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Negotiating Islamic Identity in Secular Europe: A Maqāṣidī Framework for Second- and Third-Generation Muslim Minorities

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Abstract:

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This study examines the identity negotiation challenges faced by second- and third-generation Muslims belonging to minority communities in secular Europe. It proposes adopting a maqāṣidī (objectives-of-the-law) framework as a guiding paradigm for reconciling Islamic values with civic life in this context. A maqāṣidī-driven approach prioritizes the higher objectives and ethical principles of Sharīʿah—such as justice, compassion, and public welfare—over a strictly literal adherence to specific rulings. This approach enables contextual adaptation while preserving core faith commitments. By reframing Islamic practice around these universal goals, young European Muslims can better harmonize their religious identity with full participation in secular society.

The study also addresses issues of intergenerational cultural tension, pressures of assimilation, and the potential for isolationism or extremism. It illustrates how a purpose-centric interpretation of Sharīʿah can foster constructive integration and resilience in the face of these challenges. Comparative reflections on Muslim minority experiences in other regions (such as Southern Thailand) highlight the broader applicability of this maqāṣidī approach beyond the European context. Ultimately, the study concludes that grounding identity in the maqāṣid paradigm empowers Muslims to remain faithful to Islamic principles while thriving as equal citizens in secular societies.

Keywords: Maqasid al-Shariah; Islamic Identity; Muslim Minorities; Secular Europe; Identity Negotiation; Integration; Assimilation; Intergenerational Tension; Islamic Ethics; Civic Engagement; Extremism; Contextualization of Shariah; Youth Resilience.

INTRODUCTION

Muslims born and raised in Europe – the second- and third-generation descendants of post-WWII immigrants – face unique identity negotiation challenges. Unlike their parents (the "first generation") who transplanted an Islamic way of life from their countries of origin, these younger European Muslims inherit a "transmitted package of heritage" from their families while simultaneously being shaped by the secular European culture around them. They do not grow up in a cultural vacuum; from public schools to media to non-Muslim peers, the environment exposes them to values and norms often different from their parents' traditions. Rather than passively absorbing their elders' identity, young European Muslims actively relate to both heritages and negotiate a hybrid identity that allows them to maintain family bonds yet also claim full European citizenship (Ghatas, 2023). In other words, they strive to be both authentically Muslim and authentically European. This negotiation is dynamic and sometimes difficult. Greater interaction between Muslim and non-Muslim cultures is crucial for a shared future, even if segments of the Muslim community have viewed such exchange warily or resisted change (Ghatas, 2023; Faiz & Afrita, 2024). Secular European states, for their part, often uphold a strict separation of religion from public life (*laïcité* in the French model), which can make visible expressions of Islamic identity contentious. From Islamic attire (e.g. headscarves) to dietary practices to religious education, public expressions of faith may be met with skepticism or even regulatory constraints under secularist policies (Bowen, 2007; Baubérot, 2008). Thus, second- and third-generation Muslims frequently find themselves pulled between the private sphere of inherited faith and the public sphere of European secular norms. How can they reconcile loyalty to Islamic values with integration into a secular society that was not originally designed with Muslim communities in mind?

This study argues that adopting a *maqāṣidī* framework – focusing on the objectives of Islamic law – provides a constructive basis for negotiating Islamic identity in secular Europe. A maqāṣid al-sharīʿah approach shifts focus from the literal rules of Sharīʿah to the higher intents behind those rules, such as justice, compassion, wisdom, and public welfare. By prioritizing these universal objectives, European Muslims can adapt their religious practice to the local context without losing the essential spirit of their faith. The maqāṣid paradigm thereby offers a path to harmonize religious identity with civic engagement: it encourages flexibility in minority jurisprudence (*fiqh al-aqalliyyāt*), emphasizes the common good (*maṣlaḥah*), and aims to fulfill Sharīʿah's core goals in new circumstances. In essence, this framework helps answer a pressing question: How can Muslims remain true to Islamic principles while thriving as equal citizens in a non-Muslim, secular society? The following sections explore this question, drawing on recent scholarship about identity negotiation, maqāṣid-driven minority jurisprudence, integration and civic engagement, intergenerational dynamics, and comparative minority Muslim experiences beyond Europe.

Table 1: Generational Identity Markers

Language Proficiency	Native in homeland language	Fluent in European language
Religious Education	Traditional, inherited	Mixed (home-based + secular schooling)
Cultural Reference Points	Country of origin	Dual (Islamic and European)
Identity Expression	Ethno-religious, private	Hybrid, negotiated, more public
Integration Attitude	Passive or reserved	Active engagement, citizenship-seeking

Source: *Author's analysis adapted from Ghatas (2023) and Westfall (2024).*

Identity Negotiation in Secular Europe

Second- and third-generation European Muslims experience identity as a continual negotiation between their familial Islamic heritage and the secular-national culture of their homeland. Socialization within Muslim immigrant families often instills strong religious values and practices, giving the younger generation a foundation of Islamic identity. At the same time, mainstream society offers a different value system that can conflict with traditional norms. The result is that many youth develop hybrid identities, selectively combining elements from both backgrounds. For example, a young Muslim in Britain or France might speak the European national language fluently and embrace local cultural tastes, yet also maintain Muslim moral values and ritual practices taught by their parents. They are not passive recipients of identity; rather, they exercise agency in how they blend "Muslim" and "European" selves (Ghatas, 2023). This active negotiation can be empowering but also stressful, as individuals may feel they must "code-switch" between worlds to fit in.

The secular public sphere in Europe sometimes exacerbates these identity tensions. Policies influenced by *laïcité* or strict church-state separation can make Muslim identity markers visible flashpoints in societal debates (Bowen, 2007; Joppke, 2018). For instance, public controversies over headscarves, halal food, mosque construction or faith-based schools signal that full inclusion of Islamic practices is still contested. Young European Muslims frequently report feeling that their Muslim identity is viewed as "Other" or incompatible with national values, forcing them to prove their loyalty to Europe. The EU's Fundamental Rights Agency in 2024 found nearly half of Muslims surveyed (47%) had experienced discrimination in the past five years – a sharp rise from a decade earlier. Particularly, European-born Muslim youth (the second generation) reported high levels of bias when job-seeking despite native language fluency and local education. Such experiences of exclusion can create an identity dilemma: the more these individuals assert their Muslimness, the more they risk being stigmatized in secular society (Ali, 2022; FRA, 2024). On the other

hand, downplaying or "invisibilizing" their Islamic identity to avoid discrimination can generate feelings of alienation or inauthenticity within their own communities (Ali, 2022). This delicate balancing act is at the heart of identity negotiation for Europe's Muslim minorities.

Importantly, outcomes of this negotiation vary. Some in the second/third generation move toward assimilation, secularizing or shedding overt religious affiliation under societal pressure. For example, survey data in France show that only about 64% of French-born people of Algerian origin still identified as Muslim in 2020, compared to 89% of Algerian-born immigrants – with roughly one-third of the French-born reporting no religion. This indicates a significant shift in religious identification across generations, as many descendants of Muslim immigrants adopt a more secular European identity (Khosrokhavar, 2022). However, many others in the second generation maintain a strong Muslim identity and seek to have it recognized as compatible with European life. These individuals often gravitate towards hyphenated identities ("British Muslim", "French Muslim", etc.), insisting that their faith and European citizenship need not conflict (Ghatas, 2023). They may engage in youth organizations, interfaith activities, or social advocacy to assert a positive Muslim presence in the public sphere (Yildiz & Verkuyten, 2013). For them, the challenge is achieving a sense of belonging in Europe without abandoning core Islamic values – essentially *integration without assimilation*. This often means negotiating which aspects of cultural tradition are adaptable and which religious principles are non-negotiable. In this context, a *maqāṣidī* outlook can be particularly valuable, as it provides a flexible framework to guide these decisions (Faiz & Afrita, 2024).

Notably, identity negotiation is not purely an internal struggle; it has security and social cohesion implications. Studies have found that identity uncertainty and marginalization can sometimes push disaffected Muslim youth toward isolationist or even extremist responses. Feeling "neither fully European nor properly Muslim," some young people may be drawn to transnational Islamist narratives or protest identities as a way to resolve the tension (Murshed & Pavan, 2009). Indeed, analyses of extremist recruitment in Europe often reveal second-generation youth who lacked a sense of belonging and reacted against perceived hostility to their Muslim identity. This highlights that fostering a confident, integrated identity among Muslim Europeans is not only a personal or communal matter but a broader societal concern. A positive reconciliation of Islamic and European identities – one that affirms young Muslims as equal citizens – can build resilience against radicalization and social fragmentation (Ghatas, 2023; Köse & Ozalp, 2022). In the following sections, we examine how a *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* framework in minority jurisprudence offers tools to achieve such a reconciliation.

Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah and Minority Jurisprudence (Fiqh al-Aqalliyyāt)

Muslim minority communities have increasingly turned to *fiqh al-aqalliyyāt* – a jurisprudence for minorities – to navigate life in non-Muslim societies. This approach was pioneered in the 1990s by scholars

like Taha Jabir al-Alwani and Yusuf al-Qaraḍāwī in response to the growing Muslim presence in the West (Caeiro, 2010). Fiqh al-aqalliyyāt articulates the importance of providing a normative basis for the religious, social, and civic life of Muslims living as minorities. In essence, it seeks to help Muslims find a healthy middle way between being a good Muslim and being a good citizen of a secular state. Rather than expecting Muslims to either fully assimilate (abandoning religious obligations) or segregate into isolated enclaves, minority fiqh aims to bridge Islamic law with modern minority contexts. It does so by emphasizing ease (*taysīr*), contextualization, and the higher objectives of the Sharīʿah. Classical rulings may be adapted or new fatwas formulated, all with the goal of enabling Muslims to practice their faith in harmony with the laws and norms of their country, insofar as core Islamic principles are not violated (Al-Alwani, 2003; Zarabozo, 2013).

Central to contemporary minority jurisprudence is a maqāṣid al-sharīʿah orientation — focusing on the intents and purposes of Islamic law. Modern scholars argue that Muslims in non-Muslim lands must prioritize the *maqāṣid* (objectives) of the law over literal or rigid interpretations that might not suit their context. Whereas traditional *fiqh* often derives rulings based on strict textual evidence (*naṣṣ*) suitable for historically Muslim-majority settings, *fiqh al-aqalliyyāt* consciously bases its rulings on the authority of Sharīʿah's objectives (*ḥujjiyyat al-maqāṣid*) — namely, to secure benefit and prevent harm for the community. This methodological shift means that minority fiqh rulings deliberately strive for outcomes that uphold justice, welfare, and religious freedom for Muslims, even if it requires choosing lenient or minority opinions from the Islamic legal tradition (Auda, 2018). As Alturki et al. (2023) observe, *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* in the minority fiqh context is treated as a dynamic method of juristic reasoning rather than just a set of abstract values. By letting universal principles of Islam prevail over literalist applications, this approach allows for flexibility and adaptation without forsaking the religion's spirit.

Several key components define the maqāṣidī methodology in minority jurisprudence. First is the renewal of independent reasoning (*tajdīd al-ijtihād*) by qualified scholars, to address novel issues that classical jurists never encountered in Muslim-minority settings (Al-Alwani, 2010). Second is an explicit emphasis on the *higher objectives* of the law — preservation of faith, life, intellect, family, and property, along with justice and public interest (maṣlaḥah). Any legal opinion for minorities should be evaluated against these objectives. If a strict opinion would undermine these goals in a given context, a more lenient position is sought (Fatahur-Rahman, 2022). Indeed, minority fiqh permits takhayyur (selecting from different schools of law) and even adopting historically "weak" juristic opinions if they better realize benefits and reduce hardships for Muslims in the West. This pragmatic eclecticism, while unusual in a majority-Muslim context, is justified by the unique pressures minorities face.

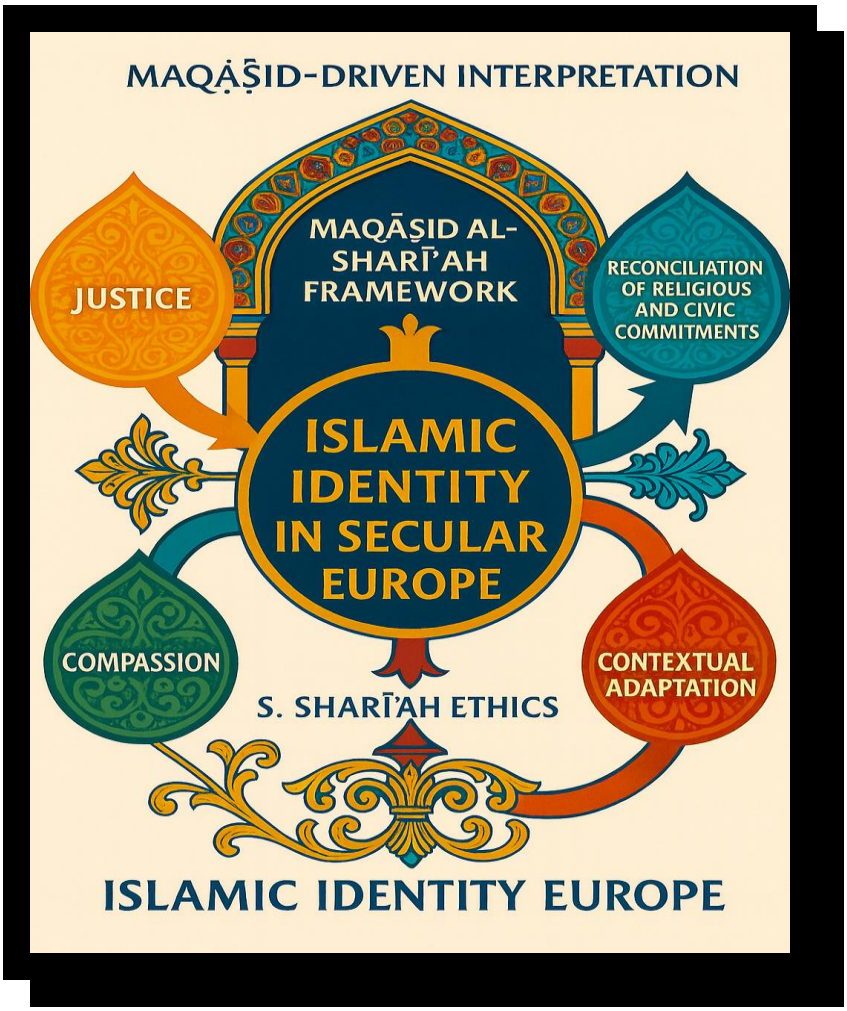
Influential scholars like Shaykh ʿAbd Allah bin Bayyah exemplify this maqāṣid-driven adaptation. Bin Bayyah is recognized as a neo-traditionalist who strives to *reconstruct* Islamic law for Western Muslim

minorities through innovative approaches (Fadhil, 2024). For example, he emphasizes *taḥqīq al-manāṭ* – carefully verifying the context and "effective causes" of rulings – to ensure laws are applied in line with real-world conditions. He advocates weighing the communal welfare (maṣlaḥah) so heavily that even non-dominant opinions in fiqh can be adopted if they prevent harm and facilitate coexistence. Moreover, Bin Bayyah explicitly links *maqāṣid* with classical legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), arguing that objectives like mercy and justice should guide the interpretation of sacred texts in minority settings. He also utilizes maxims (*qawāʿid fiqhiyyah*) such as "necessity lifts restrictions" and "hardship begets facility" to justify easing certain rulings for Muslims in Europe and America (Bin Bayyah, 2015). The significance of these new approaches is that they provide a *systematic jurisprudential paradigm* for minorities: one that is neither secular assimilation nor rigid isolation, but authentically grounded in Islamic law's purposes (Fadhil, 2024). In short, a maqāṣidī minority fiqh empowers scholars to issue context-sensitive fatāwā – on matters from citizenship to finance to interfaith relations – that help Muslims observe their faith to the fullest extent possible within a non-Muslim society (Al-Qaraḍāwī, 2001; Khallaf, 2014).

An illustration of maqāṣid in action is the fatwā permitting Muslims in Western democracies to vote and participate in non-Muslim politics. Classical jurists living in pre-modern caliphates had no cause to consider voting in secular elections. But minority fiqh scholars like al-Alwani and the Fiqh Council of North America recognized that political disenfranchisement would harm Muslim minorities' welfare. They thus issued a landmark fatwā in the 1990s allowing (and in fact encouraging) Muslims to vote, even when no "Islamic" party exists. This ruling was grounded not in historical precedent, but in *maqāṣid*: safeguarding the community's interests, justice, and rights in society (Al-Alwani, 2010). Similarly, European fatāwā have allowed taking mortgages for first homes in non-Muslim countries (to avoid hardship), permissibility of citizenship in secular states, and greetings to non-Muslims on their holidays – all departures from stricter classical opinions, justified by the objectives of ease, goodwill, and social harmony (Khalil, 2021). Each case reflects *fiqh al-aqalliyyāt* bridging the gap between Islamic law and the lived reality of Muslims in secular Europe. The underlying principle is that *if the Sharīʿah's purpose is being upheld*, then some legal flexibility is acceptable. By anchoring adaptations in maqāṣid al-sharīʿah, scholars ensure that core Islamic values – like preserving faith and justice – are never compromised, even as rulings adjust to context (Auda, 2008).

Diagram 1: Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah and Identity Negotiation Flow

A conceptual *flowchart showing the progression from traditional Islamic legal thought to modern identity negotiation through a maqāṣid-guided adaptation process. Key values such as justice, mercy, and public welfare act as mediators, culminating in balanced civic engagement and faith preservation.*



Yet, the maqāṣidī framework within minority jurisprudence provides a theological blueprint for how second- and third-generation Muslims can remain faithful to Islam while engaging fully in secular European life. It reassures them that Islam's *essence* is not about a particular medieval dress or legal code, but about eternal objectives like justice, mercy, and goodness which can be realized in any setting. This reorientation from rules to objectives is transformative: it shifts the conversation from "What exact rule must I follow here?" to "How can I best uphold Islam's higher goals here?" (Auda, 2008; Alturki et al., 2023). As the next section explores, this orientation has direct implications for integration, civic engagement, and the building of cohesive identities that are at once Muslim and European.

Integration, Civic Engagement, and Resilience Through Maqāṣid

A maqāṣid-driven approach has profound impacts on how Muslim minorities view integration and civic engagement. By stressing the Sharīʿah's universal objectives, this framework enables Muslims to see participation in secular society not as a threat to faith but as a *fulfillment* of faith. One of the highest objectives (maqāṣid) of Islam is the promotion of justice and public welfare (*al-maṣāliḥ al-ʿāmmah*). Thus,

contributing positively to one's society – fighting injustice, serving the needy, cooperating for the common good – can be understood as an Islamic duty. Young European Muslims guided by this outlook increasingly assert that building a just, ethical society is as much an Islamic objective as daily prayers or dietary laws. For example, working with non-Muslim neighbors on charitable or civic initiatives (e.g. climate action, anti-racism, volunteering) is framed as part of *being a good Muslim*, since it upholds the Quranic injunction to enjoin the good and benefit humanity (Qur'an 3:110). This mindset helps erode the false dichotomy between religious obligations and civic responsibilities.

Table 2: Key Objectives (Maqāṣid) and Their Civic Applications

Maqṣad (Objective)	**Application in Secular Society**
Preservation of Religion	Freedom of worship, Islamic education access
Preservation of Life	Public health cooperation, anti-violence initiatives
Preservation of Intellect	Educational excellence, interfaith academic programs
Preservation of Wealth	Islamic finance participation, ethical business engagement
Preservation of Dignity	Anti-discrimination advocacy, gender dignity in public space

Prominent scholars encourage Muslim minorities to fully engage in the civic and political life of their countries. Yusuf al-Qaraḍāwī argued that a Muslim living in the West "has two identities that must be balanced: identity as part of the Muslim *ummah* and identity as part of [the wider] society". These dual loyalties are not in conflict, he insists – the concept of religious brotherhood (*ummah*) does not negate the concept of citizenship (*muwāṭanah*). Citing the Prophet's Constitution of Medina as precedent, Qaraḍāwī notes that Islam from the start recognized a form of pluralistic citizenship, where Muslims and non-Muslims formed one political community with mutual obligations. Therefore, Muslims in Europe can wholeheartedly embrace loyalty to their nation and contribute to its welfare, as long as this does not force them to violate fundamental tenets of their faith. In fact, Qaraḍāwī and others describe this paradigm as "commitment without isolation, integration without assimilation". Integration does not mean dissolving one's religious identity; rather, it means participating in society while staying true to Islamic morals. The maqāṣidī lens justifies this by pointing to higher intents: preserving religion *and* preserving societal harmony both rank among Sharīʿah objectives. In Qaraḍāwī's vision, Muslim minorities should be "pioneers of benefit" to their surrounding community – actively doing good for all, which in itself is a form of silent daʿwah (invitation to Islam by example). He even asserts that with wise conduct, "Europe and America will be in the bosom of Islam gradually", meaning that through positive engagement, Muslims can win hearts and dispel misconceptions.

Crucially, minority fiqh proponents reject any narrative that Muslims must choose between religious fidelity and civic loyalty. They counter isolationist ideologies that arose in earlier generations. For instance, in the mid-20th century, thinkers like Sayyid Quṭb and M. Ali Kettani advocated that Muslims in the West should live separate from non-Muslims to avoid assimilation of un-Islamic ways. These views, emphasizing *al-walāʾ wa'l-barāʾ* (loyalty to Muslims and disavowal of non-Muslims), fueled a ghetto mentality where integration was seen as religious compromise. The maqāṣid-oriented scholars firmly push back against this. Al-Qaraḍāwī clarifies that the Quranic concept of *barāʾ* (dissociation) applies only to those hostile to Muslims, not to peaceful neighbors. He and Taha al-Alwani both stress that good relations and justice toward non-Muslims are not only permitted but commanded, citing Quran 60:8 which urges kindness and justice toward those who do not persecute Muslims. Al-Alwani, for his part, declared the old Dar al-Islam vs. Dar al-Ḥarb paradigm obsolete; in his view, any country where Muslims can practice their religion freely and securely is effectively part of the Abode of Islam for them. This bold redefinition removes any theological basis for Muslims to feel like outsiders or temporary sojourners in the West. Instead, Western Muslims can regard the nations they live in as *home* – a place where they have a treaty of citizenship and trust (often called *Dār al-ʿAhd*). With this assurance, engaging in civic duties, voting, obeying just laws, and caring for society's welfare become seen as Islamically virtuous acts. Loyalty to one's country – standing for its flag, paying taxes, defending it from harm – is no sin as long as the country does not force one to renounce faith (Bin Bayyah, 2016). In fact, serving one's country aligns with the maqāṣid of protecting life, order, and justice (FRA, 2017).

Empirical research supports that devoutness and civic engagement often go hand-in-hand for Muslim minorities. Westfall's (2024) comparative study of Muslims in Canada, the US, and Europe found that those who are active in their religious life (e.g., regularly attending mosque) are more likely to participate in secular voluntary organizations and mainstream politics. In other words, a strong Islamic identity did not hinder civic incorporation – it often strengthened it. Mosques and Muslim associations can serve as bridges into broader community involvement, mobilizing youth for service projects, interfaith dialogues, and voting drives (Peña & Cadge, 2022). Westfall even noted an inverse relationship between mosque attendance and protest activity: Muslims deeply engaged in community religious life were less drawn to alienated or adversarial forms of activism. This suggests that a healthy religious framework can channel grievances into constructive political engagement rather than resentment. It echoes the maqāṣidī ideal that a purpose-driven Muslim will be a proactive, positive citizen. Indeed, qualitative accounts from European Muslim youth show many feel motivated by their faith's ethics to address social ills like poverty, racism, and climate change (Ali, 2022; Shoka, 2021). Far from retreating into insular identities, these youth see their Muslim values as a basis for solidarity with fellow citizens on common causes (justice, human rights, etc.).

Another benefit of the maqāṣid approach is its role in building resilience against extremism and identity crises. When young Muslims are equipped with a narrative that Islam *wants* them to engage and contribute, they are less vulnerable to voices that preach clash or isolation. The maqāṣid paradigm emphasizes hope and possibility: it tells young minorities that they can be 100% Muslim and 100% European, that Islam is a mercy to all peoples (*raḥmatan li'l-ʿālamīn*) and can flourish in any land with the right understanding (Ibn Ashur, 2006). This positive framing provides a counterpoint to both extremist ideologies (which claim Western and Islamic identities are irreconcilable) and to assimilation pressures (which demand religious privatization). By prioritizing higher objectives like preserving faith *and* fostering societal welfare, maqāṣidī thinking inherently rejects any route that involves abandoning faith or sowing societal discord. For example, a youth who might be angered by discrimination is reminded that patience and working for justice through lawful means better serve Islam's objectives than rebellion or withdrawal (Qur'an 16:90). Empirically, communities that embrace minority fiqh guidance have produced proactive initiatives for youth inclusion — mentorship programs, civic education in mosques, and so forth — which channel frustrations into productive outlets (Birt, 2021). As one study noted, when young Muslims feel their identity is *recognized and valued*, they exhibit higher trust in institutions and lower attraction to radical narratives (van Slageren & van Tubergen, 2021). Thus, encouraging civic engagement as an Islamic mandate not only aids integration but also inoculates against isolation and extremism (Alturki et al., 2023; Ghatas, 2023). In sum, through the maqāṣidī framework, integration and religious commitment reinforce each other: being a good Muslim means being a good neighbor and citizen, and being a responsible citizen exemplifies one's faith.

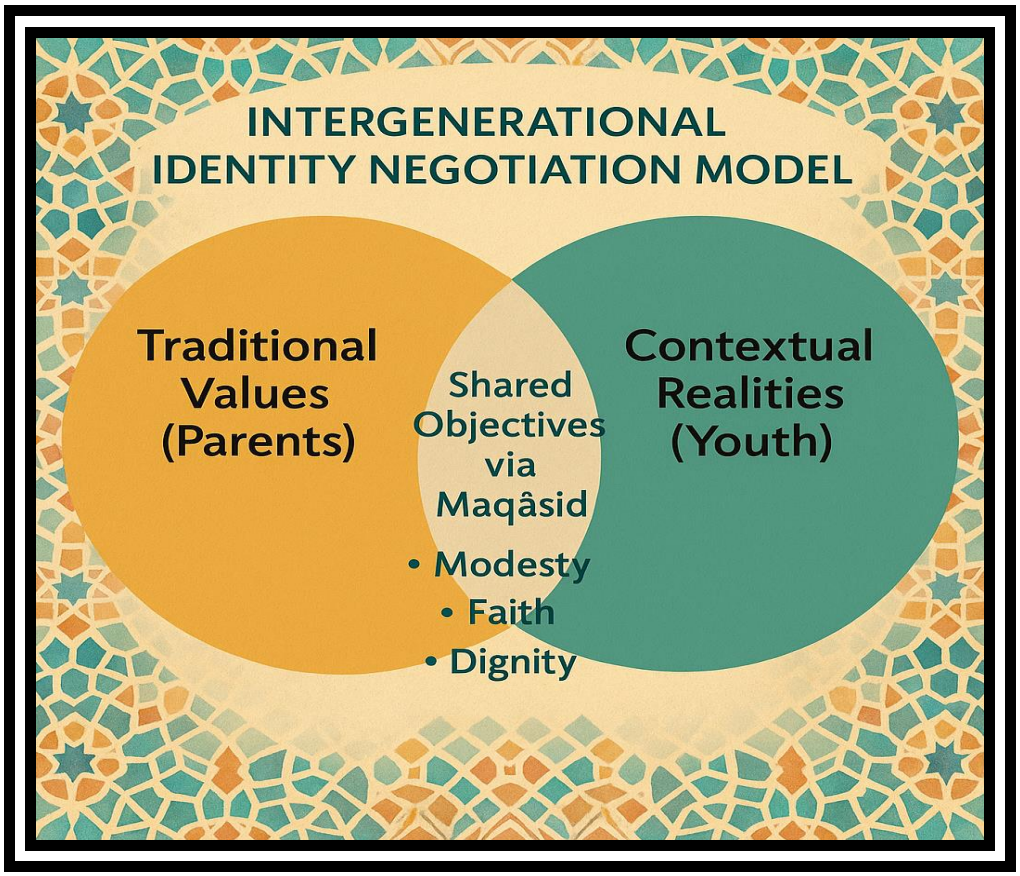
Intergenerational Dynamics and the Transmission of Identity

The identity negotiation process for Muslim minorities is also deeply influenced by intergenerational dynamics within families and communities. The first generation of post-war Muslim immigrants to Europe largely transplanted the cultural-religious practices of their homelands. They established mosques, halal markets, and cultural centers to preserve their heritage, often with an eye toward eventually returning home or at least maintaining a distinct identity in diaspora (Cesari, 2004). Their children and grandchildren, however, have grown up embedded in European society, attending public schools and interacting daily with non-Muslims. This has created a natural gap in perspectives: younger Muslims tend to have more hybridized identities and a greater comfort navigating European institutions, while the older generation may favor sticking more closely to native customs and wary of "too much" integration (Ghatas, 2023). The result can be intergenerational tension over what it means to be a good Muslim in Europe. For example, a grandfather might expect his granddaughter to wear traditional dress or speak the family's native language at home, whereas she, growing up in a Western city, may see such markers as optional and identify primarily with

being a "French Muslim" or "Dutch Muslim." Neither is necessarily wrong – they are negotiating identity in different contexts – but it requires mutual understanding.

Diagram 2: Intergenerational Identity Negotiation Model

A maqāṣid-centered Venn diagram illustrating the overlap between traditional values (e.g., parental modesty norms) and contextual youth realities (e.g., secular education, workplace exposure). Shared Islamic objectives such as faith, dignity, and ethical conduct mediate this space.



A maqāṣid-oriented framework can help mediate these intergenerational differences by distinguishing between immutable principles and adaptable practices. The older generation often equates preserving Islam with preserving the exact cultural forms in which they learned Islam (e.g. certain clothing, gender norms, ethnic customs intertwined with religion). The younger generation, steeped in Europe, may question which of those practices are truly essential to the faith and which were just cultural. Through a maqāṣid lens, families can come to see that the *principle* (e.g. modesty in dress) is non-negotiable, but the *form* it takes (type of clothing) can legitimately vary by time and place, as long as modesty is maintained. Thus, a daughter's choice to wear modest Western-style clothing instead of her mother's traditional attire is

not a deviation from Islam, but an adaptation that still fulfills the Islamic objective of modesty. Likewise, while parents might stress memorization of the Qur'an in Arabic (as they learned), their European-born children might connect more through understanding the meanings via translation — again, the objective of maintaining faith and understanding scripture can be met in different ways. By focusing on the *ends* (faith, morality, community cohesion) rather than the *means* alone, maqāṣidī reasoning provides a common language for generations to discuss change. It validates the first generation's concern for upholding religion, while also validating the new generation's need to express Islam in a way that resonates with their European reality (Abo Sharaf, 2021).

Family socialization remains crucial: studies show that despite generational frictions, Muslim families in Europe transmit a strong sense of religious identity to their children. In France, for instance, 91% of children raised by Muslim parents continue to identify as Muslim into adulthood (FRA, 2019). Close-knit family and community networks provide young Muslims with a supportive environment to learn Islamic beliefs and values from an early age (Ajrouch, 2020). This early grounding often equips the second generation with the confidence to deal with external pressures. However, the way youth interpret and practice the faith may evolve. Research by Faiz and Afrita (2024) notes that second and third-generation Muslims "actively negotiate" the dual inheritance from their parents and the majority culture, in order to maintain family bonds while also attaining full societal participation. Many in the younger cohort seek to reinterpret certain traditions through the maqāṣid lens — not out of rebellion, but in an effort to be true to Islam's core while addressing their context. For example, some European Muslim youth have revisited gender roles taught by their parents, asking whether certain restrictions are truly Islamic or cultural. Using maqāṣid principles like justice and human dignity, they may advocate for greater female leadership in community institutions or more egalitarian family decision-making, seeing this as more in line with Quranic objectives, even if it departs from patriarchal norms of their elders (Hidayana, 2023). This can cause friction with parents or imams of the older school. Yet, when handled constructively, such debates can lead to a dynamic evolution of religious practice that is still anchored to Islamic fundamentals (e.g., mutual consultation in family, respect for parents) but allows the younger generation a sense of ownership over their identity (Ismail & Mat, 2022).

Intergenerational dialogues within European Islam increasingly revolve around questions of interpretation and priorities. The first generation, having experienced being a minority with little institutional support, sometimes emphasize protective measures: stick to your own, don't trust the authorities, maintain a low profile. The new generation, more at home in Europe, often emphasizes engagement: build coalitions, claim your rights, and portray Islam confidently in public (Roy, 2021). The maqāṣidī framework again is useful here — it teaches that preserving religion (*ḥifẓ ad-dīn*) does not necessarily mean isolating from society (as some elders might think to protect the youth), but can mean integrating in a wise manner that actually

protects faith by normalizing it in society. Many second-generation Muslims appreciate that their parents sacrificed and built community institutions, but they feel a need to adapt institutional roles. For instance, young Muslims have pushed for sermons in European languages rather than exclusively in Urdu, Arabic, or Turkish, so that the youth can actually understand and internalize religious guidance. They argue that the objective of *Friday khuṭbah* (sermon) – to spiritually uplift and educate – is lost if the youth don't comprehend it; thus the maqāṣid require a language switch for the sake of efficacy (Kaddorah, 2021). Some older mosque committees initially resist such changes, fearing a loss of heritage, but increasing numbers are seeing the wisdom as youth involvement in mosques rises once language barriers are removed. In essence, the second generation is attempting to "Europeanize" Islamic practice (in language, approach, institutions) not to dilute it, but to ensure its survival and relevance – an aim very much in line with *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* (preservation of faith across contexts) (Ghatas, 2023; Fadhil, 2024).

The interplay of generations can thus be synergistic when guided by mutual commitment to Islamic objectives. The elders bring the wisdom of tradition and memory of origin, and the youth bring creativity and contextual intelligence. Through respectful dialogue, they can agree on core maqāṣid: e.g., "We want our family to remain firm in faith, to be safe, educated, moral, and united." They can then brainstorm how to achieve those in the European environment, which might involve new methods (education in secular universities, careers in public service, interacting with non-Muslim peers) that the older generation may come to accept as valid paths to shared goals. Indeed, research in Britain has found that many immigrant parents have gradually become more open to their children's "British Islam" as they see that it keeps the children ethically grounded and successful in society (Lewis, 2020). The *negotiation of identity* between generations is ongoing, but when framed positively it can produce a resilient, context-responsive Islamic identity that honors the past while embracing the present. This family and community cohesion, in turn, fortifies Muslims' ability to deal with external challenges. A young Muslim who feels understood and supported by her parents and community, rather than pressured from both sides, is much more likely to thrive and confidently assert her dual identity outside (Ali, 2022). In conclusion, intergenerational understanding – facilitated by the maqāṣid paradigm's flexibility – is key to a sustainable European Muslim identity that passes the test of time.

Comparative Perspectives from Beyond Europe

The experiences of Muslim minorities in secular Europe find both parallels and contrasts in other regions of the world. Examining cases in Southeast Asia, North America, and Australia sheds additional light on how Islamic identity is negotiated in different socio-political contexts, and how a maqāṣidī framework might universally apply.

Southeast Asia (Southern Thailand): In Southeast Asia, most countries have Muslim-majority populations (e.g., Indonesia, Malaysia) and thus do not present the "minority in secular West" scenario. However, there are notable Muslim minority contexts within the region — one example being Southern Thailand. The three southernmost provinces of Thailand (Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat) are home to a large Malay-Muslim minority in a predominantly Buddhist nation. Historically, this community faced challenges integrating into a Thai state that emphasized Buddhist symbols and Thai language, somewhat akin to European laïcité in its pressure to assimilate. In recent years, scholars and community leaders have applied *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* principles to improve integration and civic peace in Southern Thailand (Yusuf & Techawongtham, 2020). One significant initiative has been Islamic education reform to foster multicultural citizenship. Instead of insular madrasa curricula, educators introduced civics, Thai language, and universal ethics alongside religious studies, framed within an Islamic values context (Yusuf & Thongin, 2025). By highlighting Islamic teachings on justice, harmony, and public interest, Muslim educators showed students that being a responsible Thai citizen and a devout Muslim are complementary goals. This approach — essentially a maqāṣidī pedagogy — helped reduce mistrust: Muslim youth in the South began to see national laws and civic duties as not foreign impositions but as arenas to live out Islamic ethics (e.g., honesty, fulfilling contracts, helping neighbors of other faiths). At the same time, the Thai authorities (in part due to advocacy from academics like Imtiyaz Yusuf) have acknowledged the importance of accommodating Muslim identity — for example, by recognizing Islamic holidays and local shariah councils for family matters. The Southern Thai experience suggests that **e**mphasizing shared values can build a form of "multicultural citizenship" where Muslims remain strongly Muslim yet contribute to the national cohesion (Yusuf & Thongin, 2025). It mirrors the European maqāṣid paradigm: focus on core objectives (peace, education, welfare) provides common ground across religious divides. Indeed, comparative research notes that the maqāṣid approach in Southern Thailand has broad relevance, as it effectively addressed minority grievances through *education, dialogue, and flexibility* rather than coercion. This underscores that the challenges of identity negotiation and integration for Muslim minorities are not unique to Europe — and that solutions rooted in Islamic objectives can travel across cultures.

Table 3: Comparative Contexts of Muslim Minorities (Europe, N. America, Thailand, Australia)

Region	**Dominant Model**	**Muslim Strategy**	**Role of Maqāṣid**
Europe	Secular Republicanism	Identity negotiation	Theoretical anchor for adaptation
North America	Pluralist Democracy	Civic assertiveness	Framework for ethical engagement
Southern Thailand	Buddhist Nationalism	Educational reform, coexistence	Pedagogical and cultural integration
Australia	Multiculturalism	Dual identity assertion	Justification of civic participation

Sources: *Synthesized from Yusuf & Thongin (2025), Westfall (2024), Ali (2022).*

North America: The Muslim minority experience in North America (the United States and Canada) offers another instructive comparison. In contrast to Europe's older nation-states with strong secularist policies, countries like the U.S. and Canada define themselves as immigrant societies with pluralistic frameworks. Muslims in North America (many of them post-1965 immigrants or their descendants) have generally faced less institutional laïcité; for instance, wearing religious attire or building Islamic schools is broadly permitted. This more accommodative environment has enabled a robust development of American and Canadian Muslim communities, with thousands of mosques and civic organizations. Surveys show that a large majority of Muslim Americans — including second-generation youth — strongly identify with their country and are engaged in its civic life (Pew Research Center, 2017). This suggests that integration can be high in a context that overtly embraces multiculturalism. However, North American Muslims have still confronted significant challenges, especially in the post-9/11 era: Islamophobic rhetoric, discrimination, government surveillance, and policies like "travel bans" singling out Muslim-majority countries have created an atmosphere of scrutiny (Al-Faham, 2022). The negotiation of identity for young Muslims in North America often involves countering stereotypes and educating peers about Islam, much as in Europe. A difference is that national narratives in the U.S. and Canada somewhat facilitate hyphenated identities (e.g., "Muslim-American" is more accepted in discourse than "Muslim French" in France's republican model). Even so, Muslim Canadians and Americans often feel pressure to prove they are "loyal Americans/Canadians" and not connected to extremism — a burden similar to what European Muslims face (Cainkar & Selod, 2018).

The maqāṣidī paradigm is gaining traction among North American Muslim thinkers as well. Institutions like the Fiqh Council of North America and the Assembly of Muslim Jurists of America (AMJA) regularly issue fatwās that balance religious requirements with the American context, much in line with European minority fiqh. For example, permissibility of organ donation, participation in secular courts as jurors, and buying homes with interest when necessary have all been justified by considering the public interest and necessity (maqāṣid considerations) in America's setting. American Muslim leaders often emphasize the Qur'ānic ethic of justice and cooperative citizenship — for instance, quoting the saying of the Prophet that "the best of people are those who benefit people the most" as motivation to volunteer in local communities. Empirical evidence shows many Muslim Americans take this to heart: they have served in the U.S. military, run for public office in increasing numbers, and engage in interfaith service projects at high rates (ISPU, 2022). Westfall's cross-national study concluded that the mechanisms of Muslim civic incorporation are remarkably similar between North America and Western Europe once controlling for context. In both places, having a supportive religious community and a sense of fulfilling Islamic values correlates with greater civic engagement. This reinforces the idea that the maqāṣid approach is universal: when Muslims are encouraged to see the *purpose* of Islam as promoting goodness and preventing harm, they naturally gravitate

toward constructive roles in society, whether in Toronto or London. The North American case also highlights the importance of combating Islamophobia through proactive narrative. Canadian and U.S. Muslim activists frequently frame their appeals in universal values (human rights, freedom of religion) which align with maqāṣid al-sharīʿah's emphasis on justice and freedom of belief. By invoking these shared values, they have built alliances that benefit not only Muslims but other minority groups too — a fulfillment of Islam's principle of mercy to all. In summary, North America demonstrates how a pluralistic secular context combined with a maqāṣidī mindset can yield a fairly successful model of minority identity: proudly Muslim and fully national at the same time, even if vigilance against prejudice remains necessary (Westfall, 2024; Al-Faham, 2022).

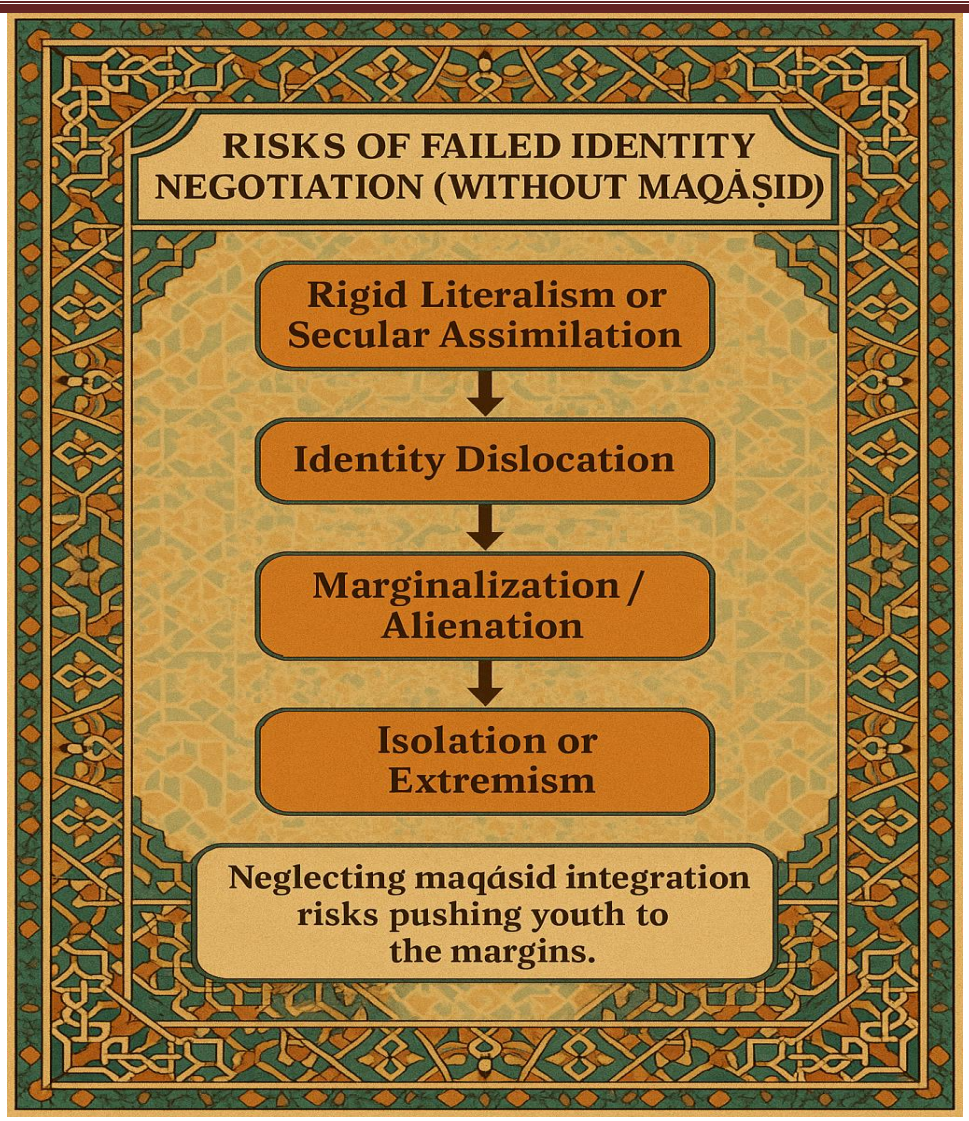
Australia: Australia presents yet another context — a Western democracy with a smaller Muslim population (~3% of Australians) but an official policy of multiculturalism. Australian Muslims (many from Lebanese, Turkish, or South Asian backgrounds) have reported experiences that echo those of European Muslims. Jan Ali (2022) notes that despite Australia's *multicultural and democratic claims*, young Australian Muslims continue to face marginalization and "Othering" in media and politics. Stereotypes about "Muslim extremists" or "ghettoized" communities create a social pressure cooker in which Muslim youth feel they must constantly prove their allegiance to be seen as "true Australians". Many third-generation Australian Muslims — born and bred Australians — still struggle for recognition as full members of the national community, indicating that time alone doesn't erase doubts about Muslim loyalty (Ali, 2022). In response, Australian Muslim youth have developed what Ali calls "depoliticised, hybrid and contextualised identities". They navigate multiple spheres deftly: at home they might speak some Arabic or Turkish and uphold family religious traditions, while in public they engage peers with a shared Australian pop culture and values. This hybridity is a strategy to move beyond misrecognition — to claim their place as Australian Muslims, not perpetually foreigners. Yet, the unreasonable and unequal burden remains on them to demonstrate that their Islamic faith is compatible with Australian life. Here too, a maqāṣid perspective helps: Australian imams and youth leaders often highlight the congruence between Islamic principles and "Aussie" values like fairness, mateship (social solidarity), and respect. By doing so, they empower Muslim youth to assert that practicing Islam makes them better Australians, not outsiders. For instance, community campaigns encourage Muslims to participate in ANZAC Day (a national remembrance day) on the grounds that Islam teaches loyalty to one's nation and honoring those who protected your society — aligning with the maqāṣid of preserving life and security. Simultaneously, Islamic ethics of charity have been tied into Australian volunteerism; Muslim youth groups engaging in bushfire relief or food drives often explicitly state they are motivated by Prophet Muḥammad's teaching of caring for neighbors. The net effect is gradually shifting perceptions, with Muslims being seen as contributors to society's welfare (though challenges persist, especially with periodic political rhetoric targeting Muslims). Australia's case exemplifies both the promise and challenge of integration: on one hand, a flexible, maqāṣid-

guided identity has enabled many young Muslims to thrive as confident, civically active citizens (e.g., notable Australian Muslims serve in parliament, sports, and academia). On the other hand, the persistence of Islamophobia means the task of normalization is ongoing. Australian Muslims have found that emphasizing universal objectives — like "we as Muslims want the same peace, prosperity and justice for society as anyone else" — is an effective narrative (Halim, 2021). This mirrors strategies in Europe and North America and reinforces that across diverse contexts, bridging identities is eased when Muslims and the wider society can recognize common goals.

In comparing these regions, one finds that the core issues — identity, integration, prejudice, generational change — recur, but the intensity and form vary by context. Europe's historically Christian secularism can be rigid (e.g. France's laïcité), making the maqāṣid approach a crucial internal resource for Muslims to justify flexibility. North America's pluralism provides more external acceptance, yet global conflicts still import stigma, so an internal maqāṣid ethos helps Muslims stay positively engaged rather than withdrawing in fear. Australia's multicultural policy gives a framework for inclusion, but societal attitudes lag; a maqāṣid outlook aids Muslims in proactively aligning with national ideals while being true to faith. Southeast Asia's minority situations (like Thailand) show that even outside "the West," Muslim minorities benefit from emphasizing Islam's higher objectives to find a livable arrangement in a non-Islamic society. Across all cases, the maqāṣidī framework functions as a universal toolkit: it extracts from Islamic tradition guiding principles that Muslims can carry with them into any environment — justice, mercy, common good — and use to interpret their duties therein. This toolkit allows Muslims to remain rooted in their ethics while adapting forms and strategies to local needs. It confirms that Islamic identity, when based on maqāṣid, is not a brittle relic of a bygone era but a living, resilient force that can positively shape diverse societies.

Diagram 3: Risks of Failed Identity Negotiation (Without Maqāṣid)

A cause–effect chain depicting how rigid literalism or total secular assimilation can lead to identity dislocation, marginalization, and eventually isolation or extremism. Neglecting maqāṣid integration risks pushing youth to the margins.



Conclusion

Second- and third-generation Muslims in secular Europe are pioneering a new chapter of the Muslim experience — one in which being a devout Muslim and being a loyal European are not mutually exclusive but mutually enriching identities. Their journey is not without trials: these young men and women stand at the intersection of two worlds, continually translating between Islamic tradition and European modernity. The *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* framework offers a viable roadmap for this journey of identity negotiation. By elevating the intents and principles of Islam above any rigid, one-size-fits-all rule, it provides young European Muslims with tools to reconcile their obligations to God with their responsibilities to society. It reassures them that they do not have to choose between faith and citizenship — they can, and should, have both. Indeed, the experiences discussed show that a purpose-centric interpretation of Sharīʿah actually *enhances* one's ability

to integrate: it imbues everyday civic involvement with spiritual meaning and frames secular challenges as opportunities to fulfill religious objectives (Alturki et al., 2023; Westfall, 2024).

In practice, a maqāṣidī approach empowers Muslim minorities to distinguish the unchangeable core of Islam from its adaptable peripheral aspects. It justifies flexibility — such as local legal concessions, context-sensitive fatāwā, and cross-cultural engagement — by pointing to the higher objectives of Sharīʿah like justice, mercy, and human welfare. Far from diluting Islamic authenticity, this approach echoes the Prophetic ethos of ease (*taysīr*) and concern for the *ummah's* well-being. The Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) said, "Facilitate religion to people and do not make it difficult" — an often-cited hadith to remind the community that the Sharīʿah was sent as raḥmatan lil-ʿālamīn (a mercy to all peoples). If Islam is to be a mercy for all humanity, it must be applicable in every land and age in a manner that secures benefit and prevents harm. European Muslims applying maqāṣid principles are enacting this mercy by finding ways to let Islamic values shine in secular settings. We are witnessing the evolution of a confident Islamic identity rooted in faith yet open to the world.

These Muslims can assert, for instance, that building a just and ethical society is as much an Islamic objective as establishing regular prayers — therefore, participating in civil society to combat injustice or inequality is part of their religious duty (Qur'an 3:110). They can argue that preserving life and intellect (two core maqāṣid) means supporting public health measures and education initiatives, which aligns them with their non-Muslim neighbors in common causes. In personal conduct, they balance Islamic modesty with professional and social participation, showing by example that Muslim values can flourish in a secular environment. Over time, such an approach is likely to diminish the perceived clash between "Islam" and "the West," as more people see in practice that devoted Muslims are not only compatible with secular society but can positively contribute to it. Already, we see countless stories of European Muslims — doctors, teachers, artists, parliamentarians — whose faith motivates outstanding service to their countries, embodying the maqāṣid of compassion, knowledge, and justice (Ghatas, 2023; Ali, 2022).

However, negotiating Islamic identity in secular Europe does not require Muslims to abandon their principles, nor should it require them to separate into cultural enclaves. Instead, through a maqāṣidī lens, identity negotiation becomes an exercise in prioritization and adaptation: holding fast to the spiritual and ethical objectives that define being Muslim, while creatively operationalizing those objectives within the norms and institutions of Europe. This balanced path honors the legacy of the first-generation pioneers but also addresses the lived reality of the new generations. It promises an Islamic identity that is faithful, flexible, and civically engaged — precisely the kind of identity that can thrive in secular Europe and enrich its social fabric with the values of faith (Faiz & Afrita, 2024; Fadhil, 2024). If European societies can recognize and welcome this evolution, and if Muslims continue to ground themselves in maqāṣid al-sharīʿah, the future is one of partnership rather than conflict. In such a future, Muslim citizens will be seen as an integral part of Europe's

mosaic — adding resilience, diversity, and moral capital to their nations. Their success in negotiating identity will not only secure the flourishing of Islam in Europe, but also stand as a model for minority communities worldwide seeking harmony between heritage and homeland. As one sociologist aptly put it, "Muslims are becoming European, and Europe, in small ways, is becoming more Muslim — and both are better for it" (Roy, 2022). The maqāṣidī framework has been a key catalyst in this transformative process, and it will remain indispensable as new challenges and opportunities arise for Europe's Muslims in the years ahead.

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