Being Young, Male and Muslim in Luton

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Discussion

This book is a contribution to scholarly approaches to the anthropology of Islam, both past and present. Anthropological approaches to the study of Islam and Muslims have been much contested in the sub-discipline’s relatively short history. Initial interest was sparked by Clifford Geertz’s (1971) famous thesis on the importance of religious symbols in providing cosmological meanings to individuals’ everyday lives. This ‘cultural’ view was challenged by Ernest Gellner’s (1981) sociological interventions, which argued that Islam is a means by which society is ordered. Gellner suggests that, since Islam is a scriptural religion that lays down permanent laws and principles pertaining to how to organise society, and given that that scripture was ‘completed’ by the mission of the Prophet Mohammed, Muslim society is one where religion and the state become enmeshed as one. Sociological order, therefore, is sustained by a class of proto-politicians who are also religious authorities at the same time, much like the Prophet himself. Further, it is this class of scholar-cum-politician that provides for social order and consequent solidarity in Islamic communities. Michael Gilsenan (1982), however, took a different approach. He argued that Islam or religion should not necessarily be the primary focus for anthropologists when studying Muslim societies. Rather, other social, economic and political factors need also be incorporated if one is to attain a holistic ethnographic account of the people and communities under study. For Gilsenan, then, Islam was indeed a core component of life in the Middle East. However the weight of other conflicting and parallel social phenomena co-existing with ‘the religious’ meant that any account where religious symbols or agents provide a totalising coherence to quotidian lives did not suffice as an accurate ethnographic picture.

In tandem with these epistemological developments, was the idea proposed by Abdel Hamid El-Zein (1977) that there is no such thing as an ‘anthropology of Islam’. His work implies that both Geertz and Gellner were guilty of ‘essentialising’ Islam in their respective symbolic and sociological approaches. For El-Zein, ‘Islam’ was only relevant in
local contexts where the religion took particular vernacularised and idiosyncratic social forms. How Islam was socially articulated in Tanzania is quite different from, say, Indonesia, for example. The logical conclusion, therefore, is that ethnographic evidence suggests that there is no one Islam, but a collection of Islams that exist and have always existed in various parts of the world. It is thus the task of the anthropologist to draw out these differences for the purpose of comparative analysis which, he posits, is the intellectual basis of the discipline. Perhaps the most ardent critic of this perspective is Talal Asad (1986). In his seminal essay ‘The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam’, Asad attempts to identify and define Islam as an ‘analytical object of study’. He argues against his forebears that Islam can be reduced to a system of symbols and social structure, or that it is a ‘heterogeneous bundle of beliefs, artefacts, customs and morals’ (1986:14). Instead, Asad claims that Islam is a ‘discursive tradition’ which is ultimately based on reference to the Qur’an and Hadith (biographical accounts of the Prophet). He suggests that all Muslims defer to the holy texts of Islam, and place them above all other forms of ontological reference. In order to conduct a ‘proper’ anthropological study of Islam, therefore, one must be prepared to locate particular religious or theological discourses that inform Muslim practitioners. Moreover, Asad alerts us to the idea that all Muslims seek and strive for a sense of religious ‘orthodoxy’ in their lives, regardless of the respective sectarian differences that exist between different Muslim groups. All Muslims, he claims, are invested in practising Islam in ways they deem to be acceptable in the eyes of God, linked to particular conceptions of temporality. This ‘discourse’ is always associated with scripture but manifests in different ways in different social contexts:

Orthodoxy is crucial to all Islamic traditions [...] [It] is not a mere body of opinion but a distinctive relationship – a relationship of power. Wherever Muslims have the power to regulate, uphold, require, or adjust correct practices, and to condemn, exclude, undermine, or replace incorrect ones, there is the domain of orthodoxy. The way these powers are exercised, the conditions that make them possible (social, political, economic etc.), and the resistances they encounter (from Muslims and non-Muslims) are equally the concern of an anthropology of Islam, regardless of whether its direct object of research is in the city or in the countryside, in the present or in the past. Argument and conflict over the form and significance of practises are therefore a natural part of any Islamic tradition. (Asad 1986:15 original emphasis)
Discerning ‘correct’ practices from ‘incorrect’ ones, therefore, is the vital part of any anthropological toolkit when exploring the lives of Muslims, according to Asad. Any endeavour that does not begin from the concept of a discursive tradition relating to the founding texts of Islam – ‘as Muslims do’ – is futile since Islam is, first and foremost, ‘a tradition’.

Asad’s sophisticated and seemingly radical contention was well-received by some, and a number of notable works have since emerged where Islam is indeed understood as a discursive tradition. These works broadly trace the role of religious law in informing ethical practices in the lives of ‘pious’ Muslims. Although they do not deny the existence of a world beyond the mosque or religious court per se, protagonists are usually located within a habitus where religious seeking for the sake of spiritual coherence is pronounced. This can be misleading, since not all Muslims are seeking ethical and spiritual perfection all of the time (if this is indeed possible). Moreover, a number of more recent ethno- graphic accounts have demonstrated that Muslims are, more often than not, constantly oscillating between and traversing through a number of concomitant ‘moral registers’, ‘regimes of truth’ and ‘multiple identities’. These scholars propose that, instead of focusing on textual Islam as an informative source for conducting ethnography, a more nuanced approach would be to demonstrate how Islam is ‘lived’ by its adherents. Through this method, anthropologists can observe the points of disjunction, ambivalence, and everyday slippages that litter the lives of Asad’s ‘discursive’ Muslim searching for orthodoxy. At the same time, the lives of ‘non-practising’, ‘lapsed’ or ‘nominal’ Muslims can also be absorbed into the anthropological gaze. In so doing, a more beleaguered, torn and incoherent subject is brought to the fore, thereby demonstrating the complexities and contradictions of Muslims lives. In fact, Samuli Schielke (2010), a keen advocate of the ‘lived Islam’ approach, has even suggested that ‘there is too much Islam in the anthropology of Islam’.

Although there is much to take note of from Schielke’s intersectional insights as a methodological starting point – particularly with regards to moving focus away from the ‘ethical habitus’ – my own exposure to Muslims in Luton suggests ‘Islam’, ‘the text’, and a quest for ‘orthodoxy’ maintained resonance with all of my informants (I did not meet anyone who claimed not to believe in Islam). Moreover, ‘being Muslim’ not only meant striving for moral coherence (however difficult and thankless), but brought with it a distinct political identity that, I suggest, is particular to and seemingly acute among Muslims living in the West. The vast majority of my informants struggled with being a ‘good Muslim’, but this did not deter them. Moreover, being Muslim in the post-9/11 world
engendered my informants with a will to ‘represent’ and ‘defend’ their religion against a perceived tide of antagonism and suspicion from White liberal society. I spent time with young men who purposefully missed prayers, refused to fast, dealt drugs, fornicated regularly and yet argued that women should wear the hijab, planned trips to Mecca for pilgrimage and always ate halal food. This ‘ambivalence’, as Schielke rightly puts it, stood side-by-side with a cogent, conscious and coherent sense of being ‘Other’ within their own society. This manifested most prominently in a suspicion towards the discursive and institutional influences of the state, and a longing to be contingent with the utopian habitus of the international fraternity of Muslims (ummah).

In the post-9/11 world, being a young Muslim in diaspora offers up a particular set of challenges. There is a qualitative difference between my informants and their peers living in Muslim-majority countries. It is premised on a particular history and retrospective memory of migration that is intrinsically linked with the global flow of colonial labour in the aftermath of the Second World War. These economic ‘push factors’, coupled with subsequent immigration restrictions led, eventually, to the permanent settlement of mostly Caribbean and South Asian families in Britain. Of this cohort, Muslims comprised the largest ethno-religious group (predominantly originating from Kashmir, Punjab, Gujarat and East Bengal). My young informants in Luton were well acquainted with stories of such migration, the struggles that pioneer migrants faced when they first arrived and, importantly, how the fortunes of their family (both in Britain and South Asia) were revolutionised as a result.

Once settled in Britain, these working-class ‘strangers’ were confronted with a host of institutional and political hurdles, particularly in the struggle for ethnic and racial recognition. Despite a sustained period of unified race-based political mobilisation in the 1970s (the decade when immigration from the New Commonwealth was permanently curtailed), previous unity became fragmented following the advent of Multiculturalism as state policy in Britain. This was implemented in reaction to a series of race riots in the early 1980s, staged within ethnic ‘ghettos’ across the country. The British government’s response to structural racism, (on this occasion, in the specific form of police brutality), was to instigate a set of policies that sought to ‘celebrate cultural diversity’. In effect, it disintegrated previous class solidarities, as various ‘ethnic’ groups jostled for newly ring-fenced state funds and recognition. This period of structural change, I suggest, produced certain material and discursive conditions that succeeded in cementing particular conceptions of the British Muslim community (both internal and external) that survive
to the present day. Moreover, arguably no other event (including 9/11) has played a more significant role in simultaneously illuminating and demonising British Muslims than the ‘Satanic Verses’ affair of 1989. Multiculturalist policies implemented throughout the 1980s attempted to institutionalise essentialist conceptions of minority ‘cultures’ by encouraging different minority groups to vie for government subsidies: ‘Different ethnic groups were [thus] pressed into competing for grants for their areas. The result was that black communities became fragmented, horizontally by ethnicity, vertically by class’ (Kundnani 2002:69).

British Muslims, being one such group, were propelled into the public imaginary by the fervent protests and public burning of *The Satanic Verses* in Bradford, a northern ex-mill town where a substantial Muslim community continues to reside. These scenes were received with horror by White liberal society, as sensational images of people burning books, circulated in the press, brought back memories of Nazi Germany. Prior to this watershed moment, British Muslims were seen as ‘Asians’ or even as politically ‘Black’. The *Satanic Verses* affair separated British Muslims from other minority groups. It made them ‘visible’. Moreover, it was a public expression of the Multiculturalist vision, albeit an unintended one. Muslims became identified along ethno-cultural lines, along with other minority groups, such as British Sikhs for example. Culturally, they were no longer ‘British-Pakistanis’ but were now primarily recognised as ‘British Muslims’. The controversy created a seminal shift in both how the wider British public viewed Muslims within their midst, and also how Muslims themselves self-identified. By the time my ‘millennial’ informants witnessed the events of 9/11 and, later, the London bombings of 2005 (7/7), they were already socialised along ethno-religious lines. Multiculturalist policies and public discourse, therefore, played a direct role in cultivating communal identities. Notably, the implementation of such policies followed on from the breakdown of trust between ethnic minority groups and the state, caused by fundamental structural inequalities. Moreover, although similar patterns of settlement could be observed throughout Europe and North America at the time, the British case is specifically contingent on a particular colonial genealogy. Any credible ethnographic inquiry into British Muslims of South Asian origin, therefore, must be sensitive to these formative historical machinations.

Such conditions, specific to diaspora, provide an additional metonymic node to the anthropological study of Islam in order to move beyond classical fixations on tribes, harems and ‘men of piety’. I suggest that its catchment must include the study of diaspora, post-colonial subjectivities and transnational social forms. This book thus attempts to
supplement anthropological works situated in the ‘centre’ of the Islamic world, through an appraisal of its ‘peripheries’. It draws ethnographic attention to how state narratives and policies possess the potential to balkanise its citizenry, explores the teleological impact of migration and generational renewal, and demonstrates how Muslims born into minority status are developing novel political identities in the post-9/11 world. In doing so, I hope to expand on classical and contemporary debates within the anthropology of Islam, and provide an area of inquiry that embraces both textual and quotidian approaches to studying Muslims. Moreover, an inquiry that sheds ethnographic light on the lives of those Muslims who, as Olivier Roy (2004) argues, are ‘culturally’ and ‘territorially’ detached from the Islamic world.23

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By the time the events of 9/11 became known, Multiculturalist doctrines were fully embedded. As the fallout from the atrocities unfolded, Muslims in Britain already shared a common identity that was, as we’ve seen, endorsed by the state. The months following on from those events were a particularly tense and anxious time for British Muslims. Many faced various forms of discrimination, from bearded men being refused entry onto public coaches, to the overnight termination of large commercial contracts with Muslim-owned businesses, to veiled women being abused in the streets.24 All of my informants retained significant memories of this period, and many of them held strong political views on the subsequent ‘war on terror’. It is also important to note here that many of my informants came of age in a political milieu dominated by events concerning Muslims from around the world. I have already discussed the significance of the Rushdie affair in 1989 in pushing the British Muslim community into the public gaze. The Rushdie affair was shortly followed by the outbreak of wars and violent skirmishes involving civilians in a number of Muslim-dominated regions in Europe (Bosnia Herzegovina, Kosovo), and Asia (Chechnya, Palestine, Kashmir). Notably, they all took place prior to 9/11. Images and reports of destroyed mosques, widespread displacement and carnage, and high civilian death tolls were consumed by my interlocutors on a regular basis. British Muslims, who considered themselves as part of the international Muslim community (ummah), were active in campaigning in support of the victims, consistently lobbying the government to reach resolutions. So many of my informants (particularly those old enough to remember) claimed that they felt the same sense of solidarity with Muslims from other parts of the world as they did with
fellow British Muslims. Moreover, this is precisely the arena where the emotional efficacy of a common ‘discursive tradition’ as Asad describes it, can be observed.

The idea of the ummah is one sanctioned by the holy scriptures in Islam. Specific nuances of its meaning and definition have often been disputed by theologians. However, the notion of a common humanity and solidarity between Muslims is one supported by unequivocal references in the Qur’an and Hadith literature:

Indeed, [all] Muslims are brothers (Qur’an: Al-Hujarat: 10).

The example of Muslims in their mutual love, mercy and sympathy is like that of a body; if one of the organs is afflicted, the whole body responds with sleeplessness and fever (Hadith-Muslim).

These references were often memorised and recited by my interlocutors to demonstrate the encompassing Islamic obligation to stand united with co-believers across the world. Such transnational loyalties almost always contradicted British foreign policy throughout the 2000s, (including during my own fieldwork). Particularly pertinent for our purposes here, however, is the almost universal consensus among my informants, young and old, that Western foreign policy in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine was unacceptable and tantamount to a ‘war against Muslims’. Many claimed the only motivation for military interventions in Muslim lands was due to a scramble for natural resources. My interlocutors were thus highly critical of the British state, with their loyalties clearly aligned to the fate of co-religionists rather than the interests of their country of residence. Terence Turner posits such divided loyalties as the ‘postmodernist reaction to the delegitimization of the state and erosion of the hegemony of the dominant culture in advanced capitalist countries’ (1993:423). He suggests that:

People all over the world have turned to ethnic and cultural identity as a means of mobilizing themselves for the defence of their social and political-economic interests. The increasing political importance of culture as an ideological vehicle for the new forms of ethnic nationalism and identity politics that have accompanied the weakening or collapse of colonial empires and multiethnic states, has made it a favoured idiom of political mobilization for resistance against central political authorities and hegemonic national cultures. (Turner 1993)

My informants in Luton certainly maintained an unmistakable camaraderie with those they perceived to share a common cultural and
historical heritage. Many attended and organised marches, rallies and lectures in solidarity with Muslims in Palestine and Iraq, for example. Unity with international Muslims was complemented by unity with those living in the UK, who were also included within the aegis of the ummah. Here, too, fellow Muslims were perceived to be victims of the ‘war on terror’, most pronounced through the manner in which Muslims had been profiled in the media; and, perhaps more significantly, in reaction to the government’s PREVENT strategy, designed to tackle extremism and radicalisation. Studies have shown that British Muslim communities have been largely suspicious of the latter. Counter-terrorism policies are grounded in ‘intervention strategies’ that theologically challenge ‘extremist’ positions. Such strategies rely on the cooperation of Muslim communities in identifying and participating in interventions, while also paradoxically targeting them as a ‘suspect community’.

Being seen as a target community and, at the same time, being expected to lead the charge against radicalisation has led to widespread confusion and resentment among Muslims and mistrust towards government. Muslims felt compelled to ‘apologise’ for their religion as a result of the actions of militants around the world who purport ideas and actions that many consider to be overt political transgression rather than any attempt at scriptural conformity.

In the face of the perceived international persecution of Muslims as a result of Western foreign policy, and the further marginalisation of Muslims at home, depicted as a ‘suspect community’ or ‘fifth column’, the conception of the ummah as an emancipatory social form and ‘site for resistance’ took root among my young informants. Feeling for the ummah was not only a religious obligation, but also a political necessity for the times. By being conscious of and, in many cases, overtly expressing resentment and criticism of British foreign and domestic policy towards Muslims, my informants were actively in the process of subverting established state narratives of citizenship and belonging. Moreover, my informants were able to navigate this ‘double consciousness’, as W.E.B. Du Bois aptly put it, in one of two ways. They had recourse either to an abstract, imagined utopia of the ummah in the face of wider hostilities, or to what Franz Fanon claimed to be ‘some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others’ in order to escape ‘the misery of everyday life, self-contempt, resignation and abjuration’ (Fanon in Hall 1993:394).

The ummah thus acted as an abstract ‘space’, that Gupta and Ferguson (1997) describe as ‘a neutral grid’ within which post-modern transnational communities inscribe ‘cultural difference, historical
memory and societal organisation’ (1997:34). However, ummah, as my informants understood it, further subverts this idea to necessarily create a space that is devoid of culture, history, or society in order to suit the culturally flattening conditions of diaspora. Moreover, my informants politicised its meaning. It was a utopian habitus where categories of class, race and gender collapsed. The ummah was an inclusive realm within which all Muslims of the world were united. The way in which Muslims in Luton conceptualised the ummah forms a fundamental component of my argument in this book. I argue that young Muslims in Luton are increasingly becoming attracted to what Olivier Roy refers to as globalised Islam (2004). He suggests that Muslims living in the West resist culturally alienating state narratives, as well as the equally alien South Asian ‘culture’ of their parents, by valorising their Muslim identity, which transcends national or ethnic allegiances. Roy argues that the combination of globalisation, westernisation and the increase in worldwide Muslim diasporas has led to a reimagining of the ummah. A ‘global Muslim’ can mean either:

- Muslims who settled permanently in non-Muslim countries (mainly in the West), or Muslims who try to distance themselves from a given Muslim culture and to stress their belonging to a universal ummah, whether in a purely quietist way or through political action. (2004:iix)

Roy claims that second and third generations in diaspora are particularly attracted to the doctrines of globalised Islam due to the fact that they are ‘de-territorialised’ from the Islamic heartlands. Moreover, they are dissuaded by the alienating cultural proclivities of both the host community, and particular non-Islamic cultural preoccupations of preceding generations. Instead, the appeal of being a member of the ummah, united by a common belief that transcends race, ethnicity and nationality is particularly powerful. In the post-colonial world, the ‘ummah no longer has anything to do with a territorial entity’, but now must be ‘thought of in abstract or imaginary terms’ (2004:19 my emphasis).

He goes on to suggest that Muslims in diaspora are also captivated by the notion of a ‘glorious Islamic past’ promoted by various reformist thinkers and groups. This conception of history resonated with many of my interlocutors in Luton, especially those disenfranchised by the regional ‘folk Islam’ professed by members of the older generations. Young Muslims regarded the Islam practised in the home to be more ‘cultural’ than ‘religious’. They argued that their parents often conflated
South Asian ‘cultural’ practices with Islam. This realisation led many to engage in debate and discussion with their parents, mosque imams and elders in the community. The pursuit for a ‘pure’ Islam, devoid of polluting cultural influences, is consistent with what Roy’s defines as ‘deculturalised Islam’:

The construction of a ‘deculturalised’ Islam is a means of experiencing a religious identity that is not linked to a given culture and can therefore fit with every culture, or, more precisely, could be defined beyond the very notion of culture […] The new generation of educated, Western born-again Muslims do not want to be Pakistanis or Turks; they want to be Muslims first. (2004:22–5)

Homi Bhabha (1994) suggests that explorations of the fragmented cultural identities of post-colonial subjects, particularly those generated within the modern diaspora, must escape essentialist paradigms and seek to unearth the discursive spaces that exist ‘in-between’ dominant political and ontological discourses. Bhabha’s proposition of the ‘third-dimension’ is particularly pertinent for our purposes here. He argues that the historical ruptures and transformations which occur as a result of mass movement of people across continents profoundly disrupt the applicability and generation of previously held ‘traditions’. Confronted with a new environment, minority subjectivities embark upon a process of novel and innovative re-articulation. He claims that:

What is theoretically imperative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. The “in-between” spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, an innovative site of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining society itself. (1994:2)

Bhabha focuses on the idiosyncratic character of new ‘hybrid’ forms of identity that occur as a consequence of cultural interaction. He identifies a ‘third-space’, which is ‘invisible’ to prevalent homogenising discourses of the nation-state, where cultural meanings and subjectivities are continually reproduced and innovated to create cosmopolitanisms that transcend and undermine national narratives of cultural homogeneity. Bhabha’s approach corresponds with the way my own informants generated new identities in the ‘in-between’ spaces of the home and wider
society, informed by the attitudes and discourses that dominate both spheres, and yet are distinct from it.

Diaspora cultural (re)production of this kind is further verified by the works of Paul Gilroy. Based on research conducted among Britain’s post-war Afro-Caribbean communities, Gilroy locates the production of black identities in the diaspora within the milieu of anti-racism struggles in Britain throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. He focuses on the popular appeal of politically subversive Afro-Caribbean music produced in this period. Through various cultural mediums, Gilroy contends that black youths developed dynamic forms of political resistance that were unique and flexible and that went beyond classical forms of proletarian organisation. He is critical of traditional Marxist cultural approaches that seek to simply situate working class ‘black expressive cultures’ as characteristically ‘anti-racism’. He suggests that Black-British culture transcends the narrow confines of the politics of anti-racism and ethnic absolutism and incorporates all the taxonomical complexities of ‘race’, ‘ethnicity’, ‘nation’ and ‘culture’, as well as ‘class’, to produce something new and unremarked. He writes:

Black Britain defines itself crucially as part of a diaspora. Its unique cultures draw inspiration from those developed by black populations elsewhere. In particular, the culture and politics of black America and the Caribbean have become raw materials for creative processes which redefine what it means to be black, adapting it to distinctively British experiences and meanings. Black culture is actively made and remade. (1987:202)

Gilroy alludes to a process of ‘cultural syncretism’, which emerged within the black diaspora in Britain that had galvanised at a particular political moment. Yet, at the same time, he reminds us that the diaspora should not be analysed as separate from the British social fabric. Black culture, he argues, should be considered a significant interlocutor within the ‘ever-in-process’ British cultural mosaic:

An intricate web of cultural and political connections binds blacks here to blacks elsewhere. At the same time, they are linked in the social relations of this country. Both dimensions have to be examined and the contradictions and continuities which exist between them must be brought out. (1987:205)

This approach is entirely apposite within the context of my interlocutors in Luton. Like black youths in the 1980s, young Muslims have developed
politicised identities in the face of turbulent global events and the burgeoning of local suspicions against them. In contrast to Gilroy’s black youth, it is not necessarily their ‘race’ which is divisive in social relations, but their religion. Moreover, it is the dual cultural and political capacity of the imagined ummah that ‘binds [Muslims] here to [Muslims] elsewhere’ within a domain of mutual struggle and solidarity against neo-liberal forces of domination.

Similarly, Stuart Hall reminds us that identity should not be viewed as an already accomplished fact, but as a ‘production which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation’ (Hall 1993:392 my emphasis). He posits that displaced communities attempt to collectively essentialise identity in an attempt to impose a ‘shared culture’, even where this process seems difficult to engender.35 Cohesion, he argues, is achieved through displaying unified projections of ideological solidarity even where such solidarity is superficial or artificially imposed. Borrowing from Fanon, he suggests that the experience of colonisation has contributed towards the ‘emptying of the natives’ brain of all form and content’. Colonial authorities, he posits, reshaped the historical trajectories of the subject populations to the extent of ‘distorting, disfiguring and destroying them’ (1993). Once fully conscious of these historical mutations, the colonised attempt to unearth that which the colonial experience has buried and overlaid. He concludes that:

Cultural identities are the points of identifications, the unstable points of identification, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture … not an essence but a positioning … hence there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental law of origin. (Hall 1993:395)

Black-British identity has emerged from heterogeneous roots as slaves were taken from different countries, tribal communities, villages, linguistic groups and religious traditions. However, the specific conditions of displacement and diaspora have led to the generation of novel Black-British subjectivities that seek to reach beyond the confines of the exclusivist nation state. Black-Britishness functions as a unifying counter-culture against the trials of social marginalisation. Similarly, in Luton, the ummah was conceptualised as an effective means of reconciling a sense of perceived ‘Otherness’ in society, made possible by Orientalist stereotyping of Muslims as exotic, visceral and violent in the popular imagination.36
My informants, self-identifying as they did, must thus be contextualised within specific historical, social, economic and political developments that have shaped their intersectional and often contradictory opinions, emotions, and loyalties throughout their lifetime. These conditions have given rise to unique vernacular and hybrid forms of British Muslim identity based on national and transnational solidarities, personal piety and salvation, and a recalibration of what it means to be British in today's post-colonial Britain.

Notes

8. See Masquelier and Soares 2016.
10. See Kapoor 2002.
16. The Satanic Verses is a novel written by British author Salman Rushdie, which was published in 1988. The book attracted controversy as some Muslims claimed it was a deliberate parody of the life of the Prophet Mohammed, and therefore deemed to be blasphemous. The affair was heightened by the issuing of a fatwa (religious decree) by Ayatollah Khomeini, then the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The decree urged all Muslims to target Rushdie for defaming the name of the Prophet, and to seek to assassinate him. In the UK, Muslims reacted to the fatwa by a staged public book-burning in Bradford. This event attracted considerable media attention, and propelled British Muslims into the public eye as separate from the wider South Asian diaspora for the first time.
27. See Poole 2002; Meer 2006; Allen 2010; and Morey and Yaquin 2011.
29. See Awan 2012; and Breen-Smyth 2014.
30. See Choudhury and Fenwick 2011; and Hopkins 2009.
34. See Gilroy 1987.