

The Global Ummah as a Communicative Strategy: Power and Identity in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

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Abstract

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation's status as an international organization articulating the collective interests of Muslims was copper fastened by its role in the Danish Cartoon controversy of 2005-2006. Since then the OIC has become a prominent actor in the international arena, especially with regard to matters relating to Muslims in minority communities. The analysis considers the discursive construction of the 'ummah' throughout the period following the establishment of the OIC in 1969 and connects this to the emergence of collectively adopted normative position vis-a-vis minority rights for adherents of Islam domiciled in Western nations. The analysis suggests that the OIC has capitalized extensively on discourses legitimized through the communitarian philosophical tradition. This is considered in conjunction with two other communicative strategies. The first relates to voting patterns by OIC member states with respect to the 'Defamation of Religions'. The second relates to the construction and reproduction of a coherent 'ummah' through the establishment of an Islamophobia 'observatory'. The construction of the 'ummah', of a transnational Muslim identity community representable through an interstate organization, displaces an earlier statist organizational orientation and is sustained primarily through the reproduction of a hostile 'other' in the form of what might be referred to as 'the Occident'. Consistent bloc voting was apparent in two UN fora with respect to the 'defamations' of religion, which are specifically orientated towards defending Islam. The Muslim 'ummah', as articulated through the apparatus of the OIC, is a fragile construction contingent on a tripartite strategy of de-emphasizing national identities and pluralism among OIC member states, a sustained critique of the Occident as an organizing principle, and collective action at the interstate level around a perceived defence of broadly shared symbols.

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We examine the role of the Organisation of the Islamic Cooperation (formerly Conference; hereafter OIC) in international affairs. While the OIC is self-consciously not a religious organisation (see OIC, 2009), it is a political entity mobilised around a distinctly confessional bias. It claims to be the ‘collective voice of the Muslim world’ and endeavours to ‘safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world’ (OIC, 2010). The following section begins by drawing on scholarship into Islam’s formative period and connecting emergent themes with contemporary idealisations of a de-territorialised and transnationalised religious ‘community’ – the ummah. The two questions guiding the study relate to a) understanding the function of the concept of ‘ummah’ as a politically infused marker in late-modernity, and b) to understand how the OIC discursively navigates the constraints of member states’ national interests relative to transnational organizational objectives, chief among these being its dual ‘representative’ functions vis-à-vis the world’s adherents to Islam and the Muslim majority states that constitute its membership.

A Genealogy of the Late-Modern ‘ummah’

The idea of ummah as a transnational confessional collective, embodied in the international organ of the OIC, has gained increasing currency in the OIC’s institutional rhetoric throughout its organizational evolution since 1969. The OIC lays explicit claim not only to representation of majority Muslim states in international politics but also to the interests of Muslim minorities in non-Muslim states. The concept has its roots in the earliest accounts of the foundations of the Islamic faith and the constitution of the first political entity founded by Muhammad. The study focuses on the strategies extant in the construction and reproduction through official discourse of the idea of the ‘ummah’ and charts its evolution and manifestation in collective action by a prominent international organisation. Tensions between the putative transnational solidarity of the ummah and the particularities of member states and national interests are thrown into relief through the following analysis in order to focus on its constructed and contingent reality.¹ Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis the study focuses on the role of opposition in sustaining the coherence of the OIC. The study then considers examples of how the idea of transnational solidarity is developed and deployed in order to mobilise collective action and support the interests of particular actors in international fora. Our study relates specifically to the pursuit of the ‘Combating Defamation of Religion’ resolution by OIC member states, which has been passed in the United Nations Human Rights Council and the United Nations General Assembly over several years (see Grinberg, 2006).

Methodology and Method

The analysis examines naturally occurring data from the archives of the OIC using a combined qualitative-interpretive approach (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006) that is chiefly rooted in Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 1995, 2007). Specifically, the study considers the official discourses (Burton and Carlen 1979) that emerge through the reports, communiqués and declarations produced by the OIC in two

¹ These are also dealt with by al Ahsan, 1992

distinct strands. Official discourse refers to the production (and reproduction) of documents by institutions and organizations whose authorship is attributed to the institutional/organisational collective. Relative to the revival of the idea of the 'ummah' the study draws on naturally occurring data such as the declarations and communiqués that are released following the conclusion of intergovernmental or ministerial meetings by the member states of the OIC. These data represent the agreed intergovernmental consensus of OIC member states on broad issues and – importantly from the point of view of this study – the self understanding of the OIC and its member states' relationship to that organization and the wider international world. The second strand has to do with a more recent development and is viewed here as an ancillary but no less important strategy in the reproduction of the 'ummah'. Prompted by the Danish Cartoon controversy of 2005-2006 the OIC has established an 'Islamophobia Observatory' and since 2008 it has published annual reports which are submitted to the intergovernmental organs of the OIC as well as being made publicly available on the OIC website. These reports, ostensibly documenting the plight of Muslim minority populations domiciled in western democracies, also facilitate scholarly analysis of discursive constructions of self-understanding and meaning within the OIC. Both textual analyses are conducted using the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 2007), which permits examination of the textual, discursive and social practices evident. The variation in applying CDA notwithstanding this analysis focuses specifically on the construction of 'self' and 'other', the use of contrast and equation. The emergence of discursive patterns and constructions is then connected to overt manifestations of collective action by the OIC (through its member states) within other international fora, specifically the United Nations Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly. Through examination of OIC initiated actions through key member states in both fora, the study highlights the connection between the OIC's normative imperative and the practices of OIC member states.

The 'ummah' – and its uses

The embryonic conceptualisation of an Islamic ummah (or community of believers) occurred in the formative period of Islam's establishment. Unlike concepts such as the 'house of peace' (Dar al Islam) and the 'house of war' (Dar al Harb), which emerged during the Abbasid period (mid 8th to 13th Century CE; see Afsaruddin, 2008: 118ff), the ummah is closely associated with Muhammad's actions at the city of Medina. When Muhammad fled to Medina after persecution in Mecca he unilaterally set down the Constitution of Medina (also the Charter of Medina). The early ummah as manifest in Medina included both 'believers' (Muslims) and Jews. It was, in short, a multi ethnic and multi-faith community bound together in the face of hostility (see Afsaruddin, 2008: 6-7; Rippin, 2005: 47-48). In this document the traditional ties of blood and kin were subordinated to the primacy of allegiance to the political community and, among believers, to the Islamic faith (see Watt, 1968: Appendix; Afsaruddin, 2008; Rippin, 2005; Gibb, 1978; Levy 1971). A new claim of identity was established in the Constitution of Medina. In the face of conflict, Muhammad redrew the affective boundaries of community, elevating adherence to the new faith above other ties, and simultaneously set out prescriptions for interaction between Muslims and non-believers (specifically, Jews and pagans). Watt (1968: 5) notes that several distinct themes emanate from this formative political document:

- Believers and dependants constitute a single community (ummah) and this expressly included Jews
- Members of this community are enjoined to show complete solidarity against crime and not support criminals, even if they are near kinsmen, where a criminal act is against another member of this community
- Members are to show complete solidarity against unbelievers in peace and war

The crucial importance of the document was that, among Muslim believers, ethnic or tribal loyalties were now subsumed under loyalty to the ‘religious’ community, establishing a mode of solidarity along a religious (Islamic) axis. It was the reorientation of affective ties from ethnic or kinship to the confessional and religious that paved the way for the establishment of an ‘imagined’ Muslim community that, at its height, would span a considerable geographic distance and include a myriad of ethnic and tribal distinctions (Rahman, 1966: 19, 72). However, the idea of a coherent ummah has never been realised (see Roy 2004), not least because of the prevalence of scholastic, sectarian and theological or juridical distinctions from the period following the death of Muhammad. Contemporary invocations of the concept of ummah are not so much a reflection of a reality as an effort to construct it. Roy offers the useful term ‘neo-ethnic’ to describe the notion of ummah in contemporary Islam (Roy, 2004 pp. 124ff).

Roy (2004, 2007) argues that this active construction of a transnational community of believers – the ummah – is a recent and largely unsuccessful attempt to deal with the consequences of (late-) modernity, globalisation and secularisation. ‘Islam’ and ‘Muslims’ have always been divided along multiple lines, both religious and non-religious. Aside from the various schools of thought and sectarian divisions between Sunni, Shia and Sufi, ethnic and nationalist divisions persist, even in Europe, where mosque attendance is often along ethnic or nationalist lines (Maréchal, 2003: 82; see also Roy, 2004: 43ff). Roy does point to the transversal dimension to Islamic (or Muslim) identity: the decoupling of religion and territory; de-culturalisation, the rise of the individual adherent and the crisis of traditional religious authority (Roy, 2004: Ch 1). He further contends that the notion of a single ‘Muslim culture’ cannot withstand critical analysis, because it has no content beyond basic tenets (Roy, 2004: 129). Ultimately, the ummah exists because believers identify with it (Roy, 2004: 198). It is not necessary, in this analysis, to rehearse these divisions, tensions and disaggregations of the ideal of an ummah. It is merely sufficient to acknowledge that these cross-cutting cleavages exist. For our purposes, drawing on insights into the problematic of ‘identity’ as a factual category (Hollinger, 2006; Brubaker, 2004; Brubaker and Cooper, 2000), it is only necessary to consider the *political uses* of the ‘ummah’ concept – as an instrument of transnational (even global) solidarity construction – in the contemporary context of late modernity.

In what follows, analysis is concerned to examine the discursive strategies deployed to shore up the ummah concept and examine its practical deployment in international politics. The aim of the study is to chart the evolution of that organization’s use of the concept as a communicative strategy relative to the context of later modernity. The communication is not – as will be clear – directed merely outward from the aggregate ‘Islamic self’ to the wider world. In the vein of Burton and Carlen’s ‘official discourse’ (Burton and Carlen 1979) it is also about reflectively communicating the

idea of solidarity among majority Islamic states to this putative ‘Islamic self’. In the end, it is a concept that only has traction through the studious silence of the OIC with respect to the highly relevant issues of diverging national interests, not to mention the matter of minority rights within the OIC’s member states. The record of OIC member states in this regard is poor, and retrograde (see Houston, forthcoming). Nevertheless, the discourses of ‘minority’, xenophobia, Islamic/Muslim solidarity and the active (re-) construction of ‘The West’ as an organizing principle, are all central to the OIC’s communicative strategy.

The OIC and the emergence of the ‘ummah’

Founded in 1969 following the arson attack on the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, and presently comprising of fifty-seven nations, at its inception the OIC committed itself, *inter alia*, to fulfil several key objectives on behalf of member states. At this point it is pertinent to trace the (re-) emergence of the ummah as a concept in international affairs.

In its seminal statement the OIC heads of state declared that their ‘common creed’ and their ‘unshakeable faith in the precepts of Islam’ constituted a ‘powerful factor [in] bringing their peoples closer together and fostering understanding between them’ (OIC, 1969). There is acknowledgement of the ‘fraternal and spiritual bonds’ and ‘the heritage of their common civilisation’ (OIC, 1969), but while there are certainly overt references to the basis of the OIC’s conceptual basis, a clear assertion of an Islamic identity or the existence of a transnational ummah is markedly absent. Similarly, the Lahore Declaration, issued at the conclusion of the second Islamic Summit in 1974 (OIC, 1974), makes no mention of the ummah, or community of believers. It is a distinctly ‘intergovernmental’ document. The OIC, as a community of *nations*, is manifestly premised on the Westphalian paradigm, as evinced by the invocation of the United Nations Charter and the unambiguous respect for national sovereignty (and by extension the non-interference principle) in both these earlier documents. The OIC’s Westphalian roots are further entrenched in the revised organisational Charter, which commits the OIC and its Member States to the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter (OIC Charter, 2008: Article 2.1).

In fact, the first mention through official communiqués of the ummah does not occur until the third Islamic Summit, held in Mecca, Saudi Arabia in 1981 (OIC, 1981). The Final Communiqué from the Mecca conference fulsomely employs and elaborates on the concept of ummah:

It is our conviction that the Ummah of 1000 million people, composed of various races, spread over vast areas of the globe and possessing enormous resources, fortified by its spiritual power and utilizing to the full its human and material potential, can achieve an outstanding position in the world and ensure for itself the means of prosperity in order to bring about a better equilibrium for the benefit of all mankind (OIC, 1981)

By subsuming national, ethnic and even sectarian differences beneath the aggregate ‘1000 million people’ strong believing community the OIC shifts focus from ‘inter’-national relations to ‘trans’national relations, juxtaposing the collective of Islam with the ‘other’. The individuation of member state citizens (as ‘1000 million people’) emphasizes the numerical strength of the aggregate of Islamic adherents and simultaneously downplays their internal differences and distinctions. It makes no

mention of the populations included within these national jurisdictions that are not Muslim. These peoples are one in faith and their 'various races' are spread across the globe as components of – and subsumed within – a larger 'Islamic' whole. The reconfiguration of the global landscape now embodies a simultaneous unification (of all 'Muslims') and implicit division (from 'non' Muslim). Following this claim upon the affective dimension of the citizens of Muslim majority countries the idea of ummah subsequently takes root in the OIC's Islamic summit documents, gradually increasing in frequency throughout the 1990s. Projecting our analysis forward to the Third Extraordinary Summit, again at Mecca, in 2005, the concept infuses a greater range of documents and is illustrative of the extent to which the concept has become embedded and regularized in the discourses of the OIC.

Protecting our Islamic identity, our basic values, and the higher interests of the Ummah can only be achieved through the sincere loyalty of Muslims to true Islam and their commitment to its original principles and values as their cherished way of life (OIC, 2005a).

The 2005 Makkah Al-Mukarramah Declaration goes on to state that:

[O]nly too aware are we of the internal and external threats that have helped to exacerbate the Ummah's current plight, as they not only menace its very future but also that of the whole of humanity and civilization (OIC, 2005a).

The 2005 Mecca Islamic Summit was significant by virtue of the extent of introspection conducted by the organisation on the predicament of many majority Muslim countries. Reflecting on the findings that emerged from a series of United Nations sponsored reports on human development indicators in Arab countries (the UNDP Arab Human Development Reports) the 2005 Mecca summit also put forward a ten year development plan. In addition to calls for greater political will, joint 'Islamic Action' and the imperative to promote a moderate and tolerant version of Islam, combating Islamophobia and reform of the OIC, the ten year plan also included proposals to expand economic cooperation between Member States, intra-organisational trade, the establishment of an Islamic Development Bank, investment in higher education and science, ensuring greater rights for women and children, and increasing cultural exchange between Member States (OIC, 2005b). What is pertinent for our analysis is that the normative basis of this was the expressed need for the member states through the OIC to:

[T]ake joint actions within the framework of the OIC, based on common values and ideals so as to revive the Muslim Ummah's pioneering role as a fine example of tolerance and enlightened moderation, and a force for international peace and harmony (OIC, 2005b).

The reference to 'pioneering role' recreates the putative idealised past as an example of the essentialised identitarian core, represented as a basis of cultural esteem. Implicitly denied by this official discourse, is the association of Islam with backwardness and cultural stasis, both of which are implied by the conclusions of the UNDP reports. In addition to the assertion of institutional primacy in this endeavour,

the OIC communiqué demonstrates this recurring tension between the imperatives of the nation state and the ideal of a transnational, primordial (neo-ethnic), ummah continues into the present.² The leaders of the fifty-seven Member States were also now the ‘leaders of the Muslim Ummah’ (OIC, 2005b). Reporting on the ten year plan, the Secretary General of the OIC drew attention to the conclusions of the plan’s authors. Chief among these was recognition that ‘there was no conflict between the Islamic and contemporary universal values’ (OIC, 2005c), and that in order for the plan to be implemented successfully, and while respecting national sovereignty ‘solidarity between [Member States] needed to be strengthened’ (OIC, 2005c). He further iterated that:

With the enormous challenges posed by globalisation, the scholars³ stressed the necessity for Muslims to act with unity and speak with one voice through the instrument of the OIC. As the only overarching Organisation for the Muslim world, the OIC has the potential to play a major role in creating a brighter and prosperous future for the Ummah if certain reforms are implemented (OIC, 2005c).

The Islamophobia Observatory

A second strategy by which the strengthening of the ummah construct was achieved is through the projection of a dichotomy between ‘Muslims’ and ‘others’ – invariably ‘the West’. The strategy’s discursive basis lies in its fundamental reliance on the discourses of minority rights, victimization, oppression and marginalization. Principle among these is the regular annual release since 2008 of an Islamophobia Report by the Islamophobia Observatory, an ancillary organ of the OIC. These reports, published on the OIC’s website in PDF and formally submitted to the OIC’s Council of Foreign Ministers, collate and highlight incidences of xenophobia and perceived disrespect for Islamic symbols which were, until the 2014 report, exclusively concerned with incidents in western countries.

Qualitative analysis of the texts reveals several strategies of identity construction. Three are discussed and analysed here. First, there is the active reproduction of dichotomy between Muslims and non-Muslims, and included within this distinction are citizens of other states who are Muslim adherents. The Observatory reports are infused with the conceptual trope of Muslims as a single community of believers regardless of the distinctions between states, or between member states and non-member states. Filtered out are the various ethno-nationalist and sectarian divisions among believers.

Equally, a strong distinction is made between what might for shorthand be referred to as the ‘occident’ (Europe and the United States/North America, ‘the West’, ‘western’) and the ‘Muslim world’. What is subsumed within the latter are – again – the various cleavages within Islam and among Muslim adherents as well as the various non-Muslim minorities living within OIC member states. The sole orientation of the

² Again, al Ahsan is a useful, if partisan, guide to these tensions (al Ahsan, 1992).

³ ‘Scholars’ refers to the authors of the Ten Year Plan.

observatory is westward (or occidental) from the 'Islamic' centre, and the exclusive and exhaustive concern of all the reports is with tracking extensively both the simultaneous treatment of Muslim minorities in western countries and the tenor of non-Muslim discussion of the Islamic religion. In its cataloguing of incidents of Islamophobia, the observatory reports do not distinguish categories of hostility. For example, there is no discernible distinction between the xenophobic discourse against Muslims as a visible minority or physical attacks on Muslim as a neo-ethnic category and the range of criticisms levelled at the Islamic religion per se as a set of ideological precepts. The reports conflate these distinct categories in order to collocate the maltreatment of Muslim citizens (or migrants) with critical attacks on the Islamic religion by non Muslim commentators.

Omitted from the reports up to 2014 are any discussions or analyses of similar issues relative to Muslim minorities living in non-western nations. The close tracking of minority rights violations in Europe does not, until this point, extend to other world regions outside the putative 'ummah'. Not until the 2014 report does the observatory finally examine the question of Myanmar's Rohingya population. Despite the fact that anti Muslim xenophobia had reached much more lethal levels in Myanmar than in the whole of the occidental context it is noteworthy that the positioning of the Rohingya issue within the 2014 report occurs *after* the discussion of the situation of Muslims in the occident. The OIC has retained the prioritization of Muslim minority issues in the west despite the clear (and somewhat late) recognition of considerably more significant problems in a proximate non-western state.

Prominent in the reports is the discourse of hostility emanating from within this occidental 'other' (juxtaposed to the Islamic 'self') and the corresponding invocation of both human rights and minority rights to highlight the discrepancy between acceptable standards and actual lived experience. There is no discussion or analysis of the question of sectarian violence perpetrated upon one confessional community by the other (for example, Sunni-Shia conflict). The discrimination suffered by Shias in Sunni majority states (and vice versa), or even the discrimination suffered by minority sects such as Yazidis or Sufis – a clear form of religious discrimination – is notably absent.

From the point of view of intertextuality there is extensive importation of the discourse of multiculturalism along with frequent invocations of tolerance, dialogue and peace. The philosophical standoff between liberals and communitarians in recent decades, along with the conceptual repertoires of post-colonial theory and human rights, has provided a legitimacy enhancing framework permitting the normative conditions for the OIC's Islamophobia to find a discursive grounding. The conditions of possibility for the production of the reports lie in the framework provided by the evolution of international norms which have evolved from the post war period.

What is also absent within any of the reports is any reference to the situation of non-Muslim minorities in Muslim-majority (and therefore OIC member) states. None of the observatory reports can examine this issue as these reports are constrained by the premise of Islamophobia. This is perhaps explicable as a result of the clear confessional bias of the OIC itself. Nevertheless, given the extent of the trade in minority and human rights discourse, the absence of any reference to

Drawing together the focus on discursive elements to the OIC's official discourse the invocation of international norms regarding treatment of minorities and their one-sided application to Muslim minorities domiciled in the western context comes through strongly in the documents. The strategic importance of the rhetoric and framing of issues by the OIC has the net impact of bolstering a sense of collective purpose and organisational coherence. The deliberate and wholesale omission of non-ideal types, to say nothing of member state culpability for violations within the 'ummah', sustains the 'ummah' mythology and identitarian coherence. The OIC's official discourse has the net impact of sustaining a sense of solidarity both organisationally and collectively, primarily through the emphasis (and arguably, the construction) of external hostility.

Manifestations in Practice: The 'ummah' in action

Even before the OIC's introspection evident in the 2005 Mecca summit, and the commitment to deepen coordinated action that emanated from its proceedings, the OIC had been acting through its member states and the organisation's Secretary General on a range of issues in the international arena.⁴ The 1994 International Conference on Population Development in Cairo, and the follow-up conference in 1995 in Beijing, permitted the OIC and member states to take positions on issues such as the empowerment of women and the provision of reproductive rights including abortion (See Houston 2012 for discussion). These international policy discussions, pushed by the support of key member states, afforded the OIC an opportunity to begin finding its voice in the international arena. The policy position of Muslim majority countries and the OIC as an international institution was invariably concerned with the restriction of measures to improve women's access to reproductive health, and to conceptualize the ideal for women's social role as homemakers and bearers of children. The OIC and its members assumed a religiously inspired and conservative stance on such issues, asserting its conservative ideal of women and their role vis-a-vis the family and motherhood (see Houston, 2012). OIC Member States also sought to impede the contribution of LGBT civil society associations to a United Nations Special General Assembly on HIV/AIDS prevention. The impact of Islam, mobilised through the coordination of majority Muslim states and Islamic socio-political movements, has not always been progressive or tolerant. Here we analyse one pattern of OIC and Member State intervention in particular that allows us to observe how this solidarity manifested itself on the international arena.

In 2006 the discredited United Nations Commission on Human Rights had been replaced by the Human Rights Council (hereafter the Council). Almost immediately the OIC's foremost, high profile members continued concerted action to utilise the forum to effect interest realisation. Throughout the period 2006 to 2010 the Human Rights Council regularly voted through a non-binding resolution on 'Combating Defamation of Religion'. Consistent within the wording of each of these resolutions was the urge to ensure that states take 'resolute action' to prohibit the dissemination of 'racist and xenophobic ideas and materials aimed at any religion'. Islam/Muslims

⁴ Not the least of these was the issue of Palestine, which is not examined here.

were and remain to date the only religious tradition mentioned by name, and they have explicitly referred to the declarations or communiqués of the OIC in resolution preambles. The pattern of voting practices is revealing, as it indicates a significant and consistent polarisation of states within the Human Rights Council.

Table 1: United Nations Human Rights Council Voting Patters – Resolution concerning ‘Combating Defamation of Religions’ 2007 (4th Regular Session) to 2010 (13th Regular Session).

Year (Session)	In Favour	Against	Abstentions
2007 (4 th Session) Resolution 4/9	Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Cameroon, China, Cuba, Djibouti, Gabon, Indonesia, Jordan, Malaysia, Mali, Mauritius, Mexico, Morocco, Pakistan, Philippines, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tunisia (24)	Canada, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Guatemala, Japan, Netherlands, Poland, Republic of Korea, Romania, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (14)	Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Ghana, India, Nigeria, Peru, Uruguay, Zambia (9)
2008 (7 th Session) Resolution 7/19	Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Cameroon, China, Cuba, Djibouti, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Malaysia, Mali, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Qatar, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, South Africa, Sri Lanka (21)	Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (10)	Bolivia, Brazil, Gabon , Ghana, Guatemala, India, Japan, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mexico, Peru, Republic of Korea, Uruguay, Zambia (14)
2009 (10 th Session) Resolution 10/22	Angola, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Cameroon, China, Cuba, Djibouti, Egypt,	Canada, Chile, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom of	Argentina, Brazil, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burkina Faso , Ghana, India, Japan, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mexico,

	Gabon, Indonesia, Jordan, Malaysia, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Qatar, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia , Senegal , South Africa (23)	Great Britain and Northern Ireland (11)	Republic of Korea, Uruguay, Zambia (13)
2010 (13 th Session) Resolution 13/16	Bahrain , Bangladesh , Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Burkina Faso , China, Cuba, Djibouti, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan , Philippines, Qatar , Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia , Senegal , South Africa (20)	Argentina, Belgium, Chile, France, Hungary, Italy, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Republic of Korea, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Uruguay, Zambia (17)	Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Cameroon , Ghana, India, Japan, Madagascar, Mauritius (8)

The block voting was reflected in the parallel passage of the ‘Combating Defamation of Religions’ resolution through the United Nations General Assembly. In General Assembly voting the vast majority of OIC Member States supported the resolution and, combined with votes from other non-aligned states, its adoption was secured by a consistently wide margin.

Table 2: General Assembly Resolutions ‘Combating Defamation of Religions’: Voting Patterns (OIC Member State votes are given in brackets)

General Assembly (‘Combating Defamation of Religion’ Resolution)	In Favour	Against	Abstaining
60 th General Assembly 2005 (A/RES/60/150)	101 votes (50 OIC votes)	53 votes (2 OIC votes)	20 votes (1 OIC vote)
61 th General Assembly 2006 (A/RES/61/164)	111 votes (52 OIC votes)	54 votes	18 votes (1 OIC vote)
62 nd General Assembly 2007	108 votes	51 votes	25 votes

(A/RES/62/154)	(52 OIC votes)		(1 OIC vote)
63 rd General Assembly 2008 (A/RES/63/171)	86 votes (51 OIC votes)	53 votes	42 votes (2 OIC vote)
64 th General Assembly 2009 (A/RES/64/156)	80 votes (50 OIC votes)	61 votes	42 votes (4 OIC votes)

There are, therefore, two dimensions of strategy evident. The first is the clear strategy of the OIC to utilise the weight of Member State votes to a) further enhance the profile of the OIC as the main organ of Muslim representation internationally, and b) to ensure that Islam – as a broadly defined system of beliefs and practices, is accorded the status of protection equivalent to ‘human’ rights in international affairs. The persistent inclusion of specific references to Islam is a clear manifestation of significant bias on the part of those who put forward the motion. Secondly, Islam/Muslim has emerged as a prominent – arguably, a predominant – category at international level and within nations that are receivers of inward migration from OIC Member States. The instability of identitarian categories has allowed religious definitions to become predominant. This strategy of cultururation and confessionalisation of plural societies has potentially salient implications for other identity categories in national contexts, such as gender and class. The predominance of this confessional category is potentially insensitive to complex variations (and fluctuations) in belief patterns and the tensions between gender and belief.

The consistent promotion of the ‘Combating Defamation of Religion’ resolution is not so much an objective, still less altruistic, defence of human rights as it is an internationally coordinated rationalisation of national domestic policy concerning the primacy of Islam within a tangible hierarchy of religions and beliefs in majority Muslim states. In short, despite the absence of any central doctrinal authority, and despite the persistent disaggregation of the ummah ideal along ethnic, nationalist, sectarian and doctrinal lines, the idea of a community of believers is sustainable – but only in the broadest sense, and primarily as a strategic instrument in order to realise particular objectives within the international arena.

In the case of Islam, a religion with no monolithic institutional or organisational global presence, the international system afforded a useful platform for manifestations of corporate Islam to coordinate their actions across national boundaries. This has only been possible relative to problems definable in broad terms, usually when questions of collective Islam’s relationships with non-Islamic entities are prominent. This was the case in relation to the idea of ‘defamation’ of religions, and the OIC was prominent in efforts to have satirical depictions and offensive statements concerning the tenets and/or symbols of the faith brought under the umbrella of ‘Islamophobia’. However, disparity between international rhetoric and national practices arguably supports the reasonable conclusion that ‘defamation’ of religion is aimed at protecting Islam from critical scrutiny in light of practices associated with or attributed to that faith, and in light of the difficulties encountered by some contemporary minorities in OIC states. Interests and power have determined how both these organised forms of religion relate to the global/international system, and the result has not been contingent on an objective reality. Rather it has been contingent on how those concepts have proved useful to particular perspectives on reality.

Conclusion

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), a collective institutional voice of Muslim majority states, the normative impetus to assert the integrity of Islam and the consolidation of minority Muslim adherents in non-Muslim majority states diverges radically with the discursive and political marginalization of minorities within OIC member states. We find that the ethic of justice is closer to Spinoza's (and Foucault's) than the abstract concept of justice espoused by Chomsky. The appropriation of minority rights and concepts of religious freedom are strategically deployed in order to defend Islam from negative portrayal and Muslims from perceived injustice in (mainly) Western advanced democracies. The principles underpinning the OIC's assertive defence of Islam and minority Muslim groups in non-Muslim majority states are not in evidence at member state level. A survey of the most prominent states in the OIC shows that all of them exhibit and embody significant deviations from the political ethic in evidence at the transnational institutional level. The invocation of universal standards is a strategic device, rather than an expression of a universally grounded ethic.

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