

Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis

Studia de Cultura 16(4) 2024

ISSN 2083-7275

DOI 10.24917/20837275.16.4.3

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“Everyone Should Mind their *Jihād*”.

Polish Female Converts to Islam against Homonegativity

Introduction

The scientific text refers to Eurobarometer data from 2019, which indicated that 49% of Poles supported granting equal rights to gay, lesbian, and bisexual people, while 45% opposed it. These numbers positioned Poland as part of the more conservative bloc within the EU in terms of LGBT+ rights, especially compared to the EU-28 average of 76% in favour and 20% against. Similar splits were observed regarding acceptance of same-sex relationships and same-sex marriage. Comparing these 2019 figures with the 2024 Eurobarometer results, we see continuity and change. Support for same-sex marriage in Poland has slightly risen to 50%, reflecting a modest shift toward greater acceptance despite continuing political opposition and the societal divide. In contrast, the EU-wide average has also grown, with 72% supporting same-sex marriage, further highlighting the gap between Poland and the broader EU trend. Both datasets reveal that while Polish society remains divided, there is a slow increase in acceptance of LGBT+ rights in Poland over time, even though it continues to trail behind many EU nations (Komisja Europejska 2019)¹.

¹ Research conducted by the Public Opinion Research Center shows that compared to the 2019 survey, in 2021 there was a clear improvement in the attitude of Poles to gays and

This conservative attitude is not unique to Polish society and is shared by societies of the so-called new member states, i.e., Central and Eastern Europe. However, Poland is one of the few countries where the existence of LGBT+ people has become a political issue and has been (mis)used in public discourse by the party that had been in power until 2023, Law and Justice (pl. Prawo i Sprawiedliwość). The key concept in this discourse was the ‘gender ideology’, which was said to be a “dangerous and widespread ideology that fights traditional family and motherhood” and is a “direct way (...) to acknowledging ‘rights’ of homosexuals to be married and have children” (Pawłowicz 2012: 139). As Bachryj-Krzywaźnia (2016: 346) notes, the term has emerged from a scientific niche into the political debate and has been fundamentally transformed within the latter. The high politicisation of the concepts of gender and LGBT+ has an important religious dimension, and thus, they have become a significant topic in the Roman Catholic press and discourse. The scope of this discourse ranges from presenting LGBT+ people as the ultimate evil – as represented by the right-conservative wing – to pointing to the homophobia of Catholics (Leśniczak 2020: 119).

The bulk of studies related to LGBT+ issues and religion in Poland have covered the Christian religion, mainly Roman Catholicism, and were devoted to the conflict between faith and homosexuality (Hall 2013). Our article aims to explore the perceptions and narratives of the LGBT+ community, and in particular homosexuality, among a segment of the Polish Muslim community – namely Polish female converts to Islam.

Our article analyses how Polish females convert to Islam perceive homosexuality and presents how they reconcile their faith with LGBT+ acceptance. Our data was collected in 2017–2019 and comes from 12 in-depth interviews with Polish female converts to Islam carried out within a broader project dedicated to Polish female converts to Islam². Our study did not particularly ask about their attitudes to the LGBT+ community. Our interviewees brought this topic up while discussing issues that are difficult for them in Islam. We decided to extract this data and look into the narratives our respondents created to approach the LGBT+ community and reconcile the existence of such people with their religion.

Although we know that one of our respondents is a lesbian, we did not ask our respondents about their sexual orientation, only about their marital or civil status. Thus, our respondents refer to LGBT+ as a category of people distinguished based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Sometimes they refer to their own experiences with Muslim or non-Muslim gay or queer friends. Sometimes, they tackle LGBT+ in general – as people, they might encounter or might have encountered. In our paper, we will explore what strategies they use to find a way to reconcile Islamic mainstream jurisprudence of homonegativity with their acceptance of the LGBT+ community.

lesbians. More positive answers were given to all questions about the attitude towards homosexual people, as well as about their rights. It is possible that this is related to the increased presence of the topic of homosexuality in the media and public debate in recent years, which, after all, is conducive to taming this topic (Scovil 2021).

² *Managing spoiled identity: the case of Polish female converts to Islam*. National Science Centre-funded project for 2017–2021.

We explore these approaches in more detail in the following sections, but to begin with, we briefly outline the complicated and unambiguous approach of Islamic jurisprudence towards homosexuality.

Homosexuality in Islam

As the youngest of the three monotheistic religions, Islam had inherited from Christianity the story of Lot (Arab. *Lūṭ*) and the sin of Sodom. Just as in Christianity, sexual acts of unmarried couples are considered to be sinful. Homosexual acts are forbidden in traditional Islamic jurisprudence³ and illegal in most Muslim-majority countries. Modernity with the new vision of sexuality has interfered with the traditional approach towards same-sex erotism. The neo-orthodox scholars adopted the essentialist view of sexual identity, losing the ability to differentiate between homosexuality and same-sex sexual acts (Zollner 2009), and started perceiving same-sex sexuality as an “unnatural” (Esack, Mahomed 2011) chosen lifestyle, rejecting the concept of innate disposition (Zollner 2009). European Christian discourses on homosexuality influenced this neo-orthodox narration (Kugle 2010). The prevalent official Muslim perspective is a kind of hybrid combining premodern position with „sensibilities of present notions of sexual identity, sexual stability, and sexual pathology” (Esack, Mahomed 2011). Many Muslim scholars in the West advocate tolerance for LGBT+ rights but, at the same time, stand for the prohibition of same-sex sexuality for Muslims (Mahomed 2016).

The attitude towards same-sex relations in Islamic ethics has been changing during the past thirty years in the LGBT+ Muslim communities in the West (Esack, Mahomed 2011: 41), especially between converts to Islam not being involved in the “Arabo-Islamic traditions where sharia is mistakenly perceived as divine law” (Khan 2009). Some scholars challenge the dominant approach that homosexuality has always been condemned in Islam. Several arguments are used to substantiate this claim, such as the incompatibility of the modern term (homosexuality, queer, gay) and historical realities of Muslim majority societies (Murray 1997: 14–44), positioning gender and sexuality against European practices and narratives imposed on the Middle East with colonialism (Najmabadi 2005; Foucault 1990). Another way is to re-read sources of Islamic law in an LGBT-friendly manner, prioritising Islamic Revelation’s fundamental values like justice and mercy or universal human rights (Kugle 2010).

In a modern sense of the word, homosexuality has a relatively short history, dating back to the late 17th century. In contrast, gay (and later lesbian) subcultures were developed in the 20th century – mainly in the West (Edsall: 2006: x). In the case of Islamic jurisprudence, homosexuality – understood as same-sex male intercourse – has

³ Islamic jurisprudence is a dynamic, flexible, hybrid, individualised, differentiated (not only temporally and regionally), dialogic, polyphonic, casuistic, and open system of law applying to relation between a Muslim towards God and with other creatures. This character allows Muslims (as individuals and groups, for instance states) to make choices between many different legal opinions (Górska 2020).

been condemned according to four Qur'anic verses (7:81–82), (26:165), (27:55), (29:29), and several hadiths which present more severe and precise view on punishing people committing this kind of transgression. In Arabic, the language of the Qur'an, 'homosexuality' was translated as *liwāṭ*, which is a noun (*maṣḍar*) derived from a verb denominative of Lūṭ (Pellat 1983: 776). As a juridical concept, *liwāṭ* means only anal intercourse between men, and the focus on this kind of sexual act is so strong. In juridical terminology, this term is often used as a name for anal intercourse between man and woman as well. Other forms of sexual interactions between men, such as kissing, caressing, fondling, and intercrural intercourse, could be considered objectionable according to Islamic law but were not included in the category of *liwāṭ*.

The term also does not refer to homoerotic love and desire (as the emotions are involuntary). Thus, in the history of Islamic civilisation, it had been possible to express such feelings, e.g., in art or literature, and the theme of homoeroticism was broadly represented in the poetry and cultivated even by highly reputable Islamic scholars (El-Rouaheyeb 2005). Because of the strict definition of *liwāṭ* as anal intercourse, most sexual relations between women were not considered homosexual and thus not punishable because of the lack of penetration. Some scholars considered all these forms of sexual activity as minor sins (*saḡā'ir*), which can become major sins (*kabā'ir*) if committed notoriously or accompany by significant sins such as abusing other people's trust (El-Rouaheyeb 2005).

Islamic law distinguishes between transgression against 'the law of God' (*ḥaqq Allāh*) and misconduct against the 'laws of humans' (*ḥaqq ādamī*) for committing which *ḥadd* punishment is imposed (Rahman 1965: 237–251). All Islamic school of law except the Ḥanafī *madhab* treats *liwāṭ* as a kind of fornication (*zinā*), one of the most abominable sins against *ḥaqq Allāh*. While Islamic scholars debated which of these two – *liwāṭ* or *zinā* – is more horrific, they only focused on the type of penetration (vaginal vs anal), not its homo- or heterosexual character. The gravity of sin and punishment has also been related to sinners' status with active partners and *muḥsan* (those in a legally valid marriage) deserving the highest penalty.

All Islamic schools prescribed severe corporal or capital punishment. Still, as in the case of *zinā*, it is imposed on the transgressor only if four (or two in the Hanafī school) honest and reliable witnesses saw the penetration, or the sinner admitted their sin in public. Islamic law strongly discourages denouncing such transgressions and discourages denounciators with corporal punishment – people who accuse others of committing *liwāṭ* because they saw them kissing, caressing, or fondling other men can be punished by eighty lashes (El-Rouaheyeb 2005). It is connected to the idea of sin's personal and public aspects. Islamic law strongly underlines the need to hide the sinner's vices. Muslims are discouraged from confessing their sins and denouncing others' sins, considering a 'private' sin as a personal issue between God and a believer. Denouncing is justified only when someone's bad deeds are harmful, as stipulated by the Qur'an (4:148), (24:19), (49:12), and several hadiths. Simultaneously, avoiding judgment and not prying into other people does not mean that Muslims can confuse bad and good deeds. They shall rather 'enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency' (3,110).

In the following sections, we present how Polish female converts to Islam reconcile Islamic teachings with accepting the LGBT+ community. In our paper, we have grouped their approaches into three categories: respecting LGBT+ people as an example of worship, unwillingness to judge the LGBT+ community and leaving it to God; and comparing the experience with conversion and coming out as LGBT+. As two of our interviewees are openly supportive of LGBT+ people’s rights as Muslims, we decided to add a sub-section on how they reconcile their Muslim identity and support for LGBT+ people in the specific Polish context.

“Islam Means, Above All, Respect for Other Humans”

The first category comprises active strategies of adapting Islam with acceptance towards LGBT+ people by reinterpreting Islamic texts, values, or history to suit this purpose. The traditional Islamic jurisprudence that opposed homosexuality leaves Muslims who accept LGBT with cognitive dissonance. Polish female converts to Islam use various strategies to reduce this cognitive dissonance. Interestingly, these strategies are based on two fundamentally different perspectives: Islamic mainstream or liberal/progressive.

Anna⁴ presents the mainstream perspective. As she explains:

For me, Islam means, above all, respect for other humans or worshipping God through respect for everything and everyone, so for me... I don’t know... There are no exceptions, regardless of whether it is an animal, whether it is an older person, a gay or lesbian, or my husband. I will respect them, and in this way, I worship God.

Anna does not consider her approach liberal but mainstream. Instead of diving into the complicated relation between Islam and the LGBT+ community, she implements a different perspective that does not refer to LGBT+ or any other group of people. It is an affirmation of every individual God has ever created in this world. Respect for other human beings – regardless of their race, gender, or sexuality – is, for her, an act of worship. Urszula and Barbara can also relate to this point:

There are also opinions of scholars that a homosexual is not subhuman, we are all people, and we should all respect each other, right? [Urszula]

I believe that Islam teaches respect for another human being. It reminds us about it, and then, you know, things happen... [Barbara]

For both of them, Islam is a religion that advocates respect, and that is how they should approach other people. They did not say explicitly that accepting LGBT+ people was an act of worship, but pointed out that as Muslims, they should accept other people.

⁴ The names have been changed. In all cases, Polish names are used, as the vast majority of our respondents use their Polish names, even if they also have Islamic ones.

Another way to reduce cognitive dissonance is to make one of the contradictory elements less contradictory. In the case of the Polish female converts to Islam, this is usually by differentiating between the LGBT+ person as a person and the sexual acts that are condemned by Islamic teachings. This point is brought up by several of our interviewees, including Barbara and Marta. According to Barbara, God has created human beings according to his will, just as he created LGBT+ people, and that is the way they are supposed to be. Marta considers Islam to be more spiritual than consisting of a strict set of rules. It helps her in a way to decrease the cognitive dissonance between the condemnation of homosexuality in Islam treated as a set of rules and Islam as spirituality. Queer Muslims themselves have also used this strategy (Rahman, Valliani 2016: 83). She also stresses that Islam only condemns homosexual acts, not people. It allows her to have gay friends without contradicting her religion.

Both Muslims and Christians have used a similar approach to the LGBT+ community. The story of Sodom and the people of Lot had been reinterpreted to be about other crimes (such as robbery, assault, rape) rather than homosexuality. According to White (2015), the reference to same-sex relationships in the Bible is the invention of the 20th century and resulted from the newly established therapeutic sciences of human sexuality. Similarly, progressive Muslim theologians claim that the story of Lot had a different meaning. For example, it did not refer to all sexual activities but to same-sex anal sex, which was associated with the subordination of the passive actor (Zanghellini 2010: 286), or could be interpreted within a broader moral framework, not a sexual one (Kugle 2010).

The second perspective can be called progressive, although in the Polish language, the word 'liberal' is used more often. The term 'progressive' refers to the search for non-conformist approaches to Islam (Thompson 2020: 127). It means that our respondents have actively engaged with the Islamic doctrine and offered (re)interpretations that prove Islam to be LGBT+-friendly.

One such interpretation came from Urszula. She has a Muslim lesbian friend who heard at a local mosque that LGBT+ people can pray but not in public. She tried to comfort her friend and came up with the following reasoning:

The early caliphs didn't punish homosexuality as homosexuality but as rape, which is logical, because any rape is terrible, but homosexuality as such – not. Even here at the mosque, every imam will tell you that the first Islamic state was the best Islamic state. These four rightly guided caliphs. So, if they had not noticed that homosexuality is a no-no, that only confirms what I have been thinking.

Urszula has actively engaged in Islamic history to develop a more inclusive interpretation of Islam. Her argument is logically structured. The rightly guided caliphs are considered the best caliphs that the Islamic ummah ever had. The caliphate was supposed to be an ideal Islamic state in their time. Since they had never condemned homosexuality, one can conclude that homosexuality should be accepted in Islam. A valuable tool from Islamic law is *ijtihād* – a struggle to understand and one of the ways of reasoning. This practice allows progressive Muslims to analyse Islamic law sources and

apply their rulings to their lives. However, for many traditionalists, *iğtihād* is a tool that Muslim scholars can only use. The practice of *iğtihād* has been widely used in Islamic feminism and can also create a space for LGBT+ Muslims within the Islamic community and following Islamic teachings (Cervantes-Altamirano 2013). New perspectives are open by interpreting not only the story of Lot, revising classical Quranic exegesis concerning the story and rejecting the doubtful hadiths. Some researchers invoke a secular system of values, justifying it by the flexible character of Islamic law and arguing for a “reformation” of Islam within the frame of universal human rights, claiming that “mainstream” Islam requires a reformation (Kugle 2010).

Do I Know How God Will Judge Them?

The second type of approach to LGBT+ people of Polish females converting to Islam is passive. Rather than seeking a way to actively affirm LGBT+ identities, they take a more conservative stance, preferring not to interfere with other people’s deeds or actions. Barbara’s views below illustrate this point.

I don’t stick my nose into anyone’s business or someone’s bed. I will not hold them accountable for their deeds. If Prophet Muhammad tells his daughter: Be aware of God, as I will not stand up for you in Judgement Day – then who am I? Why should I care?

Barbara is unwilling to judge other people morally. She leaves that to God. Her argument reflects the public and private aspects of sin. Unless someone is causing harm, Muslims should not interfere in their actions and leave it to God. If they had sinned, God would only judge them on Judgement Day.

Another two Polish female converts, Zuzanna and Janina, are also unwilling to judge others but does not refer to Islam:

I don’t judge what they do, right or wrong. I believe that they exist. And what they do in their bed, in their house – this is their business (...). If such a person loves another person, and they want to live in one place, marry, or how shall I call it, then why should I care, tell me? Let them have the right. [Zuzanna]

Let them set the mahr, let them set the rules, let them live. There is a right-wing argument that homosexuality is connected to promiscuity. And here we have a wedding! So, you promised fidelity in front of God, so go for it! [Janina]

This approach seems secular and reflects the sentence: ‘live and let live’. Zuzanna and Janina belong to the minority of our respondents who would accept same-sex marriages.

Within the passive approach to LGBT+ people in Islam, there is also an interesting interpretation of sin. Małgorzata believes that sin is universal; that is – everyone is a sinner. It refers both to non-Muslims, and Muslims, LGBT+ and non-LGBT+ people alike. Similarly, Aneta reflects on the universality of sin:

Homosexual intercourse is a sin, but that doesn't mean I can't be friends with such people. I definitely can because as I have other sins on me. I don't know if my sins are better or worse, because I have other, completely different ones.

The concept of sin is complex in Islamic jurisprudence as there are *kabā'ir* – the major sins enumerated in the Qur'an, yet their exact definition is variable and *sağā'ir* – lesser sins. People are not born sinners, unlike in Catholicism, in which the notion of the original sin has set the foundation of theology (Antoniewicz 2012). Sexual acts can be considered as *sağā'ir* or *kabā'ir*. Therefore, it is hard to judge and compare different people's sins – both Muslims and non-Muslims.

It Is Giving a Name to a Part of Myself that Has Always Been There

The third approach to LGBT+ people expressed by Polish female converts to Islam can be described as relational. In this way, they have related their experiences as Polish female converts to Islam to their experiences of LGBT+. As mentioned in the introductory section, the Polish government – by the time the research was conducted – and a significant part of society had taken a hostile stance towards the LGBT+ community. Often, the same actors express negative attitudes towards Islam and Muslims. Both LGBT+ people and Muslims are perceived as a threat and danger to the Polish tradition and the Catholic religion. They are also believed to be proof of the moral decline of Western Europe (Górak-Sosnowska, Pachocka 2019). This unprecedented combination of Islam and LGBT+ people can only be explained through the notion of *antemurale christianitatis* – i.e., the bulwark of Christianity. Polish people have the power to save Europe from Islam and reconstitute the moral order based on the Christian religion and traditional values (Bobako 2017).

The conservative approach of Polish society against LGBT+ people made several of our respondents reflect on whether Poles are more or less tolerant towards LGBT+ than Muslim-majority societies. For Anna, Polish Christians are as homonegative as Muslim-majority societies. Such a generalising approach is rather an indicator of dissatisfaction with what is going on in Poland⁵. Urszula and Janina have different opinions. According to her, Muslim-majority societies condemn LGBT+ people, unlike Polish society. As she explains:

There are many rules on which I may agree, but they are unnecessary for me when it comes to Polish realities. Even if it is about the university, I am in touch with queer persons, and so what – shall I not talk with them only due to their orientation? This is really unthinkable! [Urszula]

⁵ One shall add here that the opponents of the conservative approach to gender or LGBT in Poland often refer in their arguments to Islam and Muslim-majority countries: they do not want a 'Catholic Caliphate' in Poland, a legal system that is based on 'Catho-šarī'a', and they call the ruling party PiSlam (from PiS + Islam). This way Muslims in Poland become unwillingly involved in the ongoing protests. Slogans that were meant to be against the ruling party, work also against them, and lead to their further stigmatisation.

In my Islam, there is no contradiction between respecting and accepting others and... I am aware that in the Quran and other cultures, where Islam is the majority religion, gays' heads are taken off by swords, they're burned alive, and who knows what else, and persecuted, expelled from homes and so on. I am aware of it. But, well, I am living in Europe, I am European, and I believe that there is no contradiction in my Islam. [Janina]

In this case, the comparison seems to have added value for her. Urszula sees herself as a liberal European Muslim and believes that some aspects of Islamic practice were developed in a culturally specific setting of the Middle East. As such, they reflect local realities rather than the Islamic doctrine. Janina distinguishes between her Islam and Islam in Muslim-majority countries. Living in Europe helps her to reconcile her religion with being LGBT+-friendly.

Similarly, Julia considers herself to be more liberal than other Muslims. Julia is one of the two respondents from our sample who emigrated and has lived in the UK ever since. She works in a company with two British Muslim colleagues, one of whom is gay. According to her, the gay Muslim colleague has been met with more acceptance from white Muslims than from other Muslims in the country, and she attributes this to their culture, which is not conducive to gay identity (Jaspal, Cinnirella 2010).

However, the most powerful approaches to LGBT+ use converts' own experiences to relate to their lives. Two of them compared LGBT and Muslims in Poland, as both face discrimination. Since 2015, the Polish government has allowed hate speech directed at specific social groups (women's movements, the LGBT+ community, migrants, Muslims, and People of Colour). As a result, Polish society in general and young people, in particular, have become less vulnerable to hate speech, i.e., they do not perceive hate speech targeting certain minorities as hate speech (Winiewski 2017). Being the target of hate speech sometimes leads the LGBT+ community and Muslims in Poland to stand up for each other. However, as the LGBT+ community is more politically and socially engaged and active, it is that community that usually supports Muslims rather than the other way around. The change of government and the liberalisation of politics in 2023 did not significantly change social attitudes.

The relationship between LGBT+/feminist communities and Muslims is not easy, both in Poland and abroad (Bobako 2012/2013). Both represent norms and values that are easily criticised from the other perspective. LGBT+ and feminist activists often criticise human rights violations in Muslim-majority countries and traditional patriarchal role division. For many Muslims, LGBT+ represents as sin against the laws of nature and getting beyond traditional religion-based social order. Aneta illustrates this relationship between the LGBT+ and Muslim communities in Poland:

We are in such a paradox, as there has been one person in Poland – a politician – who stood up for Muslims, and that was Biedroń. And on the one hand, we feel that he is discriminated against, and we are discriminated against, so we like each other. These hyper-active converts, they run to such... they become living books, they have in their phones a number to some local gay, someone they meet. On the one side, these people protect us. On the other side, there are some opinions that you disagree.

Islam and Muslims became frequent targets of hostility. For many years, Polish Islamophobia was latent, i.e., it existed, but there have been hardly any incidents directed against Muslims. The situation became tense for Muslims in Poland after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, but especially after the 2015 refugee crisis that coincided with the Law and Justice Party's victory. The combination of these internal and external factors has moved the latent Islamophobia into the Polish mainstream narrative. The Polish government not only did not acknowledge the existence of Islamophobia (or intensively downplayed its role) but also used it to gain political capital (Piela, Łukjanowicz 2018: 479). It leaves Polish Muslims with a minimal number of allies who would stand up for them.

Sharing a similar fate as a community vulnerable to discrimination is also expressed by Zdzisława – a Polish female convert to Islam who decided to leave Poland and move to the UK to practice her religion. She referred to her experience in the following words:

It should not be questioned and should not be a matter of any discussion because what does my religion matter, if I drink alcohol or not, or if I am gay, or if I am not gay. This should not matter in daily contact with people.

After embracing Islam and deciding to wear the veil, she had to give up her job in Poland as she was looked down on and discriminated against in the workplace. In the UK, she is free to express her Islamic identity.

Being a minority often has to struggle for acceptance means that many LGBT and Muslims live in a closet or decide to come out. Cuthbertson compares coming out to conversion (Cuthbertson 1996). Barbara reflected on her conversion similarly:

I concluded that I was Muslim, and it is not that I have converted to anything. I just figured that I had taken this path a long time ago, but only now I found a name to call it. In the same manner, gay people often say that they didn't know how to call it: 'I have always been gay, but I didn't know how to call it, and now I know that this is a part of my identity to be homosexual, but I didn't know it exists'. And exactly, this is how I see it. It is giving a name to a part of myself that has always been there.

For Barbara, becoming Muslim was maybe not so much about the obligation to come out as Muslim. It was more about becoming aware of a part of her identity that had always been there. Just as in the case of sexual orientation, which is inborn, she believes that she has always been Muslim. Just as being brought up in mainstream heterosexual society, one usually reflects later on sexual orientation. The same happens if one is brought up in mainstream Catholic society. One becomes a Muslim after having discovered the Islamic part of herself.

Two of our interviewees are Muslim and openly support LGBT+. During the 2019 Equality March in Warsaw, they had formed a small, two-person Islamic block. Janina wore black *hiğāb* and a big rainbow handbag, and her friend had used an LGBT+ flag to wrap her *hiğāb*. Janina and her friend provoked various reactions – from accusations

of ridiculing Islam to the doubt that Muslims can support LGBT+. However, most people were positively surprised to meet them at the march. Janina believes that she can be Muslim and support LGBT. Participation in the Equality March has allowed her to express both parts of her identity. Many other people at the march were dressed in rainbow clothes and showed their support for LGBT+ in different ways.

You can be yourself, which is very important (...). You can walk through the city for a couple of hours, and no one gives you dirty looks [Janina]

Wearing the *hiġāb* is a challenge in Poland due to Muslims’ marginal visibility of Muslims and rising Islamophobia. Showing support for LGBT+ people by wearing rainbow colours has also been proved difficult. There have been several cases of verbal or physical violence against people wearing rainbow symbols in public. Combining a *hiġāb* with a rainbow is a double threat as it can provoke both types of prejudice and violence – against Muslims and LGBT. That is why Janina appreciated the opportunity to wear both during the Equality March.

Conclusions

This article has explored how Polish female converts to Islam approach LGBT. Our respondents used a wide range of strategies to accommodate the acceptance of LGBT within their Islamic beliefs. Some of them used active strategies that aimed at the reinterpretation of Islamic history or doctrine to become LGBT-friendly or at looking at LGBT+ people from a different perspective. Some other respondents used passive strategies. In this case accepting LGBT+ people were simply about living and letting live and leaving the judgment to God. An essential aspect of this strategy was the belief that everyone is a sinner, which resembles the Christian notion of original sin. Finally, there were strategies by which our respondents personally related to LGBT+ people’s experiences. Being discriminated against and, at the same time, being different from the mainstream (in terms of gender, sexual orientation, or religion) gave them the possibility to link their experiences to the LGBT+ community. Our study refers only to attitudes that are more or less affirmative of LGBT+. It does not represent the Polish female community of converts to Islam.

There is a compelling intersection of local context and embraced religion. Islamic jurisprudence is generally homonegative, making any attempts to reconcile Islam with LGBT+ challenging. The local context is even more challenging. In Poland, LGBT+ people have become intensely politicised, and people who fall beyond the heteronormative pattern are often discriminated against. The same had happened to Muslims in Poland, another minority that is particularly vulnerable to hostility. The intersection of the LGBT+ community and Islam in Poland leads to a quadruple exclusion:

1. exclusion of LGBT+ by mainstream Catholicism (in most cases the previous religion of Polish female converts),
2. exclusion of LGBT+ by mainstream Islam,
3. exclusion and discrimination of LGBT+ in Poland,
4. exclusion of Muslims and widespread Islamophobia in Poland.

It has created a powerful context for Polish female converts to Islam to challenge the Islamic discourse and mainstream Polish society. Some Polish converts to Islam can relate their own experiences as Muslims to the experiences of LGBT+ people. It is evident in the case of Zdzisława, who decided to emigrate to the UK because she faced hostility as a Muslim in Poland, and Janina – who actively supports the LGBT+ community. Many others want just to be left alone as “everyone should mind their *jihād*”, as one of our respondents has summarised.

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Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the National Science Centre, Poland under grant 2017/25/B/HS1/00286.

Streszczenie

Będąc w przeważającej mierze państwem katolickim, a zarazem rządzonym w latach 2015–2023 przez pravicową partię Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, Polska przyjęła dość konserwatywne stanowisko wobec osób LGBT+. Homonegatywność weszła do głównego nurtu dyskursu politycznego, a „gender” uznawany jest za niebezpieczną ideologię. Te same uwarunkowania polityczne wzmocniły również negatywne nastawienie do muzułmanów i doprowadziły do wzrostu islamofobii. Celem artykułu jest analiza postaw polskich konwertytek na islam wobec osób LGBT+, a konkretnie postaw przeciwstawiających się homonegatywności. Aby pogodzić swoją religię i akceptację dla osób LGBT+, polskie muzułmanki wdrażają strategie, które łączą krytyczne podejście do szari’atu ze świeckim podejściem do nieingerencji w sprawy innych ludzi. Co więcej, wiele polskich muzułmanek dostrzega podobieństwa między byciem muzułmanką a osobą LGBT+ w Polsce, ponieważ obie role społeczne mają ten sam kontekst wykluczenia i dyskryminacji.

Abstract

Predominantly Catholic and governed in the years 2015–2023 by the populist right Law and Justice Party, Poland is a country that has adopted a conservative stance towards the LGBT+ community. Homonegativity has entered the mainstream political discourse, while the notion of gender is considered a dangerous ideology. This political setting has also strengthened negative attitudes towards Muslims and led to the rise of Islamophobia. Against this context, the article aims to analyse approaches to Islam and LGBT+ issues of Polish females converting to Islam, who strive against homonegativity. To reconcile their religion and acceptance of LGBT+ people, they implement strategies that critically engage with Islamic jurisprudence and secular approaches of not interfering in other people’s matters. Many Polish female converts reflect on similarities between being Muslim and LGBT+ people in Poland, as both share the same context of exclusion and discrimination.

Słowa kluczowe: Polska, konwertycy na islam, LGBT+, homonegatywność, islam

Keywords: Poland, converts to Islam, LGBT+, homonegativity, Islam

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Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska – profesor nadzwyczajny i kierownik Zakładu Bliskiego Wschodu i Azji Centralnej w Szkole Głównej Handlowej w Warszawie. Posiada doktorat z ekonomii (SGH) i habilitację z religioznawstwa (Uniwersytet Jagielloński w Krakowie). Jej badania koncentrują się na społecznościach muzułmańskich w Polsce i Europie. Opublikowała kilka monografii, w tym *Deconstructing Islamophobia in Poland* (Uniwersytet Warszawski 2014), *Managing spoiled identity. The case of Polish female converts to Islam* (współautorka, Brill 2022). Obecnie kieruje projektem CEEMEA „Academic Partnership for the Study of the Middle East and North Africa in Central and Eastern Europe”, finansowanym przez NAWA, oraz polskim zespołem w projekcie DIGITISLAM „Digital Islam across Europe: Understanding Muslims’ Participation in Online Islamic Environments”, finansowanym przez CHANSE – Collaboration of Humanities and Social Sciences in Europe.

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