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Islamic Ethical Reflections on Sant Dionís Day: Love, Culture, and Muslim Family Resilience in Spain

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ABSTRACT

Background: Muslim families living in multicultural societies often face challenges in balancing their religious values with local cultural traditions. Sant Dionís Day, celebrated annually in Valencia, Spain, is a cultural event symbolizing love and affection through gift-giving. This raises important questions about how Muslim families can ethically engage with such celebrations while maintaining Islamic family values.

Methods: This qualitative study employs a comparative normative approach, analyzing Sant Dionís Day's cultural elements alongside Islamic ethical principles (akhlaq) and family law (fiqh al-usrah). Literature review and normative analysis were used to assess the compatibility of the celebration's practices with Islamic teachings on love, modesty, and family resilience.

Results: The findings indicate that Sant Dionís Day does not inherently violate Islamic values. However, Muslim engagement with this tradition requires awareness and adherence to Islamic ethical boundaries, ensuring that expressions of affection remain within the framework of faith, modesty, and moral conduct.

Discussion: Navigating cultural traditions like Sant Dionís Day presents both opportunities and challenges for Muslim families in Spain and similar Western contexts. Critical discernment and religious education are necessary to uphold Muslim identity and strengthen family resilience while fostering cultural integration.

Conclusion: Islamic ethics offers a balanced framework for Muslim families to interact with non-Islamic cultural traditions. Love and affection can be expressed in ways that respect both cultural diversity and Islamic norms, supporting resilient and harmonious Muslim families in pluralistic societies.

Novelty: This study provides a fresh perspective on the ethical engagement of Muslim families with Western cultural celebrations, highlighting the importance of cultural literacy and religious adherence in promoting social cohesion and family resilience.

Keywords: Islamic Ethics, Saint Dionysus, Family Resilience, Spain, Shariah

INTRODUCTION

In today's increasingly multicultural societies, Muslim families living as minorities face ongoing challenges in navigating cultural traditions that originate outside of Islamic norms. In Spain, particularly in the Valencian region, Sant Dionís Day is celebrated annually on October 9 as a symbol of regional pride, romantic affection, and historical memory. Known as the

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"Valencian Valentine's Day," this celebration features the gifting of *mocaorà*—colorful marzipan sweets wrapped in handkerchiefs—as expressions of love and appreciation between couples (Euroace, 2024). Though rooted in local history and identity, Sant Dionís has evolved into a cultural event centered on romantic symbolism and public displays of affection.

While such traditions may appear secular and benign, they raise important ethical questions for Muslim families, especially regarding the boundaries of participation in non-Islamic celebrations. Islamic ethics (akhlaq) and family jurisprudence (fiqh al-usrah) emphasize the sanctity of modesty, lawful affection, and moral conduct within the family (Ayubi, 2020; Al Jahsh, 2024). The Qur'an teaches that affection and mercy are signs of divine wisdom within marital relationships—"And among His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquility in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy" (Qur'an 30:21, as cited in Ghaly & al-Khatib, 2023)—yet it also sets clear parameters for emotional expression in public and private spheres. Thus, the Muslim response to local cultural practices must consider not only social harmony but also religious integrity (Abdillah, Fadli, & Murad, 2024).

This study explores Sant Dionís Day as a cultural, not religious, tradition, and examines its implications for Muslim family life in Spain. Using a normative Islamic ethical framework, it investigates how Muslim families can respond to such celebrations in ways that maintain faith-based family values, cultural awareness, and moral resilience. The research aims to contribute to broader discussions on how Muslim minorities engage ethically with Western cultural norms, especially in the context of diasporic identity, intergenerational dynamics, and the pursuit of family cohesion in pluralistic environments (Khan & Wahid, 2023; Yusuf & Mahmud, 2022).

Ultimately, this study seeks to assess whether limited and value-conscious participation in local customs such as Sant Dionís can support, rather than undermine, the goals of Islamic family ethics and the maqāṣid al-sharī'ah, particularly the preservation of religion (hifz al-dīn), lineage (hifz al-nasab), and family unity (hifz al-'usrah) (Ibrahim, 2019; Zarkasyi & Fauzi, 2021). By doing so, it contributes to a more nuanced understanding of cultural integration and ethical discernment among Muslim families in Western societies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between cultural identity, social integration, and religious ethics has been a central focus in interdisciplinary studies on migration, minority communities, and Islamic family values. Previous research has explored how ethnic and religious minorities interact with dominant cultural frameworks and how these interactions influence family life, identity preservation, and social participation. This literature review discusses key studies relevant to the present research, focusing on Muslim identity negotiation, cultural participation, and Islamic ethical values in multicultural societies.

Juan Iglesias, in his study titled *Ethnic Closure and Immigrant Residential Segregation in Spanish Working-Class Neighbourhoods*, provides insight into how immigrant communities in Spain, particularly Muslims, often experience spatial and social segregation (Iglesias et al.,

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2024). This segregation can lead to the development of closed ethnic enclaves, which serve as both a means of cultural preservation and a barrier to intercultural dialogue. Iglesias highlights the challenges Muslim families face in accessing shared civic and cultural spaces. His findings are pertinent to this study, as they suggest that cultural celebrations such as Sant Dionís can either reinforce exclusion or become platforms for respectful participation and identity negotiation (Haggart and Keller, 2021).

Lorraine Brown's study, *The Female Tourist Experience in Egypt as an Islamic Destination*, examines the intersection of Islamic values and cultural expectations through the lens of tourism (Brown and Osman, 2017). Although her research focuses on the tourist experience in a Muslim-majority country, it reveals important insights into how Islamic norms are interpreted and presented in public life. The study's relevance lies in its demonstration that Islamic ethics are adaptable and context-sensitive, offering a flexible framework for interpreting love, respect, and modesty within various cultural settings—an idea that can inform how Muslim families approach non-Islamic cultural celebrations abroad (Hamzah et al., 2024).

Anneke Newman, in her research on *The Influence of Migration on the Educational Aspirations of Young Men in Northern Senegal*, explores the social impact of transnational migration on youth identity and familial expectations (Newman, 2019). While the focus is on education, the study provides a broader perspective on how external cultural influences reshape internal family dynamics and values. In the context of this paper, Newman's research supports the notion that cultural participation—such as engagement in local festivals—can influence young Muslims' perceptions of family, tradition, and religious observance, thereby affecting long-term resilience and identity formation.

Katrina Daly Thompson, in *Queering Language Socialization: Fostering Inclusive Muslim Interpretations through Talk-in-Interaction*, investigates how everyday communication within Muslim communities is used to construct alternative, inclusive interpretations of Islam. Her work emphasizes the importance of language and discourse in shaping how Muslims interact with both religious norms and broader cultural influences (Thompson, 2020). Thompson's findings are critical in framing how Muslim families in multicultural societies might use culturally specific events, such as Sant Dionís, as teaching moments to discuss Islamic ethics and boundaries in a constructive and dialogical manner.

Lastly, Hisam Ahyani, in his article *Birrul Walidain in Political Preferences: Harmonizing Family Values and Employment Law in Indonesia*, emphasizes the integration of Islamic family principles—such as filial piety—within modern legal and political systems. His work illustrates the compatibility of Shariah values with broader societal frameworks when approached thoughtfully (H. Ahyani et al., 2024c). This idea aligns closely with the present study's objective of analyzing how cultural celebrations in non-Muslim contexts can be ethically assessed and potentially harmonized with Islamic family ethics to promote social cohesion without compromising religious values.

In summary, the reviewed literature provides a multi-dimensional understanding of how Muslim individuals and families interact with surrounding cultures, particularly in the context of migration and minority status. These studies collectively support the argument that cultural celebrations like Sant Dionís can be understood and navigated through an Islamic ethical lens—

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one that promotes family resilience, intercultural dialogue, and the preservation of core religious values.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative methodology to explore the ethical implications of Muslim family engagement with the Sant Dionís celebration in Valencia, Spain. Conducted between October 2 and October 29, 2024, the research specifically investigates how Muslim families residing in a multicultural European society interact with local traditions while maintaining their Islamic ethical and familial commitments.

The research design integrates a comparative normative approach grounded in Islamic family jurisprudence (fiqh al-usrah) and the broader framework of maqāṣid al-sharī'ah, which emphasizes the preservation of religion (hifz al-dīn), lineage (hifz al-nasab), intellect (hifz al-'aql), and family (hifz al-usrah). This framework is appropriate for assessing how non-Islamic cultural practices may be reconciled—or not—with Islamic ethical boundaries, particularly in pluralistic social environments (Rahman et al., 2024a; Zarkasyi & Fauzi, 2021).

To build a conceptual foundation, an extensive literature review was conducted. The review examined scholarship on Muslim minority life in Europe (Ahyani et al., 2022), Islamic ethics in secular societies (Rahman, 2023), and the effects of migration and cultural adaptation on religious identity and youth development (Ahyani et al., 2024; Rahman et al., 2024b). Studies on governance, Muslim discourse in Spain, and the harmonization of Shariah with Western socio-political contexts also informed the theoretical underpinnings of this study (H. Ahyani et al., 2024a, 2024b, 2024c).

The case study method was chosen to focus on the Sant Dionís celebration as a unique cultural event. Data were sourced from official city event documentation, local media coverage, and public cultural programming by the municipality of Valencia. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven Muslim families living in Valencia, selected purposively to ensure diversity in age, occupation, length of residence, and religious practice. Interview questions explored participants' views on cultural participation, religious obligations, intergenerational values, and the ethical considerations that shape their decisions regarding Sant Dionís.

Interview responses were analyzed using thematic analysis, guided by the maqāṣid framework. Themes were coded and categorized using NVivo software, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns—such as the ethical meaning of gift-giving, perceptions of assimilation versus preservation, and children's exposure to hybrid cultural settings.

While this research focuses on a specific locale and event, it acknowledges its contextual limitations. The findings may not fully represent the broader Muslim experience across Spain or Europe. However, the study offers important insights into how cultural adaptation can be approached through an Islamic ethical lens, thus contributing to discussions on Muslim resilience, integration, and identity maintenance in Western societies (Khan & Wahid, 2023; Yusuf & Mahmud, 2022).

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RESULTS

The findings of this study reveal diverse perspectives and practices among Muslim families in Valencia regarding the Sant Dionís celebration. Interviews conducted from October 2 to 29, 2024, show that while most participants recognized the cultural importance of the festival within Valencian society, their levels of participation varied significantly, shaped by nuanced interpretations of Islamic ethical guidelines—especially regarding public displays of affection, symbolic romantic gestures, and involvement in non-Islamic rituals. This indicates a complex ethical negotiation rather than a simple acceptance or rejection of the celebration.

Approximately 60% of respondents opted not to participate directly in the festivities. Their primary motivation was the desire to preserve religious integrity and avoid any actions that might be perceived as religious imitation (*tashabbuh*) of non-Islamic traditions. For these families, Sant Dionís was viewed predominantly as a secular romantic celebration rooted in Western cultural norms rather than a neutral civic event. Nonetheless, many allowed their children limited exposure through school activities or public parades, considering these experiences educational rather than theological compromises (Abdullah, 2018; Rahman et al., 2024b).

Interestingly, among non-participants, there was a shared concern that total isolation from local culture might alienate children from their social environment, creating dissonance between Islamic values and lived realities. These families often used the occasion to discuss Islamic concepts of love (*mawaddah*), mercy (*rahmah*), and modesty (*haya'*), contrasting these with the secular aspects of the festival. This approach helped establish ethical boundaries while maintaining social engagement (Burhanuddin, 2023).

About 30% of participants engaged selectively in the festival by attending public concerts, visiting cultural exhibitions, or purchasing sweets associated with Sant Dionís. These activities were perceived as culturally permissible and distinct from religious compromise. Decisions in this group were often guided by local imams or community scholars who emphasized the importance of *niyyah* (intention) and context when evaluating participation (Azhari et al., 2024). These families practiced a form of *fiqh al-waqi* (jurisprudence of reality), balancing integration with adherence to Islamic values.

A smaller group, roughly 10%, reported full participation in the festival. Mostly consisting of second- or third-generation immigrants and interfaith families, these respondents viewed Sant Dionís as a cultural rather than religious event. Their involvement included exchanging gifts, attending fireworks, and wearing traditional Valencian costumes. They framed such participation as an expression of civic responsibility and intercultural harmony, asserting that engagement in local customs need not conflict with Islamic ethics (Abdelhadi, 2019; H. Ahyani et al., 2024b).

This group emphasized educating children to embrace cultural diversity confidently, fostering belonging and reducing identity conflict. They highlighted that respectful participation provided opportunities to embody Islamic values like generosity and community bonding in pluralistic settings.

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Across all levels of engagement, respondents reported that Sant Dionís served as a catalyst for intergenerational dialogue about cultural boundaries, Islamic ethics, and identity negotiation. Parents and children used the festival as a moment to openly discuss the meaning of Islamic values within the multicultural context of Spain. Notably, younger family members, often born in Spain, tended to view the festival more favorably and as an integral part of their social life, contributing to mutual trust and emotional closeness within families.

In summary, these results demonstrate that Muslim families in Valencia actively negotiate their participation in local cultural traditions through an ethical Islamic framework. Their varied responses reflect a dynamic balancing act between religious fidelity, family resilience, and social integration in multicultural environments.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that Sant Dionís functions as more than a regional festivity in Valencia; it serves as a significant site for ethical negotiation among Muslim families living in a pluralistic European context. This negotiation, framed within the maqāṣid al-sharī'ah, suggests that selective cultural participation can support essential Islamic objectives, such as the preservation of family integrity (*hifz al-usrah*), community well-being (*hifz al-nafs*), and sound ethical reasoning (*hifz al-'aql*) (Abdussalam, 2021).

Selective engagement—allowing children to observe festivities or enjoy sweets without partaking in symbolic romantic acts—demonstrates intentionality grounded in Islamic ethics. Rather than religious compromise, this reflects *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) that adapts tradition to new cultural realities. Many families transformed Sant Dionís into an opportunity for ethical education, discussing Islamic values such as *mawaddah* (affection), *rahmah* (mercy), and *haya* '(modesty), thus turning a secular cultural event into a moment for religious reinforcement rather than dilution (Ardi et al., 2020; Santoso et al., 2022; Fathorrahman et al., 2024; Setyawan et al., 2024).

This approach aligns with Thompson's (2020) concept of "discursive reinterpretation," which encourages viewing engagement with non-Muslim cultures not as assimilation or rejection but as dynamic dialogue informed by lived religious experience. The generational differences observed—where younger Muslims, especially those born in Spain, embraced more cultural inclusion while maintaining Islamic principles—illustrate a form of ethical hybridity responding flexibly to multicultural integration (Mutakin et al., 2021).

Conversely, older generations showed caution shaped by experiences of marginalization and a protective stance toward religious identity. Nonetheless, they accepted limited cultural exposure framed within Islamic educational goals. This reflects broader scholarly consensus on how religious minorities renegotiate identity through complex cultural adaptation processes (Ahyani, 2024). The families in this study exemplify this harmonization of Islamic family values with contemporary societal governance, mediated through ethical reasoning and dialogue.

Central to this harmonization is the principle of *niyyah* (intention). Participants emphasized that their involvement with Sant Dionís focused on civic participation and social cohesion rather than Western romantic celebration. This underlines *niyyah* as a critical evaluative lens

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within the maqāṣid framework. Furthermore, the festival fostered intergenerational communication, helping parents and children discuss identity, belonging, and values—a key aspect of dialogical parenting in diaspora contexts (Adnan et al., 2024).

From a *ḥifz al-usrah* perspective, such family dialogues are vital in reinforcing emotional bonds and transmitting ethical frameworks that help children navigate their environment through an Islamic worldview. Thus, culture can strengthen rather than divide families. However, concerns remain about potential erosion of religious boundaries without strong Islamic education and community support, highlighting the need for religious literacy to guard against unconscious assimilation.

Iglesias (2024) warns that unchecked cultural integration may risk ethnic and religious dilution, particularly in marginalized communities. This study's findings partially confirm this risk but also show that critical ethical engagement fosters resilience rather than withdrawal. Families adopt a balanced approach, distinguishing between culturally compatible practices and those conflicting with Islamic ethics, reflecting *fiqh al-waqi* or context-based jurisprudence (Ahyani & Mutmainah, 2021).

Sant Dionís thus becomes a space where cultural engagement boundaries are actively negotiated with family, religious authorities, and lived experience, promoting a dynamic and context-sensitive application of Islamic law suited to diaspora life. The notion of public visibility is also important; families saw their participation as positive representation of Muslims within Valencia's civic fabric, aligning with the Qur'anic principle of *ta'āruf* (mutual recognition) (Qur'an 49:13). Engaging with culture in ethically grounded ways helps build inclusive societies that uphold social stability (*hifz al-nafs*).

Nonetheless, it is imperative that participation does not normalize practices contrary to Islamic teachings. Thus, guidance from community leaders is crucial to maintain ethical and intentional engagement. Many families reported that children exposed to Sant Dionís alongside Islamic teachings developed confidence in their dual identities, indicating that inclusive upbringing fosters balanced development and prevents identity crises.

In sum, cultural participation filtered through maqāṣid al-sharī'ah principles strengthens rather than threatens Muslim identity. Families use such engagement to teach, reflect, and reaffirm Islamic values while promoting cohesion and inclusion in multicultural contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the celebration of Sant Dionís in Valencia, Spain, through the framework of Islamic ethics and its implications for Muslim family resilience within a multicultural society. Utilizing qualitative data from interviews and case analysis alongside Islamic legal principles, particularly the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, the research demonstrates that cultural participation, when undertaken with ethical mindfulness and educational intent, need not conflict with Islamic values.

Findings show that Muslim families in Valencia adopt varied approaches towards local traditions such as Sant Dionís. While some families abstain entirely to avoid *tashabbuh*

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(imitation of non-Islamic practices), others engage selectively or symbolically, leveraging the event as a means to impart Islamic virtues such as compassion, respect, and moderation. This nuanced ethical negotiation exemplifies Muslim communities' capacity to adapt and thrive in pluralistic environments without compromising religious integrity.

Moreover, public cultural events, when filtered through Islamic ethical reasoning, can function as important sites for moral reflection and intergenerational dialogue. Rather than weakening family cohesion, such participation—guided by Islamic principles—may strengthen family bonds and foster social inclusion. The application of $maq\bar{a}sid$ al- $shar\bar{i}$ 'ah in this context ensures the preservation and active reinforcement of Islam's core objectives: safeguarding faith (hifz al- $d\bar{i}n$), family (hifz al-usrah), intellect (hifz al-'aql), and community well-being (hifz al-nafs).

In conclusion, Sant Dionís transcends being a mere cultural challenge; it offers Muslim families a valuable opportunity to cultivate resilience and ethical clarity amidst social diversity. This study underscores that Islamic ethical frameworks not only coexist with multicultural living but are essential for guiding Muslim families through complex social realities with confidence and integrity.

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