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'Society does treat me differently and that is a shame': Understandings and Feelings of Britishness amongst Visibly Observant Young Muslims

Abstract

There has been increasing media and political questioning of the national loyalties and identities held by young British Muslims, with a particular focus on those seen to separate themselves through strict and religiously observant dress and lifestyles. This paper draws primarily on research focusing on the meanings of 'Britishness' held amongst a group of visibly observant young Muslim adults. Empirical evidence is provided to demonstrate that although these young adults demonstrated an explicit and visible sense of Muslim identity, this co-existed without any conscious conflict with their British identity. The young adults' acknowledgement of their religious attachment developed from a positive and proactive identification with Islam rather than one in opposition or rebellion against a British identity. Therefore, in a wider context, their lives must not be analysed only through the lens of religion, dress and appearance as this has repercussions in relation to national policy formation and subsequent perceptions of wider society.

Key words

Young Muslims, visibly observant, Britishness, culture, religion

Introduction

Since the beginning of the 21st century, young British Muslims have received significant academic and political attention. Incidents including the terrorist attacks of 7/7, the killing of soldier, Lee Rigby in 2013, the 2015 Paris attacks, and the very recent, (2017) Westminster, Manchester and Barcelona attacks, and high profile media accounts of young Muslims joining the Islamic State (IS) have contributed to the politicisation of the activities of these young people and the emergence of Islamophobia (cf. Gale, 2013; Franceschelli and O'Brien, 2015). Such incidents have also been argued as reframing events, which have realigned the Islamic World as the new 'uncivilised enemy' of the 'West', replacing the preceding 'enemy' of the Communist East (Shaw in Roy and Shaw, 2016).

Contemporary discourses focusing on Islam in the UK are framed principally around two notions. First, that growing religiosity amongst young Muslims is posing a challenge to British society (Parekh, 2006) and second, the idea that a minority of British Muslims pose a severe security threat to the UK (Fekete, 2009, also see Fox and Akbaba, 2015; Hellwig and Sinno, 2016). Since the events mentioned above, a number of politicians, policy makers and academics have suggested that Muslims must embrace British values in order to assimilate into British society (Joppke, 2009; Cameron, 2011; Morrice, 2016).

This paper draws on the findings of 34 qualitative interviews undertaken with a group of visibly observant[1] young Muslims. The research set out to explore their interpretations and understandings of Britishness and their perceptions of the compatibility of Islamic and British lifestyles and values. The paper begins by outlining what is meant by the term 'Britishness' and some of the challenges of defining the term. Subsequent to this, the paper problematises binary understandings of visibility in observance of the Islamic faith. Following on, the paper recapitulates the research methods, including the demography of the participants; researcher positionality; access and research tools. The first of the two findings sections which follow show how the participants identified as being more

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[1] We utilise this term in the popular understanding as being related to attire: for instance women wear the face covering Niqaab, Hijab and Jilbaab and men have a full beard and wear the Jubba or topi.

British than that of their parent's national heritage. Yet, similar to existing literature, the participants found the term 'Britishness' difficult to clearly conceptualise. The second of the two findings sections demonstrate how, despite the young people having strong identifications as being British, they felt 'othered' and viewed as being less British by British non-Muslims.

Finally, our research found that although these young people demonstrated an explicit and visible sense of Muslim identity, this co-existed without any conscious conflict with what they considered Britishness. We found them to be reworking religious and cultural practices within the perspective of contemporary British values and lifestyles. Rather than commonly held misconceptions that the media and general public have about these young Muslims as either being fundamentalist or being less integrated in British society (Clayton, 2012), we found that their Islamic education and visible, religious observance played a role in mediating a more nuanced consciousness of British Muslim identity. Prior to embarking on the findings, the paper will first provide an overview of notions of Britishness, and perceptions of Islamic visibility.

Meanings of Britishness

The question 'What does it mean to be British?' is both ongoing, fascinating (Parekh, 2000) and pressing. It compels us to consider the manifold changes in British society over the course of this century. It also encourages a consideration of the theoretical issues concerning the nature of identity. Defining national belonging or affiliation with Britishness can be a challenging task, especially in considering that it is a state of four nations (Jacobson, 1997). Vadher and Barrett (2009) argue that Britishness is a term subjected to several interpretations and has several boundaries and acknowledge that defining Britishness, British culture and values may be similarly difficult for individuals who belong to the dominant majority group. Paradigms of racial, ethnic and religious identity being incompatible with British identity have already been challenged in the form of hybrid or hyphenated identities which engender race, ethnicity, religion and Britishness across people who would commonly be described in terms of 'minority' (cf Modood, 2003).

Whilst successive UK governments have attempted to address the perceived problem of a lack of British identity amongst immigrant (or 'minority') communities by insisting on the promulgation of shared norms and values (cf. Kundnani, 2007). Such attempts, in their vigour and persistence, are readily able to be described as dictatorial and controlling in the pursuit of a monochromatic British cultural value standard (McGhee, 2008). As such Britishness, in the lived sense, is not something which requires imposing or corralling; it is hyphenated (Modood, 2003), or even multi-hyphenated. After all what is the British people? It is a historic blend of many people, cultures and languages from many parts of the globe. A point which has been presented differently by some politicians, such as Enoch Powell and Margaret Thatcher, who have suggested British national identity is not ethnically or racially (respectively) connected with others (cf. Parekh, 2000). More recently, successive UK governments under Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and David Cameron have each spoken of the acceptance of 'British Values' but without any reference to what these values are. This implies a politically driven version of Britishness rather than one of the people, as Parekh (2000) suggests, concepts of Britishness must be in constant negotiation between the people and the state.

While British values continue to be debated but remain indeterminate, Britishness does have definitions, which dominate both in popular and political discourse. Despite there being no constitutional value set of Britishness, research into what British people perceived British values to be, which although criticised as being non-specific have found their way into teaching standards for curriculum representation of British values (Maylor, 2016). These values include 'democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance' (DfE, 2014).

Much political attention has been paid to the radical Islamist minority amongst young British Muslims, but arguably a more significant development is the gradual emergence of a genuinely British Muslim identity which enables Muslims to be truly at home in a multicultural society of multiple identities (Ramadan, 2009). This theorisation from Ramadan (2009) is also in keeping with Cesari (2009) and Roy (2004) who provide in-depth illustration of ways in which Muslim identities and religiosity mirror "European" lifestyles, as well as multiplicity and reflexive understandings and interpretations of faith. Recent research suggests that young

Muslims are able to observe an Islamic lifestyle in parallel with what they regard as a British identity (see Mythen et al., 2009 and Thomas and Sanderson, 2011).

However, as Mythen et al., (2009) attest, young Asian Muslims living in Britain mediate identity within a push and pull between various cultural, racial, national and religious drivers. In particular, for some, identity is in flux between nationalist British opinion, which does not acknowledge the 'Britishness' of British Muslims and familial influence (cf. Franceschelli, 2016) to continue and embrace culturally traditional interpretations of Islam. In some ways, this is supported by Thomas and Sanderson (2011) in their description of how religious identity is stronger for young Muslims, yet British identity is widely presented alongside this; Britishness here is identified as inclusive and multi-cultural (Thomas and Sanderson, 2011). Likewise, Franceschelli, (2016) points to the reflexive crossing of boundaries between the multifaceted and myriad conceptualisations of Britishness or British Muslim.

A consideration of visible, religious observance amongst young British Muslims will now be explored; drawing attention to notions of 'othering', perceptions of religious identity and the problems of dualistic understandings of Islamic dress. This exploration, alongside that of British values and identity (as illustrated above), situates our findings within a wider understanding of the co-existence of visible religious observance and British identity amongst young Muslims.

Visibly Observant or Observed Visibility?

Archer (2009) has argued that society views young Muslims as adopting an Islamic lifestyle at the cost of ignoring a British lifestyle. Choudhury (2007) suggests that most young Muslims have a strong feeling of attachment to a British identity but problems arise when they feel that they are treated as 'other' rather than British. The 'othering' process most recently described by Selod (2015) enables non-Muslims to deny Muslims the same rights and privileges of citizenship, while Tufail (2015) observes that Muslims are expected to assume a British identity over all others. This meeting point of securitisation, 'othering' and corralling of national identity definitions is multiplicative of precarious citizenship that both dissents, assimilates and alienates (O'Loughlin and Gillespie, 2012).

A greater affiliation with religion and an adoption of Islamic lifestyles and values is often viewed as a rejection of British values and lifestyles (Meer and Modood, 2010). Whilst there is a perception that a greater number of young British Muslims are adopting Islamic dress codes in public places to display their religious identity, i.e. wearing headscarves, the veil, the Arabic jubba (long dress for men) and beards (cf. The Telegraph Feb 4, 2011), there are actually no substantive statistics available in a UK context (Goldsmith and Harris, 2014). Changing patterns of migration and increased media attention, rather than an increased adoption of these visible practices could explain this public perception. For example, patterns of migration in Leicester (the city of focus for this paper) have changed over time. According to 2011 census results, Muslims are now the largest religious group in the city, constituting (61,440 people), and 18.6 per cent of the population. This is significantly higher than the general population of Muslims in Britain, which is less than five per cent.

Of course, the semiotic reading of 'mundane' items such as everyday dress of 'subordinated' groups by established dominating groups and the mismatch in meaning of the bearer are not new phenomena (Hebdige, 1983). However, it is this interface between the interpretation of the 'established' and the (complex and nuanced) meaning of the 'subordinated' which manifests as a parallax (Zizek, 2009) and forms a novel point of understanding of how visibly observant young Muslims perceive the nexus between their own dress, as well as how others perceive and respond to it.

Furthermore the wearing of Islamic headscarves or veils are often perceived through orientalist[2] frameworks that do not distinguish between cultural differences in style, convention, purpose and context across national and regional tradition and (re)interpretation (cf. Kinder, 2016). Likewise Islamic headdress may be worn by young Muslim women as a means of expressing a myriad of meaning of self, inclusive of the pious, political, cultural, modest and aesthetic presentation of identity (Tarlo, 2010). Similarly, it has been posited that dualistic understandings of Islamic dress are ill founded in suggesting oppositions of piety – secularity or Muslim versus

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[2] Cf. Said, 2003 on Orientalism.selod

West and are better understood through more nuanced biographical and cosmopolitan frameworks (Tarlo, 2007). Elsewhere, it has been noted that the identity of Muslim young people is mediated at the hinter-space between religion, class, gender, ethnicity, age and physical location (Dwyer et al, 2010). All of which are situated within broader subordinating structures; be they civilizing offensives (cf. Kruithof, 2015; Flint et al, 2015) via ideological state apparatuses or repressive state apparatuses of control (Althusser, 2001).

Whilst there has already been much work carried out in relation to young Muslim's identity, Islamic dress and concepts of Britishness, there are still gaps in our knowledge. The following sections of this paper seek to contribute toward filling some of these gaps in outlining how visibly observant Muslims can be more exposed to Islamophobia, stereotyping and discrimination. Yet despite potential for heightened 'othering' the views the young people within this study expressed do not diverge from those expressed by others who may not present visible indicators of their religious faith with regard to similar issues (cf. Franceschelli 2016). In this sense, our research points out that the participant's visibly Muslim appearance, although reflective of a stronger commitment to religion, does not impact on their sense of having a British identity. This identification with Britishness is experienced despite their visibly observant Muslim appearance having the potential to 'other' them under the stereotyping gaze of non-Muslim British.

Research Methods

The research was carried out in Leicester over a six month period. Over the last ten years, the Muslim population in Leicester has increased by 84 per cent to 18.6 per cent (2011 census). Leicester's Muslim population is made up mainly of Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Indians, as well as Turks, Somalis, Algerians, Arabs, Kenyans and Ugandans. Turks, Algerians and Somalis are more recent migrants to the city (Kabir, 2012).

34 semi-structured interviews were undertaken with young Muslim adults aged 18-30 in a number of geographical wards across the city; snowballing sampling was used to identify respondents. The participants were from Pakistani, Indian (Gujarati),

Bangladeshi and East African ethnic backgrounds and each had been born and raised in Britain. An equal number of male and females took part in the research. In addition to being visibly observant Muslims, one third of the young adults in this study had studied for a degree in Islamic theology and Jurisprudence. This is an extensive 4-6 years course studied at an Islamic educational institute normally after completing GCSEs or A levels; the qualification is not recognised by the British educational system. Individuals who complete the degree are known as Aalim and Aalimahs (people who have knowledge about Islam). They strictly follow the practices of Islam in their everyday life. For example, they opt to wear complete Islamic attire i.e. women wear the face covering Niqaab, Hijab and Jilbaab and men have a full beard and wear the Jubba.

The research was undertaken by one of the authors of this paper who worked at a Muslim faith school in the city. The initial interviews were undertaken with colleagues who then went on to identify friends and family. By way of context, xxx is a visibly observant Muslim and wears the full Niqaab. Being Muslim provided xxx with an 'insider' status and one, which researchers understand to be the most effective way of overcoming religious, cultural, or racial obstructions (see Garland et al., 2006). As a female Muslim, it was much easier for xxx to make contact with other Muslim women and generally speaking, the male participants felt comfortable speaking with a Muslim female. However, it must be emphasised that this positionality merely provided a sense of ease in access, as opposed to easy access. Many non-Muslims (for instance Briggs, 2010, O'Toole and Gale, 2013) and less pious Muslims (for example Mustafa, 2015) have accessed Muslim communities in their research. Importantly, while xxx belongs to the Muslim community and thereby had an 'insider' status, xxx is not British she is Pakistani and had only been residing in the UK approximately six years prior to undertaking the research.

We now turn attention to the research findings and, in particular, interpretations and understandings of Britishness, experience of 'othering' and the compatibility of Islamic and British lifestyles and values amongst visibly observant young Muslims.

Meanings of Britishness

The majority of young adults affirmed their ethnicity with an affiliation to Britain. They described themselves as either, British Pakistani, British Asian, British Indian or British Muslim, thus confirming the positive notion of binary (see Thomas and Sanderson, 2011) or hybrid[3] / hyphenated (Modood, 2003) identities found in earlier studies. However, the responses regarding ethnicity demonstrate that the participants felt more affiliation to their British identity than their ethnic heritage. The majority of respondents did not identify themselves with the ethnicity of their parents or grandparents. Hence, this research affirms the view in which individuals make choices for asserting their ethnicity (Patterson et al., 1974) and distance themselves from purely ethnic based identities (cf. Franceschelli, 2016).

Not dissimilar to earlier works, (see Jacobson, 1997 and Vadher and Barrett, 2009), participants struggled to elucidate and define Britishness. When asked directly about their understanding of Britishness, some responses tended towards an explanation of citizenship. A number were of the view that someone can be British only if they are legally British. One young woman explained, 'My understanding about being British, someone abiding by law of the land and paying tax and having a British passport' (Female, 30). During the course of our research, it became clear that the majority of participants favoured the benefits of living under the British legal system, which is in stark contrast to the increase in focus by UK media on young Muslim's desire to replace British law with sharia. However, in most cases holding legal status and abiding by the 'law of the land' was only a partial account of nationality. For some, their understanding of Britishness was associated with origin of birth. One young man explained, 'Someone who was born in this country would be British. Values and lifestyle not necessarily, for me it's more geographical. If someone is born here then he is British'. (Male, 25)

When asked to elaborate on their understanding of British values many associated it with democracy, the welfare state and everyday manners and etiquette. Some young people clearly brushed aside the racial factor in determining the parameters of Britishness.

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[3] Hybrid in the context of Bhabha, 2006.

> 'The term British is very vast. It comprises of quite a lot of values and for me someone who feels that their identity is British, he is British. They are identifying themselves as British. They are showing British values and they are showing British lifestyle as well. I think that means to be British'. (Female, 22)

The distinction between culture and religion emerged as a significant issue for the young adults and the compatibility between values was mentioned by a number of participants. They were aware that wider society confuses many cultural values and practices with Islamic values.

> There are a lot of similarities in Islam and British values, if I would quote, democracy that is one, looking after the poor, making sure that no one will sleep with empty stomach, charities, laws of country, most of them tend to go hand in hand with Islamic laws. There are a lot of others. Well, balancing being Muslim and being British is not something really hard.' (Male, 27)

However, some equated British values with stereotyped 'British' behaviours such as drinking alcohol and frequenting pubs and parties, confirming Kundnani's (2007) assertion that British values are confusing and ill defined.

> There is some difference, one is religion and one is culture, which is the biggest difference? Being British, it doesn't mean that it has to do something with your religion. So there are similarities and differences but it has quite a lot of similarities. It is not something totally different to each other. Except for drinking and pubs and a little bit of segregation in Islam it is quite same.' (Female, 30)

A number of academics (Modood, 2005; Abbas, 2007; Hopkins and Gale, 2009) argue that the differences between Islamic and traditional western cultures are highlighted to propagate that Muslims do not adopt British values. Others suggest that young Muslims compromise British values due to a strong attachment with their religious values and practices (Mirza et al., 2007; Modood, 2005). Despite the emphasis in promulgating (vague) values of Britishness, via education (and other means), it is widely noted that British Muslims generally view themselves through the hybrid lens of British (and) Muslim, as religious identity, unlike place identity, has 'universal' relevance (Jacobson, 1997). Mythen (2012) describes this Islamic identity as an 'anchor identity' within a tripartite set comprising of 'solid, elastic and resilient identities' incorporating religion, place and culture. Again, the concept of hybrid

identity is in effect, as the identification of self as perceived by the young people in Mythen's (2012) study is one resistant to being corralled into 'us' and 'them' binaries (cf. Bhabba, 2006).

Bagguley and Hussain (2008) highlight the importance of language skills to make a claim of identity. Each of the respondents mentioned that their generation exhibits a strong British identity as they speak fluent English, have attended British schools and are employed within the wider British society.

A young woman expressed her identity cogently. When asked whether she felt herself British, she replied excitedly,

> 'Yes, yes, very much... well I was born here. I grow up here, my parents are mixed, and culture is mixed. I speak English. I went to schools there. Probably I am national. Because I have been living here, I can't think of something else than being British, and I always lived by the laws here you know.' (Female, 23)

This young woman makes reference to her strong British identity by relating it to certain factors such as birth place, being brought up in Britain, and the British education system. She also views language as a potent way to maintain and affirm her Britishness. Mastery of English language and communication skills has become a significant indicator of integration over the last decade, with successive governments highlighting the need for migrants entering the UK to take an English language test.

Looking closely at the views of the respondents, it becomes evident that, despite the diversity in their comments, within their social world, Britishness is a concept that is subject to reinterpretation. There are several widely accepted ways of being British. As the work of Cohen (1994), Jacobson (1997), Kundnani (2007) and Vadher and Barrett (2009) attests it can be argued that a definition of Britishness, values and cultures is difficult. Flory and Miller (2010) argue that religion is increasingly practiced in different ways among the Muslim younger generation. This provides them with greater opportunity to interpret religion and blend aspects of religion that they value, with other core parts of their identity, i.e. culture.

Being British: Seen as 'other'

To further develop an understanding of Britishness participants were asked to describe whether they felt themselves to be British. When asked to determine the extent they felt themselves to be British, they represented a variety of responses. During the interviews, respondents suggested that external perceptions contributed significantly to how they view themselves. In particular they claimed that public perceptions rest upon how people from a white British ethnic background view, accept or consider their identity. Some young people expressed anxieties relating to the nature of their British identity. The racial discrimination experienced by some of the participants had a pervasive effect. There was recognition amongst a number of them that some 'White British people' challenge their British identity.

Muslims often experience social exclusion and lack of recognition of their British identity by mainstream society (Karlsen and Nazroo, 2014). Most of the young people viewed the area in which they lived to be safe. However, on the street or in their everyday navigation of the city, most participants had some experiences of verbal abuse or hostility. Experiences of verbal abuse, being called 'Paki' or 'Ninja' (for the veiled woman) were common. Some young female participants who wore the veil, mentioned that they had experienced verbal abuse so often, they barely noticed anymore. Most of the participants mentioned that wearing Islamic style clothing or having a beard (for men,) often resulted in the attraction of unpleasant attention and occasional discrimination.

One young male mentioned that ignorance and discrimination can restrict opportunities. He spoke of friends who had been refused job opportunities because of their religious appearance,

> 'Yeah of course, when you go for a job interview like a couple of my friends went to MacDonald's for a job interview and they ask them to shave their beard off. By law it is not like to shave beard off, you can cover it with hair net, it's because they don't want to have faces with beard in their environment. Of course, you get comments from people. Personally, I had that experience and a lot of my friends have been called pakis. (Male 19)

Khan (2000) found that young Muslims express disappointment when they are not fully accepted as British A number of the young people admitted that though they feel they are British, they are aware that their religious identity does not always allow

them to be viewed as such. This is evident from the response of this young man, who stated,

'Personally I believe yes I am British as I am born and bred in a society where majority of people are British and I get along with them. I understand them but the problem in today's society is I can't really say majority....., I can't really generalize it....... but maybe there are some people who do not identify me as a British person.' (Male, 24)

Having grown up in Britain, the young adults feel British and they enjoy the liberty and freedom that was aspired to by their parents but at the same time they are aware of the differences that they posses from the majority population due to their perceived racial, cultural and religious views and their appearance. These experiences go some way towards explaining why some young Muslims are uncertain about their British identity and belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

However, some young people in their responses expressed confusion which centred around the way non-Muslims treat them and the impact of this on how they themselves feel in specific spaces and circumstances. A young woman confused about expressing herself as British responded,

'I do feel British. However when I am actually out in the public, like I am going for shopping, I don't feel British then, because of the way I am treated by the public. I stand out because of my dress, because I am wearing niqaab. Before I never used to wear niqaab and so the way I was treated was like everybody else because of the dress sense that I have. But because my dress has changed, people view me differently and I feel that I get treated differently.' (Female, 23)

While a young man responded,

'Society does treat me differently and that is a shame. That even if you have beard, you have Islamic dress code, and you are walking on street, you have to be always the person who initiates the positive gesture. For example, you are walking passing by and while smiling say hello, so you can change the prejudice barrier. But it is a shame that even sometimes you are in bad mood you are under the weather, you have a bad day, even then you have to keep positive and smile at the people who are walking passing by.' (Male, 25)

In the past decade, academic attention has shifted markedly from private issues to the visible public area of the street (Alexander, 2004). The dress code for young men

and women is treated as marker of identity, community and belonging (Gilliat-Ray, 2010). In accordance with Hopkin's (2010) finding, the majority of our respondents mentioned that wearing Islamic style clothing having a beard (for men) and wearing the veil (female) often resulted in the attraction of unpleasant attention. It emphasises a point made earlier, that a more nuanced understanding of Islamic dress is needed to understand how visibly observant young Muslims perceive their own dress, as well as how others perceive and respond to it. From such a perspective, it is possible to begin to understand the complexity of meaning making in process for visibly observant young Muslims and the framework through which monochrome perceptions of their Islamic visibility through dress and personal grooming are externally interpreted. Although these young people demonstrated a more explicit and visible sense of Muslim identity, it co-existed without any conscious conflict with a British identity.

Conclusion

Visibly observant British Muslims have an ambiguous identity in relation to a British identity. They are different from other minorities as their identity is defined in relation to religion (and not race or colour). This religion is also more visible in terms of appearance, practice and beliefs (eg dress) which may contest claims on forms of Britishness that exhibit neutrality and conformity. Current discourse views such observant Muslims as those more likely to reject a British identity. This is made more complicated as Islam as a religion is in many ways implicated in wider global and political processes such as terrorism, human rights and multiculturalism, leading to many forms of Islamophobia.

Our findings suggest that Britishness is a concept subject to reinterpretation; the young people's observance of religion was not a hindrance to active citizenship; thereby rejecting the suggestions of Hardy (2002) and Caldwell (2009) who claim that Islamic values and lifestyles are in stark opposition to British and liberal lifestyles. From the young person's perspective there was an understanding that the wider British population can fail to distinguish between sub-continental values and practices and Islamic values and it is often concluded that Muslims are in denial of a modern way of life (see Kundnani 2007; Fekete 2009). The young adult's responses

suggest that British values do not contradict Islamic values nor are they a threat to each other.

It is suggested that British Muslims may suffer from a sense of dual or conflicting loyalties. In the current study, young Muslim's acknowledgement of their religious attachment developed from a positive and proactive identification with Islam rather than one in opposition or rebellion against Britishness. The respondents did not just recognise their British identity but embraced it. We contend that young, visibly observant British Muslims cannot be solely defined or confined by their religious affiliations; neither can they be understood without identifying the ways in which religion frames their views and lives. Our respondents saw 'both sides of the story', they understood how they perceived themselves as British and Muslim but they also acknowledged how non-Muslims view them as 'other'. Therefore, the respondents had a more nuanced if not clearer view of their positionality whereas the people perceiving them as 'other' only had that one perception. It was their religious observance that mediated their personal concepts of the 'othered' despite not seeing themselves as 'other'.

'Othering' of young Muslims through policies that seemingly institutionalise Islamophobia will serve to alienate young Muslims. Visibly observant young Muslims may well bear the burden of this as the visible markers of their religion become increasingly politicised. We suggest that a more informed approach to policy formation is needed, developed through an understanding that visibly observant young Muslims are reworking religious and cultural practices leading to a strong affiliation with a British identity.

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