

Text 3: Muslims Report Rising Discrimination at Work

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Published: September 23, 2010

At a time of growing tensions involving Muslims in the United States, a record number of Muslim workers are complaining of employment discrimination, from co-workers calling them “terrorist” or “Osama” to employers barring them from wearing head scarves or taking prayer breaks.

Such complaints were increasing even before frictions erupted over the planned Islamic center in Lower Manhattan, with Muslim workers filing a record 803 such claims in the year ended Sept. 30, 2009. That was up 20 percent from the previous year and up nearly 60 percent from 2005, according to federal data.

The number of complaints filed since then will not be announced until January, but Islamic groups say they have received a surge in complaints recently, suggesting that 2010’s figure will set another record.

The federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has found enough merit in some of the complaints that it has filed several prominent lawsuits on behalf of Muslim workers.

Last month, the commission sued JBS Swift, a meatpacking company, on behalf of 160 Somali immigrants, saying supervisors and workers had cursed them for being Muslim; thrown blood, meat and bones at them; and interrupted their prayer breaks.

On Sept. 1, the commission filed a case against Abercrombie & Fitch, the fashionable clothing retailer, accusing it of discrimination for refusing to hire an 18-year-old Muslim because she was wearing a head scarf.

And in June, the agency sued a Four Points by Sheraton hotel in Phoenix, asserting that its management had illegally permitted a hostile work environment in which workers called an Iraqi immigrant a “camel jockey,” mocked him with Arab ululations and taunted him over news items about captured terrorists. (The hotel’s manager said many of the claims were untrue.)

“There’s a level of hatred and animosity that is shocking,” said Mary Jo O’Neill, regional attorney of the E.E.O.C.’s Phoenix office. “I’ve been doing this for 31 years, and I’ve never seen such antipathy toward Muslim workers.”

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Although Muslims make up less than 2 percent of the United States population, they accounted for about one-quarter of the 3,386 religious discrimination claims filed with the E.E.O.C. last year. Complaints filed by Jews rose slightly in fiscal 2009, while complaints filed by Catholics, Protestants, Sikhs and Seventh-day Adventists declined. Claims of race, sex and age discrimination also fell.

The rising number of complaints by Muslims, which exceeds even the amount filed in the year after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, comes as tensions rise between Muslim Americans and those of other faiths.

Polls have shown that many Americans feel a growing wariness toward Muslims after the 9/11 attacks and after years of fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. Mosques and Islamic community centers in the United States — most prominently one proposed near ground zero in Manhattan — have faced substantial opposition. And a Florida pastor received national attention this month for threatening to burn the Koran on Sept. 11.

“We can go back in history and find other times when there were hot emotional and political tensions over religion,” said Michael J. Zimmer, co-author of several books on employment discrimination and a law professor at Loyola University in Chicago. “Right now, there is a lot of heat as to the Muslims.”

Mohammad Kaleemuddin, a Pakistani immigrant who drove trucks for the American war effort in Iraq for three years, said that while he was working for a construction company in Houston, his supervisor and several co-workers called him “Osama,” “al Qaeda,” “Taliban,” and “terrorist.”

“It was very rough,” said Mr. Kaleemuddin, who was fired after protesting to management about the ethnic slurs. “It brought a bit of terror in my chest. I’d wonder, ‘Why are they doing this? I’ve always been nice to them.’ ”

After he filed a complaint, the E.E.O.C. sued the company he worked for, Pace Services. The company agreed last April to pay him \$61,250 to settle the case.

Experts on religion and employment discrimination say many factors are behind this surge in discrimination claims.

“In America right now, there are intense concerns about many issues — immigration, the faltering economy, the interminable wars” and the erroneous belief, held by many Americans,

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that the first nonwhite president is Muslim, said Akbar Ahmed, a professor of Islamic studies at American University.

“In all of these, there’s one link, Islam. Islam is the lightning rod. Whenever there is a great distrust or antipathy, it spills beyond religion into public life,” the professor said.

Professor Ahmed said that Muslims in the United States were generally reluctant to stick their necks out and complain about discrimination, partly in the belief that attitudes toward them will gradually improve. But he said that growing intolerance has prompted more Muslims to stand up for their rights and file E.E.O.C. complaints.

Workers have complained of discrimination even in regions known for their diversity.

Halla Banafa filed a claim with the commission after she was turned down at age 18 for a job stocking merchandise at an Abercrombie Kids store in Milpitas, Calif., in Silicon Valley. According to the E.E.O.C., the manager made a note of “not Abercrombie look” on the interview form.

“I never imagined anyone in the Bay Area would reject me because of my head scarf,” Ms. Banafa said.

Federal law requires employers to accommodate head scarves, also called hijabs, as well as prayer breaks and other practices based on sincere religious beliefs unless doing so would impose an undue hardship on the employer.

“Abercrombie just decided they’re not going to comply with the law requiring religious accommodation,” said William R. Tamayo, regional attorney of the commission’s San Francisco office. “Their intolerance is off the charts.” Last year, the commission also sued Abercrombie for refusing to hire a 17-year-old wearing a hijab at a store in Tulsa, Okla.

Ronald A. Robins Jr., Abercrombie’s general counsel, said the company disputed both claims, adding that the retailer “makes every reasonable attempt to accommodate the religious practices of associates and applicants, including, when appropriate, allowing associates to wear a hijab.”

In 2004, Abercrombie agreed to pay \$40 million to settle an E.E.O.C. lawsuit charging it with racial bias against Asian, black and Hispanic employees, many of whom said they had been steered to low-visibility, back-of-the-store jobs.

At Swift, the meatpacker, the charge of discrimination dates back to 2008, when Somali workers complained that the restroom had profanity-laced anti-Muslim graffiti, that their prayer breaks

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were often interrupted and that the company would not move their meal breaks to right after sundown during the month of Ramadan, when Muslims fast during the day. After Muslim employees staged a walkout, the company fired all the protesters, the commission said.

Chandler Keys, a Swift spokesman, declined to discuss the lawsuit, but said that since 2008, the company has had no similar incidents. “We’ve worked closely and diligently with the East African community and other groups to avoid a recurrence of such problems,” he said.

Sometimes sharp disputes arise over whether employers have done enough to accommodate Muslim employees.

Imane Boudlal, a 26-year-old from Casablanca, Morocco, had worked for two years as a hostess at the Storytellers Cafe at Disneyland in Anaheim, Calif., when she decided she would begin wearing her hijab at work during Ramadan last month. Ms. Boudlal said her supervisors told her that if she insisted on wearing the scarf, she could work either in back or at a telephone job. She refused and has not worked while the dispute continues.

Disney officials said her head scarf clashed with the restaurant’s early-1900s theme, and they proposed a period hat with some scarf that would fall over her ears. Ms. Boudlal rejected that as un-Muslim. “They wanted to hide the fact that I looked Muslim,” she said.

Michael Griffin, a Disney spokesman, said the company’s “cast members” agree to comply with its appearance guidelines. “When cast members request exceptions to our policies for religious reasons, we strive to make accommodations,” he said, adding that Disney has accommodated more than 200 such requests since 2007.

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Clauses

Clause ID	Conjunction	Clause	Type of Process
1.		At a time of growing tensions involving Muslims in the United States, a record number of Muslim workers are complaining of employment discrimination, from co-workers calling them “terrorist” or “Osama” to employers barring them from wearing head scarves or taking prayer breaks.	Verbal
2.	[from	co-workers calling them “terrorist” or “Osama”]	Verbal
3.	[to	employers barring them from wearing head scarves or taking prayer breaks.]	Material
4.		[from wearing head scarves]	Material
5.	[or	taking prayer breaks]	Material
6.		On Sept. 1, the commission filed a case against Abercrombie & Fitch, the fashionable clothing retailer,	Material
7.		accusing it of discrimination for refusing to hire an 18-year-old Muslim	Verbal
8.	for	refusing to hire an 18-year-old Muslim because she was wearing a head scarf	Verbal
9.		[to hire an 18-year-old Muslim]	Material
10.	because	she was wearing a head scarf.	Material
11.		Workers have complained of discrimination even in regions known for their diversity.	Verbal
12.		Halla Banafa filed a claim with the commission after she was turned down at age 18 for a job stocking merchandise at an Abercrombie Kids store in Milpitas, Calif., in Silicon Valey.	Material
13.	after	she was turned down at age 18 for a job stocking merchandise at an Abercrombie Kids store in Milpitas, Calif., in Silicon Valey.	Verbal
14.		According to the E.E.O.C., the manager made a note of “not Abercrombie look” on the interview form.	Material
15.		“I never imagined anyone in the Bay Area would reject me because of my head scarf,” Ms. Banafa said .	Verbal
16.		[I never imagined anyone in the Bay Area would reject me because of my head scarf]	Mental
17.		[anyone in the Bay Area would reject me because	Verbal

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		of my head scarf]	
18.		Federal law requires employers to accomodate head scarves, also called hijabs, as well as prayer breaks and other practices based on sincere religious beliefs	Verbal
19.		[to acomodate head scarves, also called hijabs, as well as prayer breaks and other practices based on sincere religious beliefs]	Material
20.	Unless	doing so would impose an undue hardship on the employer	Material
21.		Last year, the commission also sued Abercrombie for refusing to hire a 17-year-old wearing a hijab at a store in Tulsa, Okla.	Verbal
22.	[for	refusing to hire a 17-year-old wearing a hijab at a store in Tulsa, Okla	Verbal
23.		[to hire a 17-year-old wearing a hijab at a store in Tulsa, Okla]	Material
24.		[a 17-year-old wearing a hijab]	Material
25.		Imane Boudlal, a 26-year-old from Casablanca, Morocco, had worked for two years as a hostess at the Storytellers Cafe at <u>Disneyland</u> in Anaheim, Calif., when she decided she would begin wearing her hijab at work during Ramadan last month	Material
26.	[when	she decided she would begin wearing her hijab at work during Ramadan last month]	Mental
27.		[she would begin wearing her hijab at work during Ramadan last month]	Material
28		Ms. Boudlal said her supervisors told her that if she insisted on wearing the scarf, she could work either in back or at a telephone job.	Verbal
29.		[her supervisors told her that if she insisted on wearing the scarf, she could work either in back or at a telephone job.	Verbal
30.	[if	she insisted on wearing the scarf]	Verbal

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31		on wearing the scarf	Material
32.		[she could work either in back or at a telephone job]	Material
33.		She refused	Verbal
34.	and	has not worked while the dispute continues	Material
35.		<u>Disney</u> officials said her head scarf clashed with the restaurant's early-1900s theme	Verbal
36.		[her head scarf clashed with the restaurant's early-1900s theme]	Relational id
37.	and	they proposed a period hat with some scarf that would fall over her ears]	Verbal
38.	[that	would fall over her ears]	Material
39.		Ms. Boudal rejected that as un-Muslim.	Verbal
40.		"They wanted to hide the fact that I looked Muslim." she said .	Verbal
41.		[They wanted to hide the fact that I looked Muslim]	Mental
42		[to hide the fact that I looked Muslim]	Material
43.	[that	I looked Muslim]	Relational att

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Material clause								
Clause ID	Conj.	Actor	Process	Goal	Scope/Range	Recipient	Client	Circumstance
3.	to	employers	barring	them				from wearing head scarves or taking prayer breaks (matter)
4.	from		wearing	head scarves				
5.	or		taking		prayer breaks			
6.		The commission	filed	a case				On Sept. 1, (time) against Abercrombie & Fitch, the fashionable clothing retailer (benefit)
9.			to hire	an 18-year-old Muslim				
10.	because	She	was wearing	a head scarf				
12.		Halla Banafa	filed	a claim				with the commission (accompaniment), after she was turned down at age 18 for a job stocking merchandise at an Abercrombie Kids store in Milpitas, Calif., in Silicon Valey.(place)
14.		the manager	made	a note of “not Abercrombie look”				According to the E.E.O.C, on the interview form (angle, source)
19.			to accommodate	head scarves, also called hijab,				as well as prayer breaks and other practices based on sincere religious beliefs (accompaniment, additive)
20.	Unless	doing so (accomodating)	would impose	an undue hardship on the employer				
23.			to hire	a 17-year-old Muslim wearing a				at a store in Tulsa, Okla (place)

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				hijab				
24.		a 17-year-old	wearing	a hijab				
25.		Imane Boudal, a 26-year-old from Casablanca, Morocco	had worked					for two years (duration) as a hostess (role) at the Storytellers Cafe at Disneyland in Anaheim, Calif (place) when she decided she would begin wearing her hijab at work during Ramadan last month (time)
27.		She	would begin wearing	her hijab				at work (place) during Ramadhan last month (duration)
31.			on wearing	the scarf				
32.		she	could work					either in back or at a telephone job (place)
34.	and		has not worked					while the dispute continues (duration)
38.	that		would fall					over her ears (place)
42.			to hide	the fact that I looked Muslim				

Mental process					
Clause ID	Conj.	Senser.	Process.	Phenomenon.	Circumstance.
16.		I	never imagined	anyone in the Bay Area would reject me	because of my headscarf (cause: reason)
26.	when	she	decided	she would begin wearing her hijab	at work (place) during Ramadan (duration) last month (time)
41.		They	wanted	to hide the fact that I looked Muslim	

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Verbal clause									
Clause ID	Conjunction	Sayer	Process	Quoted	Reported	Verbiage	Target	Receiver	Circumstance
1.		a record number of Muslim workers	are complaining			of employment discrimination, from co-workers calling them “terrorist” or “Osama” to employers barring them from wearing head scarves or taking prayer breaks			At a time of growing tensions (time) involving Muslims in the United States (place)
2.	from	co-workers	calling			“terrorist” or “obama”	them		
7.			accusing			of discrimination	it (the company)		for refusing to hire an 18-year-old Muslim (cause: reason)
8.	for		refusing		to hire an 18-year-old Muslim				because she was wearing a head scarf (cause: reason)
11.		Workers	have complained			of discrimination			even in regions known for their diversity (place)
13.	after		was turned down					she	at age 18 for a job stocking merchandise at an Abercrombie Kids store in Milpitas, Calif., in Silicon Valey. (place)
15.		Ms. Banafa	said	“I never imagined					

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				anyone in the Bay Area would reject me because of my head scarf,”					
17		[anyone in the Bau Area	would reject					me	because of my head scarf (cause:reason)
18.		Federal law	requires			to accommodate head scarves, also called hijabs, as well as prayer breaks and other practices based on sincere religious beliefs		employers	
21.		the commission	also sued				Abercrombie		Last year,(time) for refusing to hire a 17-year-old wearing a hijab (cause: reason) at a store in Tulsa, Okla. (place)
22.	for		refusing		to hire a 17-year-old wearing a				at a store in Tulsa, Okla (place)

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					hijab				
28.		Ms. Boudlal	said		her supervisors told her that if she insisted on wearing the scarf, she could work either in back or at a telephone job.				
29.		her supervisors	told		that if she insisted on wearing the scarf, she could work either in back or at a telephone job.			her	
30		She	insisted			on wearing the scarf			
33.		She	refused						
35.		Disney officials	said		her head scarf clashed with the restaurant's early-1900s theme				
37.		They	proposed			a period hat with some scarf that would fall over her ears			
39.		Ms. Boudal	rejected		as un-muslim	that			

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40.		She	said	“They wanted to hide the fact that I looked Muslim.”					
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Relational Attributive Process							
Clause ID	Conjunction	Carrier	Process	Atribute	Attributor	Beneficiary	Circumstance
43.	that	I	looked	Muslim			

Relational Identifying process						
Clause ID	Conjunction	Identified	Process	Identifier	Assigner	Circumstance
36.		Her head scarf	clashed			with the restaurant’s early-1900s theme (accompaniment: comitative)