An alternative perspective: Islam, identity, and gender migration of Sudanese Muslim women in the UK

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Aims

The aim of the article was to argue the case for studying a group of Sudanese women living in West Yorkshire and the impact of this experience on their identity as Muslims, African, and Arabic speakers. The author hoped to challenge the perception of Muslims as a homogenous group, highlighting a group of Muslims differing from the majority of UK Muslims in not originating from south Asia.

Methodology

- The author examines literature on religious and racial identity of Muslim women, and in relation to gender and migration. She also provides a historical account of the experiences and culture of Sudanese women.
- The paper argues the case for undertaking research on Sudanese Muslim women in West Yorkshire, rather than reporting on any such research.

Key issues

- The author argues that studies of Muslim women in the West focus on women of south Asian origin and fail to recognise the diversity of Islam and women's identity and experiences within it. She states that Sudanese women in West Yorkshire are an unresearched group, and that although they share characteristics with other groups which have been researched such as Muslim women and African women, it would be wrong to situate them in one of these broad categories and therefore ignore specific aspects of their identity. The author suggests that Sudanese women's experiences of Islam may be different from those of south Asian Muslim women, with Sudanese women for example having greater opportunities for accessing mosques. As an example of the author's perceived contrast between Sudanese women's practice of Islam and that of the UK Muslim majority, she reports a case of Sudanese women being criticised by a British Muslim official for celebrating Christmas.

- The article looks at literature on gender and migration, for example highlighting that in some European countries the immigration laws can reinforce traditional concepts of gender by assuming that men are the primary earners and heads of households.
- The author reports that Sudanese women in Leeds made repeated attempts to form a women's group but have failed to obtain funding and support for this.

Conclusion

The author concludes that in general studies of Muslims in the UK focus on Asian Muslims and largely ignore African Muslims. More specifically, Muslim Sudanese women in the UK are an under-researched ethnic community, possibly due to their relatively small number and their recent migration to the UK.

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