

Navigating Belonging and Identity: Representation of Indonesian Muslims in the United Kingdom

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Abstract

Indonesian Muslims, despite navigating their adaptations to new life circumstances in the United Kingdom, actively contribute to the country's socio-cultural landscape through academia, festivals, art exhibitions, and culinary events that promote and preserve Indonesia's cultural heritage. Examining Indonesian Muslim organizations in the UK such as KIBAR, PCINU UK, PCIM Britania & Irlandia, and Indonesia Islamic Centre (IIC) London, this research explores the sense of belonging and unbelonging among Indonesian Muslims in the UK, focusing on individual and collective identities. By employing Christensen's framework on belonging and unbelonging and Mossovi's framework of social representation, this study discusses how Indonesian Muslims construct and uphold their identity in different circumstances. The results reveal that Indonesian Muslims navigate their identity by preserving their traditions and practically applying their traditions in a diaspora setting through religious agendas. This research also highlights their religious commitment and contribution to socio-cultural problems in their homeland, Indonesia.

Keywords: Belonging, identity, Indonesian Muslims, the United Kingdom (UK), social representation



Introduction

Indonesian Muslims while living in different settings of the United Kingdom actively contribute to the country's socio-cultural landscape through academia, festivals, art exhibitions, and culinary events that promote and preserve Indonesia's cultural heritage (Rizal, 2024). In academia, Indonesian Muslims enhance Islamic studies and social sciences by providing insights into the intersection of Islam and culture (Hefner, 2010). They promote the Indonesian language through educational programs, and they are politically active, advocating for policies that benefit their community and the broader Muslim Population in the UK (Wardana, 2014). These contributions highlight the integral role Indonesian Muslims play in enhancing the multicultural fabric of the UK.

However, in navigating a multicultural and predominantly secular society, the Muslim diaspora faces ongoing challenges. The first is maintaining their spiritual identity (Bayram, 2015) and the second is the rise of Islamophobic incidents which have undoubtedly affected their sense of security and belonging (Cesari, 2012). This process entails both individual and collective efforts to adapt religious practices to the sociocultural norms of the host country to preserve religious continuity and foster a sense of belonging within the Western context (Khan, 2024).

This research explores the sense of belonging and unbelonging among Indonesian Muslims in the UK, focusing on individual and collective identities. Christensen's framework on belonging and unbelonging posits that identity is a 'becoming' process where individuals constantly negotiate multiple, sometimes conflicting, identities (2009). This is relevant to the experience of Indonesian Muslims in the UK as they navigate their dual identities of being both Indonesian and Muslim. Being Indonesian here means representing the inclusive identity of plural backgrounds and cultures while being Muslim means to comply with a set of religious teachings. This 'process of becoming' explores how Indonesian Muslims adapt their cultural and religious practices to fit within British society while retaining their distinct Indonesian heritage. This theoretical lens highlights the fluid nature of identity, shaped through ongoing interactions with their host society and community.

By applying Christensen's framework, this research reveals how Indonesian Muslims resist the pressures of assimilation by preserving critical aspects of their

religious and cultural identities, thus creating a hybrid identity that allows them to belong in both spheres. The aim is to discover how Indonesian Muslims construct and uphold their identity in different circumstances that enable them to navigate their religiosity through implementing their traditions in meaningful and practical ways within a diaspora setting (Moscovici, 2008). Furthermore, it addresses how the dynamics of Islamic communities maintain religious commitments and to what extent they contribute to socio-cultural problems in their homeland (Wagner, 2020).

I examined the activities of various Indonesian Muslim organizations in the UK such as *Keluarga Islam Indonesia di Britania Raya* (KIBAR), Nahdlatul Ulama (PCINU UK), Muhammadiyah (PCIM Britania & Irlandia), and Indonesia Islamic Centre (IIC) London across different cities and spaces—ranging from mosques to cultural centers and both offline and online—providing a holistic view of how community networks facilitate both religious and social belonging. These organizations represent Indonesian Muslims with a variety of social classes comprising students and diaspora. Another significant factor is the prominence of organizations like NU and Muhammadiyah and their large number of followers and branches overseas. The network and relations that these organizations offer have enabled a more comprehensive examination through interactions with the broader British Muslim Community.

The data collection for this study involves two primary methods: participant observation and document analysis. Participant observation was conducted at religious events, cultural gatherings, and organizational meetings to gain first-hand insights into Indonesian Muslim communities' practices, interactions, and experiences. This approach allows a deeper understanding of how identity, representation, and belonging are expressed and negotiated in various social settings. Document analysis involved a thorough review of archival documents and publications from Indonesian Muslim organizations to understand the historical and contextual factors shaping their narratives. This aims to complement the data and mitigate the time limitation in the data collection to provide more accurate information on Indonesian Muslims in the United Kingdom. The data is categorized based on dynamics of individual and collective identities, enabling a comprehensive exploration of how these identities were constructed and manifested within the community.

Compared to other Muslim diaspora organizations, Indonesian Muslim

organizations in the UK remain relatively invisible due to several factors. First, among the four organizations discussed, only the Indonesian Islamic Centre (IIC) London is officially registered with the Charity Commission for England and Wales. The lack of formal registration for the other organizations renders their events vulnerable to cancellation, and in extreme cases, potentially making them illegal. Second, when organizing activities that promote both Islamic teachings and Indonesian culture, these organizations often depend on third-party entities—most notably, the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia (KBRI) in London—to legitimize their events. Third, the absence of official registration for KIBAR, PCI Nahdlatul Ulama, and PCI Muhammadiyah stems from the temporary status of their members, predominantly students whose UK residency extends only for the duration of their study. This transient structure makes managing the legal registration of these organizations particularly challenging. Lastly, Islamophobic incidents in the UK exacerbate the situation, further restricting the ways in which they can represent themselves.

The structure of this essay is as follows. First, I provide an overview of Muslims and Indonesian Muslims in the UK, highlighting the lack of the discussion of Indonesian Muslims. Second, I outline Indonesian Muslim organizations in the UK – KIBAR, PCINU United Kingdom, PCIM Britania & Irlandia, Indonesian Islamic Centre (IIC) London – and their activities. The next section examines the reality of Indonesian Muslims’ double identity as Indonesian and Muslims and how they face challenges in the West with regards to Islamophobia. Lastly, I will discuss how Indonesian Muslims navigate the challenges they face by bearing Indonesian and Muslim identities while living in the UK before summing up the paper in the conclusion section.

Muslims and Indonesian Muslims in the United Kingdom

The representation of Muslims and the Muslim diaspora in the United Kingdom has attracted wide scholarly attention, exploring diverse ethno-Muslim communities, identity negotiation, and the impacts of modernity. Lewis (2015) discusses the various interpretations of Islam brought by migrants over the past sixty years and the evolving identities of second and third-generation British Muslims, while Khan (2024) focuses on specific diasporas of South Asian Muslims in London, examining the dynamics among Indian, Pakistani, and

Bangladeshi communities and their transnational connections, particularly through the concept of *ummah* (global Muslim community). Similarly, Wardana (2014) investigates the Indonesian Muslim diaspora in London, distinguishing between Traditionalists, Revivalists, and Secularists. In the case of British Muslims and their identity, Bayram (2015) highlights how modernity, colonialism, and new media affect traditional Sunni religiosity in Leeds, which remains strongly tied to ethnicity and sect despite secularization trends. Hopkins & Gale (2009) also explores how racism, gender, and religion shape the daily lives of British Muslims. Randeree (2013) focuses on South Asian British-born Muslims, examining their religious conviction, loyalty to Muslim countries, and British identity through surveys on sports allegiances. Küçükcan (2004) challenges stereotypes of the Muslim diaspora by showing how Turkish Muslims contribute to bridging European and Muslim worlds. Additionally, Ibnu & Azman (2022) examine Malaysian Muslim female students' involvement in piety movements while studying abroad in Manchester, analyzing the motives and the significance of their engagement.

The above literature sheds light on the breadth of discussions in terms of how the Muslim communities have helped shape the fabric of British society alongside the diverse societal processes that come with it. These studies reveal that while Muslims are substantially represented in the UK and their historical presence is well-established, their role remains limited and vulnerable. Furthermore, the focus has predominantly been on Muslims from South Asian countries, Turkey, and the Arabian Peninsula, leaving Muslims from Southeast Asia, such as those from Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam, relatively underrepresented in research. Southeast Asian Islam, characterized by its moderate and peaceful teachings that integrate well with local cultures, deserves more attention despite the smaller size of its community compared to other Muslim majorities in the UK.

Given the fact that British Muslims are predominantly part of a diaspora, it is essential to acknowledge the presence of Indonesian Muslims, who have been residing in the UK since the 20th century and are known for their moderate and harmonious integration with local cultures (Tho Seeth, 2023). The context of Indonesian Muslims as diaspora in the West can be seen through the lens of their dual identities as Indonesian Muslims and European residents. This dualism influences their religious practices and social interactions within the host country (Pribadi, 2022). In previous studies, for example, Indonesian traditionalists in

Europe managed to navigate the dichotomy between traditionalist and modernist Islam while focusing on how they can worship effectively in a secular European context (Mudzakkir, 2020). More recently, in the United States, Irawan (2024) discussed how Indonesians experience spiritual dynamics especially in embodying their religious expression (2024). Meanwhile the UK represents a more cohesive identity, particularly among South Asian Muslims, supported by a multicultural framework that recognizes religious and ethnic identities. The political discourse in the UK tends to focus on anti-discrimination and equality, contrasting with the more secular and sometimes restrictive approaches seen in other European countries (Modood, 2009). Indonesian Muslims in the UK, meanwhile, have not been widely discussed and are less represented in research compared to other Muslim diasporas.

Madjid speculated that the lack of research on Indonesian Muslims in the UK was due to a sense of inferiority within the Indonesian Muslim community that may have hindered their development both domestically and abroad (Madjid, 1987). Rooted in historical and socio-political contexts, this could contribute to a lack of self-advocacy and visibility, hindering their development domestically and in the diaspora. This internalized inferiority may manifest in the community's hesitance to engage with academic discourse, further perpetuating their marginalization within broader socio-cultural narratives (Hefner, 2010). Consequently, the dual impact of self-perception and external representation may restrict Indonesian Muslims' contributions to the multicultural landscape of the UK, underscoring the need for targeted research to illuminate their unique experiences and perspectives (Bayram, 2015).

Indonesian Muslim Family in Great Britain (KIBAR)

KIBAR, established in 1988, serves as a vital forum for the Indonesian Muslim community in the UK. The organization serves to connect diverse Indonesian Muslim localities across the UK, representing 17 communities including in Birmingham, Manchester and Edinburgh. KIBAR members come from various backgrounds, including students, local workers, and residents, fostering a rich tapestry of cultural exchange and support. KIBAR activities focus on community engagement and religious education, offering platforms such as online discussions, academic support for students, and Islamic seminars. The

organization hosts significant events like the KIBAR Summer Gathering and KIBAR Autumn Gathering, which attracted over 300 attendees and feature speakers from Indonesia and Europe. Through its mission, KIBAR aims to assist Indonesian Muslims in the UK by facilitating worship activities, community support, and outreach while promoting a sense of belonging among its members.

In the field of community services, KIBAR provides religious support for new residents through programs such as *From the Airport to Study*, helping Indonesian students navigate their early adaptation process. It also offers health-related services and facilitates spiritual care through *zakat* distribution. Although the United Kingdom provides health care facilities through national insurance, as an Indonesian Muslim citizen, receiving health care provided by Indonesian health students in the UK is advantageous as it also provides an opportunity to gather with fellow Indonesians.

KIBAR has also expanded its outreach through various webinars and seminars addressing the psychosocial and spiritual dimensions of living abroad. As a result of the more individualistic character of the diaspora, Indonesian Muslims experience challenges in obtaining religious knowledge. KIBAR addresses this concern by holding activities both online and offline. Some of the discussion topics include *When Your Iman is Challenged Abroad*, *How to Cure Homesickness during Ramadan Abroad*, and *How Do We Get Closer to Allah While Living in Another Country*. By involving Indonesian practitioners, academics and students, such events strengthen Indonesian Muslims' identity. In addition, for parents with children, KIBAR also provides special parenting sessions such as *Parenting in the UK*. The organization has also responded to contemporary spiritual productivity through webinars such as *Menjaga Keseimbangan Spiritualitas dan Produktivitas selama Ramadan di Perantauan* (Maintaining Spiritual and Productive Balance during Ramadan Abroad), supporting Muslims to harmonize their spiritual devotion and professional responsibilities during Ramaḍān.

In terms of education, KIBAR actively promotes Qur'anic literacy through its *Tadarus Qur'an* sessions during Ramaḍān and other regular learning activities. For children, it organizes *Ramaḍān Kids Club*, a program designed to introduce Islamic teachings through creative and engaging methods. On a broader scale, it holds an annual *KIBAR Youth Camp*, cultivating leadership, faith, and community spirit among Indonesian Muslim youth in the UK. Islamic teachings are not centralized by particular Islamic schools and ideologies, allowing diverse strands of Islam to be accommodated.

KIBAR's events reflect a harmonious blend of tradition and contemporary needs such as key communal events. This includes *Buka Puasa Bersama* (iftar gatherings), *KIBAR Family Gatherings*, and Islamic holiday celebrations. Additionally, webinars are popular, particularly one on sharing experiences around undertaking the Hajj from the UK. Given the complex and lengthy process of undertaking the pilgrimage from Indonesia, many Indonesian Muslims take advantage of living overseas to fulfill this religious duty. In the UK, the Hajj process is not only quicker, allowing registration and departure in the same year, but also more affordable.

Nahdlatul Ulama UK

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), an organization for Indonesian Muslim traditionalists, focuses on Islamic teachings with moral and ethical emphasis rather than normative law. Some scholars argue that NU aims to pursue a middle path of balancing Sunni Islam with Indonesia's national ideology Pancasila, which acknowledges monotheism but respects religious diversity (Woodward, 1998). In Indonesia, Muslim traditionalists have played a crucial role, including as a support system for civil society, especially during the New Order era amid limitations in expressing religiosity. NU has succeeded in providing an open, inclusive and progressive mindset, thereby maintaining social pluralism and encouraging tolerance and harmony (Barton et al., 2021; Fealy & Bush, 2014).

Muslim traditionalists promote Indonesian Islam. This refers to accommodating local culture and, in practice, complying with Islamic principles. In this case, local culture is seen as an element informing the law as long as it is relevant to Islamic principles (Saenong, 2021). Muslim traditionalists prioritize charity programs and workers' rights (van Bruinessen, 1991) but they also have dynamic and various patterns of tolerance based on the socio-political context and the individual character of traditionalists (Budiatri, 2025). Therefore, in daily practices, Nahdlatul Ulama has a moderate and tolerant mission within the framework of Indonesian Islam (Arifianto, 2017). Muslim traditionalists' behavior towards non-Muslims remains respectful (Bush, 2009). This was echoed by the role model of NU's pluralism, Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), who emerged as a beacon of tolerance, advocating for the rights of minorities, including recognizing Confucianism as an official religion in Indonesia (Wahid, 2006). This

is a testament to the potential of traditionalists to serve as catalysts for Moderate Islam on the international stage, as demonstrated by the establishment of the Nahdlatul Ulama Special Branch to serve as a global ambassador for the organization (Saenong, 2021).

While Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) was founded in 1926 in Indonesia and has become one of the world's largest Islamic organizations, emphasizing a moderate and traditional approach to Islam, NU's UK branch was only established much more recently in 2000. Referred to as the Special Branch of Nahdlatul Ulama or PCINU United Kingdom, the organization aims to cater to the needs of Indonesian Muslims living in the United Kingdom. Its mission focuses on fostering a supportive community that promotes Islamic values while celebrating Indonesian culture. Since its establishment, PCINU United Kingdom has organized various activities, including religious events, cultural gatherings, and educational programs to enhance understandings of Islam. These initiatives also help bridge Indonesian Muslims and the broader UK Muslim community, contributing to interfaith dialogue and cooperation. Additionally, PCINU UK is a vital resource for Indonesian students and professionals, providing networking opportunities and support in navigating life in the UK. The establishment of PCINU reflects a commitment to preserving cultural identity while adapting to a new environment, thus ensuring that Indonesian Muslims can maintain their faith and traditions in a multicultural society (Nahdlatul Ulama Special Branch of the United Kingdom, 2024).

PCINU UK actively engages in various services, including organizing weekly Qur'anic recitation sessions, referred to as *Tahlil dan Doa Bersama*, facilitating *qurbān* during 'īd al-aḍḥā, thereby providing spiritual support and maintaining religious traditions among Indonesian Muslims abroad. Even though conducted online, this program has run for 163 sessions, showing a degree of consistency since 2020. Speakers from the diaspora and student communities are often invited to present topics that extend beyond purely religious themes. PCINU UK recognizes that religious discourse should be complemented by discussions on broader issues. As such, their programs frequently include topics on technology, health, and current global and Indonesian affairs. For traditionalist Muslims, especially those who come from rural areas and may not be accustomed to urban modernity, these discussions provide valuable insights. The exposure helps bridge the gap between tradition and modernity, especially as many of the

speakers are 'cultural traditionalists'. This approach is essential not only for contextual relevance but also for making the material more engaging and accessible.

In the realm of education and religious discourse, PCINU UK hosts webinars such as *Siraman: Silaturahmi dan Pengajian*. This program focuses on spiritual enrichment and the dissemination of moderate Islamic teachings. These initiatives aim to reinforce Muslim identity among the diaspora, encouraging them to uphold Islamic values while integrating into the broader UK society. PCINU UK also emphasizes the importance of maintaining one's religious and cultural identity, as highlighted during welcoming events for new Indonesian arrivals in the UK, where they are urged to remember their roots as *santri* and to continue embodying the teachings of Nahdlatul Ulama. These activities are typically organized to coincide with specific occasions and needs, most often during the month of Ramadan. The topic often highlights the experience of fasting as a Muslim minority community, offering insights and initial guidance for those observing Ramadan in the UK for the first time. Given that most of the audience consists of students from Islamic boarding schools, the content delivered through online platforms such as Instagram and YouTube, also serves to motivate those who are considering pursuing their studies in the UK.

PCINU UK's commitment to promoting moderate Islam is further exemplified through events like the *Halal bi Halal*, which fosters unity and strengthen communal bonds among Indonesian Muslims in the UK. The organization also plays a significant role in representing Indonesian Islam on the international stage, as demonstrated during the centennial celebration of Nahdlatul Ulama held at the Indonesian Embassy in London, which was attended by various dignitaries, including the Indonesian Ambassador to the UK. Moreover, PCINU UK actively participates in interfaith dialogues and condemns acts of terrorism, emphasizing that such actions are not representative of Islam. Through these multifaceted efforts, PCINU UK continues to uphold the universal values of Nahdlatul Ulama, serving as a beacon of moderate Islam and a unifying force for Indonesian Muslims residing in the United Kingdom through its official social media and website.

Muhammadiyah UK

The Special Branch of Muhammadiyah in the United Kingdom (PCIM Britania & Irlandia) was established officially in 2007. The first chairperson was Saherman Gae, a PhD student at Queen Mary University of London. PCIM UK aims to promote Islamic outreach (*da'wah*), enjoining good and forbidding evil in line with Muhammadiyah's *Manhaj Tarjih*. Its mission includes collaboration with other Muslim organizations to uphold Islamic values in the UK. PCIM UK holds various activities, including seminars on the Qur'an, Hadith, Muhammadiyah teachings, theology, ethics, and general topics, accessible through its website at muhammadiyah.org.uk. One notable event was a book discussion on *Menyandera Timur Tengah* (Holding the Middle East Hostage) by Middle Eastern expert Riza Sihbudi, the Education and Culture Attaché at the Indonesian Embassy in London. This inaugural event, featuring speakers from the University of Exeter and the University of Birmingham, highlighted the impact of US hegemony over ongoing conflicts in the Middle East. Approximately 40 Indonesian students attended, discussing how U.S. interests in cheap oil and control over the region influenced the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and regime changes in Afghanistan and Iraq (Antaranews, 2007).

As a representative body of Muhammadiyah abroad, PCIM Britania dan Irlandia prioritizes rational Islamic thought, intellectual engagement, and structured religious discourse. The organization's services include facilitating *zakat fitrah* during Ramadan and providing assistance for new students through initiatives such as the *A–Z Persiapan Keberangkatan Studi Mahasiswa Baru UK* (*A to Z for New Students Preparing to Study in the UK*), which prepares students for their academic journey. In general, the activities are similar to other Indonesian Islamic organizations. Interestingly, they conduct collaborative events with other organizations such as PCINU UK, which is notable given the tensions between these two large Islamic organizations in Indonesia. In the United Kingdom, their differences are, in fact, an asset, representing Indonesia's diversity and demonstrating how a large and varied community can contribute meaningfully to the global stage.

In the academic and religious sphere, PCIM holds recitation sessions on *Tafsir At-Tanwir*, a distinctive Muhammadiyah interpretation of the Qur'an. It has also hosted discussions on the socio-political landscape in Indonesia through events like *Membaca Transisi Politik di Indonesia* (*Understanding the Political Transition*

in Indonesia), and global issues, such as *The Palestinian Resistance*, which reflects Muhammadiyah's concern with humanitarianism and global Muslim affairs. Furthermore, the organization runs a weekly online recitation session to strengthen religious literacy among members. Through this, PCIM's commitment to fostering communal cohesion is evident in its regular gatherings and the observance of major religious holidays. These engagements provide continuity for Muhammadiyah values in diasporic life, particularly the focus on purification of belief and reformist thinking in Islam.

Although Muhammadiyah UK has also promoted its activities through digital media, its reach remains more narrow in scope compared to KIBAR UK, which benefits from a more demographically diverse membership. Similarly, PCINU UK operates within a more limited segment of the diaspora, resulting in a comparatively smaller scale of activities. In many cases, being an Indonesian Muslim in the UK is broadly associated with one's national or diasporic identity, rather than strong affiliations with specific religious organizations. As such, religious or organizational identities may not always be visible. A notable recent development was Muhammadiyah UK's Baitul Arqam, a cadre development and leadership training program, held on August 3–4, 2024, at the Indonesian Islamic Centre (IIC) Mosque in London. This event, which aimed to strengthen the ideological and organizational understanding of Muhammadiyah, was attended by Professor Abdul Mu'ti, General Secretary of the Muhammadiyah Central Board. Conversely, Islamic organizations such as PCINU UK appear to lack comparable structured initiatives for cadre development.

Indonesian Islamic Centre (IIC) London

The Indonesian Islamic Centre (IIC) London, founded in 1996, is a focal point for the Indonesian Muslim community in the United Kingdom. It was founded by Indonesian expatriates through informal religious gatherings before eventually becoming a registered charity. The IIC London offers comprehensive religious services, including congregational prayers, Qur'anic education, and advice on marriage and family matters. It also hosts cultural and religious celebrations, providing a space for Indonesian Muslims to maintain their religious practices while sharing their rich cultural heritage. In 2022, the IIC London has inaugurated a dedicated mosque to reflect Indonesia's peaceful Islamic identity, fostering

unity and community spirit. This future mosque aims to accommodate the needs of the growing Indonesian Muslim community in London and across the UK. Through its various activities and events, IIC London strives to create a supportive environment for Indonesians in the UK, nurturing spiritual growth and cultural connection. The center also serves as a bridge, enhancing understanding and cooperation between the Indonesian community and broader British society, promoting Islam's peaceful message and contributing to social cohesion (Wulandari & Sujadi, 2022).

The Indonesian Islamic Centre (IIC) London provides a dedicated space for essential religious services, including 'Īd al-Fiṭr Prayer, daily congregational prayers, *tarāwīḥ* and night prayers or *qiyām al-layl* during Ramadan. These regular and seasonal religious practices position the IIC as a vital hub for communal worship and the preservation of religious identity. The IIC also organizes social and cultural events such as iftar gatherings, Meet and Greets for new students, and culturally significant ceremonies that serve as spaces for spiritual and cultural rites of passage. In the field of education, the IIC supports professional aspirations through initiatives such as the "Pathways to Medicine" program, aimed at assisting Muslim medical students in navigating their academic and career journeys in the UK. Additionally, the IIC hosts reflective webinars such as *Ayah Bunda yang Dirindukan (Missing Mum and Dad)*, which explore themes of family, emotional bonds, and spirituality for those living far from their parents and homeland. Collectively, these initiatives underscore the IIC's broader commitment to fostering not only spiritual growth but also the psychological and cultural well-being of the Indonesian Muslim diaspora.

The activities held at the IIC London are largely similar to those organized by the three Indonesia Islamic organizations previously mentioned. As noted earlier, Indonesian Islamic organizations in the UK frequently collaborate, often conducting religious and community activities jointly. IIC London stands as the only dedicated gathering space owned by the Indonesian Muslims community in the United Kingdom. While it is commonly referred to as a mosque, its function extends beyond religious worship as an inclusive community hub regardless of religious ideology. Organizations such as KIBAR, PCINU UK including Muslimat, Fatayat NU UK, and PCI Muhammadiyah regularly hold activities at this venue. The inclusive nature of IIC London reflects its historical foundations, which were rooted in collaboration among diverse groups of Indonesian Muslims. The

establishment of the IIC was made possible through the collective efforts of various organizations and donors, including Kahf, Human Aid Initiative, PCI and Muslimat NU UK, Muhammadiyah corporations, the Hatch-Barnwell Charitable Trust, and others. This pluralistic foundation continues to shape the IIC's role as a unifying space for the Indonesian Muslim diaspora in the UK.

Islamophobia in the United Kingdom

One of the main challenges to the discourse on Islam in the West is Islamophobia. Islamophobic incidents in Britain surged between 2012 and 2022, primarily driven by the rise of far-right extremism and a global wave of anti-Muslim sentiment (Atta, 2023). The United Kingdom has faced various acts of terrorism, such as the 7/7 2005 bombings in London and the 2017 Manchester Arena bombing. The 2017 Westminster Bridge and London Bridge attacks left 13 people dead, while a far-right extremist killed one person outside Finsbury Park Mosque also in 2017 (BBC, 2017). The 2020 Streatham attack injured two people, and a failed bombing attempt at Liverpool Women's Hospital killed only the attacker (BBC, 2020). More recently, the 2024 U.K. Riots were the latest incident proving that Islamophobia still exists in the United Kingdom. Some Islamophobic incidents have been provoked by far-right groups such as the English Defence League, Patriotic Alternative, and British Movement (Euro Islam, 2024). As reported, these cases stemmed from escalating tensions over economic hardship, growing anti-immigrant sentiment, and concerns about rising Islamophobia. Furthermore, the riots saw a blend of far-right groups clashing with immigrant communities, with underlying issues of inequality and discrimination (BBC, 2024).

The rise of Islamophobia has undoubtedly affected the sense of security and belonging of Indonesian Muslims, yet their strategies to counteract these challenges show resilience and adaptability. While Indonesia is known for being a predominantly Muslim country with a rich cultural heritage, when Indonesian Muslims live abroad, they often face challenges rooted in both their religious identity and ethnic background. Indonesian Muslims face challenges associated with Islamophobia that are not just limited to overt acts of discrimination but also extend to subtler forms of exclusion and stereotyping, despite their reputation for promoting a moderate and pluralistic form of Islam.

Many Indonesian Muslims in the UK report encountering various forms of discrimination, often in the form of microaggressions, subtle but hurtful comments or actions that perpetuate stereotypes about Muslims. For instance, they may hear derogatory remarks about their faith, especially after global events that skew public perceptions of Islam. Since 9/11, there has been a rise in Islamophobic attitudes, which not only target those associated with extremist actions, but also innocent Muslims unfairly linked to such incidents. Cesari (2013) stated that these experiences are part of a broader pattern of prejudice where Muslims (including those from Indonesia) face discrimination fueled by misconceptions about Islam. This constant exposure to Islamophobia takes an emotional toll and many victims of such discrimination report increased anxiety and stress, deepening their sense of alienation from the broader community (Lewis, 2015).

Unlike the stereotypical portrayal of Arab Muslims often seen in Western media, Indonesian Muslims bring with them a variety of cultural practices, languages, and traditions that differ from those typically associated with Islam in the West (van Bruinessen, 2018). This often leaves them marginalized in unusual ways, as they are viewed through a narrow lens that fails to capture their cultural specificity. This dual-layered discrimination complicates their experiences, making them feel alienated not only from wider British society but sometimes even within the broader Muslim community (Makkonen, 2002). For example, when seeking solidarity with fellow Muslims, Indonesian individuals may find themselves excluded or misunderstood because of cultural differences, whether due to language barriers or differing interpretations of Islamic practices. This sense of being 'outside' can lead to feelings of isolation as they navigate spaces where their identity does not entirely fit the dominant narratives of Islam. Furthermore, the intersection of religion and ethnicity can result in a lack of representation and visibility, leaving Indonesian Muslims vulnerable to harmful stereotypes and misconceptions (Laffan, 2011). This highlights the need for a deeper, more nuanced understanding of Islamophobia, one that recognizes the diverse experiences of Muslims across various ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Cesari, 2013).

For Indonesian Muslims, who often identify with a version of Islam that emphasizes moderation, tolerance, and cultural integration, this reality is particularly disheartening. They may experience a sense of unbelonging when

they are treated as outsiders, not just because of their religious identity but also because of their ethnicity and cultural background. The fear of being judged, stereotyped, or even targeted due to their appearance or religious practices can deter Indonesian Muslims from openly expressing their faith, leading to a diminished sense of belonging. This can be exemplified by women who wear hijab and may feel apprehensive about venturing into specific spaces or travelling due to concerns about being targeted. The subtle forms of exclusion, such as being overlooked for job opportunities or treated with suspicion, also contribute to alienation. This experience of marginalization can have profound psychological effects, impacting on the well-being and mental health of individuals within the community.

Navigating Belonging: Indonesian Muslim's Dual Identity

Indonesian Muslim identity is deeply intertwined with a unique sense of nationalism that reflects the nation's pluralistic and moderate approach to Islam, often encapsulated in the concept of "Islam Nusantara" (Linda Muhammad & Duderija, 2022). Michael Feener, in his work on Southeast Asian Islam, highlights how Indonesian Muslim identity has been shaped by centuries of interaction between Islam and local cultures, producing a version of the faith that prioritizes tolerance, inclusivity, and adaptability. This identity is closely linked to Indonesia's national ideology, the 'five pillars' of *Pancasila*, which emphasizes religious harmony and unity in diversity. Feener points out that this blending of Islam with nationalist ideals helped Indonesian Muslims actively engage in the anti-colonial struggle and post-independence nation-building, positioning Islam as a unifying force rather than a divisive one. As a result, Indonesian Muslims have developed a sense of national identity that is both profoundly Islamic and distinctly Indonesian, balancing religious commitments with civic responsibilities in a multicultural nation (Feener, 2010).

In the context of Indonesian Muslims in the UK, the negotiation of identity is a complex process shaped by their unique cultural heritage and the broader socio-political landscape of the Western context. Many Indonesian Muslims experience a dual identity, embracing their Indonesian roots while adapting to British society. This duality can create a sense of belonging that is both enriching and challenging. For many, being Indonesian is intertwined with cultural practices,

familial ties, and national pride. At the same time, citizenship, social interactions, and engagement with the multicultural environment of the UK shape their British identity. Indonesian Muslims often navigate this dual identity through cultural practices that are adaptable yet reflective of their heritage. Using cultural symbols—such as traditional attire during religious celebrations or community events—helps Indonesian Muslims affirm their Indonesian identity within the British context (Wulandari & Sujadi, 2022). Simultaneously, incorporating British customs and social norms facilitates their integration, allowing them to forge a sense of belonging in a diverse society. This identity negotiation is further influenced by the experiences of previous generations who may have migrated to the UK, as well as by the contemporary challenges faced by Muslim communities, such as Islamophobia and social exclusion (Cesari, 2013).

The influence of Indonesian Islam, characterized by its emphasis on moderation and harmony, plays a significant role in shaping the religious identity of Indonesian Muslims in the UK. Historically, Sufi missionaries played a significant role in spreading Islam across Indonesia by blending Islamic teachings with local traditions. This resulted in a form of Islam that is generally more tolerant and open to diversity (Hefner, 2002, 2014). This moderate approach is deeply rooted in the cultural context of Indonesia, blending Islamic beliefs with local traditions and customs (Ricklefs, 2012). As Indonesian Muslims engage with their faith in a Western context, this inclination towards moderation allows them to navigate potential conflicts between their religious beliefs and the secular values prevalent in British society. Many Indonesian Muslims, for instance, actively participate in interfaith dialogues and community initiatives promoting understanding and cooperation among religious groups (Nahdlatul Ulama Special Branch of United Kingdom, 2024).

Indonesian Muslims have employed several strategies to counteract Islamophobia and foster inclusivity. One practical approach has been to engage in community outreach and education. Organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama UK and Muhammadiyah UK actively promote interfaith dialogue, organize cultural events, and participate in educational programs to share the core values of 'Islam Nusantara', Indonesian Islam. These efforts aim to dispel misconceptions about Islam and present a more nuanced understanding of the faith by emphasizing the principles of peace, tolerance, and respect for cultural diversity. Another strategy is 'soft diplomacy', where Indonesian Muslims leverage cultural practices to

bridge community gaps. Events that showcase Indonesian cuisine, traditional dances, or Islamic arts have been organized to foster cultural exchange and build mutual understanding. This approach helps challenge the monolithic portrayals of Islam and allows non-Muslims to engage with the faith through a cultural lens, which can be more approachable and less threatening. Furthermore, social media has played a crucial role in combating negative stereotypes. By sharing positive stories, promoting successful Indonesian Muslim figures, and highlighting the contributions of their community to British society, Indonesian Muslims are creating a narrative that emphasizes their role as integrated and productive members of society. This visibility is essential for challenging dominant narratives that often associate Islam with conflict or extremism.

To understand this representation and these contributions in light of the impact of Islamophobia on Indonesian Muslims, it is helpful to reflect on Christensen's (2009) framework, which examines the tension between belonging and unbelonging. According to this framework, the experience of diaspora communities can be characterized as a constant negotiation between the desire to belong and the reality of being seen as different. For Indonesian Muslims, this tension is exacerbated by the pressures of Islamophobia, which often compel them to downplay aspects of their religious or cultural identity to avoid discrimination. However, at the same time, their community activities and engagement in cultural diplomacy represent efforts to assert their identity and claim a sense of belonging in their new environment. This shift in representation is evident in the clothing style of Indonesian Muslims. While they casually wear religious attire such as *sarongs* and long dresses in their home country, they tend to avoid such clothing in everyday life in the UK to avoid drawing attention to their religious identity. However, during community gatherings, these garments are worn without reservation, reflecting a sense of cultural familiarity reminiscent of their homeland.

This tension between belonging and unbelonging also highlights broader implications in multicultural contexts. The concept of 'becoming' suggests that identity is not static but continuously shaped by interactions with the surrounding environment. For Indonesian Muslims in the West, 'becoming' involves navigating multiple identities—Indonesian, Muslim, and British—each of which can be affirmed or challenged in different settings. Their strategies to foster inclusivity reflect efforts to carve out a space where they can be recognized

and respected for all facets of their identity rather than compartmentalizing or suppressing certain aspects. This representation is also evident in the cultural creativity displayed during festivals such as the use of traditional Indonesian religious musical instruments like the *rebana* and the introduction of traditional food and clothes. Another example is 'Discover Islam Week', an event organized by Islamic society at the University of Birmingham, which promotes the global diversity of Islam. Indonesian Muslims actively participate in this inclusive initiative. These experiences offer valuable insights into the dynamics of belonging in multicultural societies. The ability of Indonesian Muslims to maintain a cohesive sense of identity despite external pressures serves as a compelling case study of how communities respond to discrimination through resilience and active engagement. Furthermore, it challenges the notion that integration necessitates assimilation, demonstrating that a balance can be achieved in which diverse identities coexist without losing their distinctiveness.

Conclusion

Muslim organizations such as KIBAR, PCINU UK, PCIM Britania & Ireland, and Indonesia Islamic Centre (IIC) London all represent Indonesian Islam and often collaborate with one another in their activities. The tensions that frequently arise in Indonesia between organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah are not present in this context; on the contrary, their coexistence tends to strengthen their shared identity as Indonesian Islamic organizations with tens of millions of members. The main distinction lies in their ideological affiliations. For example, members of PCI NU are typically those who identify culturally with NU, including *santri* currently studying in the United Kingdom, while Muhammadiyah-affiliated individuals tend to be those who see themselves culturally as part of Muhammadiyah. Interestingly, KIBAR has a more diverse demographic base and is not specifically affiliated with any one Indonesian Islamic organization. Although there are some indications of particular pan-Islamist leanings, its members generally come from a wide range of backgrounds. IIC London stands out from the other three organizations. Its members are predominantly part of the Indonesian diaspora, many of whom are permanent residents. This gives them a more settled presence, and one of the most notable aspects is that the organization is legally recognized by the UK government. However, since most of its members are working in the UK, they

have limited time to actively engage in or represent Indonesian Islam. Nevertheless, these four organizations often collaborate in organizing events that express both cultural and religious aspects of Indonesian Muslim identity.

The findings underscore the dynamic process of identity negotiation, where Indonesian Muslims balance their rich cultural heritage with the socio-political challenges of living in a predominantly Western and often Islamophobic context. By maintaining a cohesive sense of belonging through community engagement, cultural diplomacy, and interfaith dialogue, Indonesian Muslims challenge dominant stereotypes about Islam while demonstrating the flexibility of "Islam Nusantara," a moderate and inclusive interpretation of the religion. Their experiences offer important lessons on how diasporic communities can thrive in multicultural societies without losing their distinctiveness. This research highlights the importance of fostering spaces where diasporic Muslim communities can openly express their cultural and religious identities. Second, these findings suggest that a nuanced understanding of diverse Muslim identities, including those from underrepresented groups like Indonesian Muslims, is critical for shaping anti-discrimination policies. While this study has primarily focused on the dynamics of Indonesian Muslim organizations and community-building efforts, its broader relevance lies in demonstrating how diasporic Muslim communities can act as agents of cultural integration and social harmony. Therefore, this research contributes to a broader understanding of how Indonesian Muslims in the UK navigate their identities within the complex landscape of British multiculturalism and global Islam.

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