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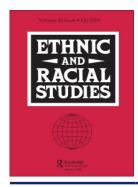
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Relocating the veil: the everyday lives of young hijabi Britons under ideological culturalism

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ABSTRACT
This article centres the testimonies of young hijabi Britons as social landscapes shift toward ideological culturalism. Exploring the idea that culture is the defining element of social life and that individuals are bound to closed cultural categories, it sets out a context of endemic cultural racism, as voices from across the political spectrum marshal the veil to vilify Islam and promote cultural homogenization. The paper reports on a qualitative study privileging the testimonies of 18 hijabi women, aged between 18 and 26. It advances "everyday culturalism", a social standpoint that shapes everyday relations to reflect culturalist ideologies and undermine cultural plurality. Three themes illuminate the young women's experiences of being addressed in ideologically embedded ways: the white scripted hijabi subject; harm, silencing, and exclusion; and resistance through re-narration. Ultimately, participants' reflections reject culture as the organizing force for selfhood, instead, asserting hijabi identities as multi-vocal, contextually contingent and contradictory.

Introduction

Over the last two decades, there has been a systematic "othering" of Muslims in the European social imaginary. Since 9/11, government policies, media coverage and social debate continually vilify Muslims as the post-immigration group associated with various social ills that are antithetical to the values of secular liberal societies. The veil is the visual distillation of this viewpoint, to use Patricia Hill Collins's term, it has become a "negative controlling image" (1990, 266) of Muslim womanhood, synonymous with a distinctly Islamic illiberalism that justifies enhanced scrutiny and regulation of Muslim cultures and identities.

Many European nations have considered prohibiting Muslim headwear, as a result it has become the focus of heated social debate, regulatory

interventions, and juridical battles (Rankin 2021; Zempi 2016). Though such restrictions have been rejected in Britain, YouGov data shows public disapproval of veiling is persistently high. Over half of those surveyed between 2010 and 2017 support the statement "The veil should be completely banned in Britain", with figures rising to 66% of conservative and 85% of UKIP voters (Lee 2018). Furthermore, Home Office data (2021) shows 45% of all religiously motivated hate crimes target Muslims, which are heavily gendered, with 83% perpetrated against visibly Muslim women by white men (Tell MAMA 2019).

Recent scholarship explores the veil from both macro and micro perspectives. Macro approaches have critiqued policies regulating the veil as legal mechanisms serving the aims of secularism and have attempted to disentangle liberalism's paradoxical relationship with Muslim women's freedoms (see Grillo and Shah 2012: Gustavsson, van der Noll, and Sundberg 2016). Micro-level studies have focused on veiling as agency, privileged niqabi testimony in the context of policy restrictions; and foregrounded the politics of space and place constituting face veiling as a situated object of contention to explain intolerance of the burqa (Burchardt and Griera 2018; Zempi 2016). This article builds on that scholarship, yet it is also distinctive. It is argued here that previous analyses have discussed isolated issues associated with veiling, this contribution relocates the veil and its cascading implications for veiled women as symptomatic of the epistemological shift toward ideological culturalism. It does so by exposing the mainstreaming of ideological culturalism and how traditionally paradoxical political standpoints are unified in calls for cultural homogeneity via civic integration polices directed at Muslim cultural practices; exploring the extent to which ideological culturalism has permeated public consciousness by examining hijabi being and living under its conditions; and, finally, contesting ideological culturalism's fundamental premise that culture is the organizing force of human societies.

Culturalism is the idea that society and human affairs are aligned along the axis of culture and that sameness and difference in culture is the defining element of social life (Stolcke 1995). Under ideological culturalism, individuals are perpetually bound to their closed cultural category and can only realize themselves within their own cultural limits. These categories are passed through generations and derived from countries of origin. Through this lens, people born and living inside the nation are constructed as not belonging to it (Ghorashi 2016; Stolcke 1995). In most European countries, this logic is overtly applied to Islam, maintaining definitive boundaries between the European "us" and the forever foreign, Muslim "them". Contemporary discourses around veiling are saturated with culturalist ideology, both the political left and right are unified in thunderous condemnation of veiling as a symbol of Islam's oppression of women to promote and naturalize strategies of cultural homogenization. To illustrate this, and to set the study within the

context of current debates, I present three contemporary discourses around veiling as antithetical to Western values: first, far-right misuse of feminist language to further monoculturalism anchored in European secularized Christianity; second, feminist scholarship that opposes multiculturalism in defence of gender equality and liberalism more widely; third, Muslim-centric national security strategies that seek social cohesion through the ideational discipline of "risky" Muslims.

To understand the fixations and fallacies about veiling that are universally embedded in such discourses, I turn to Edward Said's *Orientalism*, the central claim of which is that colonialism is an ideological and epistemic project or set of discourses that produce a complete "style of thought"; a way of thinking and set of representations about the East (Said 1993, 3). This style of thought rests on the law of division that severs the world into East and West, two binary and essential entities. The former, discursively choreographed as implacably superior to the "uncivilised", "barbaric", and "primitive" East. Orientalism is not the outcome of colonialism, but the discursive formations necessary to manufacture the notion that certain territories, peoples, and cultures "beseech domination" (Said 1993, 9). Through the naturalization of such epistemologies, the real East is erased and replaced by colonial fantasies that justify subjugation, management, and colossal exploitations. In *Algeria Unveiled*, Frantz Fanon examines how cultural erasure and replacement, the calculated severance of societies from their historical practices, enables colonial control. He argues "the way people clothe themselves … constitutes the most distinctive form of a society's uniqueness" (1994, 35). Societies are known through apparel and the colonizer's obsession with the eradication of centuries-old Islamic traditions of embodiment exposes their fixation with the erasure of colonized societies themselves. French invaders mobilized vast resources to propagandize unveiling as the humanitarian liberation of Algerian women. In fact, it was a precise colonial doctrine "to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first conquer all women" (1994, 37). Just as colonialism requires the discursive construction of local populations and traditions such that they require regulation, contemporary veil discourses are propelled by new crusaders, keen to "liberate" supposedly oppressed Muslim women while upholding the assimilationist requirements of ideological culturalism. Such neo-orientalizations are a form of racialization or Islamophobia that Tariq Modood defines as "the racializing of Muslims based on appearance or descent … attributing to them cultural or religious characteristics to vilify, marginalize, discriminate, or demand assimilation and thereby treat them as second-class citizens" (2018, 2). I argue universally "othering" Muslim cultural difference creates epistemically violent everyday conditions that make it difficult for Muslims to live as equal members of British society and through persistent harm, silencing and exclusion.

To begin making sense of these conditions, I draw on a qualitative study that centres hijabi experiences of being and living under the shadow of ideological culturalism. Drawing on those testimonies, I advance the concept of "everyday culturalism", that is the localized enactment of Muslim-centric ideological culturalism. Everyday culturalism creates and maintains the Muslim cultural "other", as well as citizen judges of cultural normality. The white gaze, the only legitimate social standpoint, judges hijabis and fixes them to culturalist discourses in routine interactions. The naturalization of everyday culturalism has been accelerated through inclusion in the policy agenda. Most notably, post 9/11 security strategies have positioned ordinary civilians as a vigilant network of citizen informants under the guise of counterterrorism (Kundnani 2015). Surveillance practices based on the culturally evocative category of "British values" were formalized into law with the 2015 Counterterrorism and Security Act to place a duty on ordinary members of civic institutions to monitor and report any "failure to uphold British values". This served to legitimize cultural profiling by, and of, ordinary citizens, undermining everyday convivial cultural plurality.

In construing ideological culturalism as the overarching framework for understanding hijabi identity, I will first set the contemporary context; second, I will draw on Michel Foucault (1976, 1977) and Anthias (2008) work for analytical precision around identity, discourse, agency and resistance; as well as, third, describing the qualitative study; and finally, I foreground Frantz Fanon's post-colonial framework (2008, 1994) to discuss the everyday regulation of racialized people in the context of a qualitative study that centres young hijabi women living in Greater Manchester. Three interwoven themes elucidate how the young women defer to, negotiate, and resist everyday culturalism: the white scripted hijabi subject; harm, silencing, and exclusion; and resistance through re-narration.

Culture wars: the veil in contemporary British discourse

The normalization of culturalism as the blueprint for understanding Muslims in western Europe is intertwined with the steep rise in the presence of far-right movements. Support for such parties has grown since the 1990s, but moral panics induced by the arrival of non-European migrants and the spate of "homegrown" terrorist attacks have propelled ideological culturalism from the political fringe to the heart of liberal democratic policy agendas (Mudde 2019; Fekete 2006). While the term far-right subsumes a broad spectrum of parties and movements, they all share a commitment to nativism (Mudde 2019). Nativism is an ideology that privileges the "native's point of view" and the "native" exclusively on the grounds of *being* "native". It intersects territory and "native" inhabitants with exclusive access to resources because "we" were here before "them". In this ethnocultural formulation,

national membership is hereditary and conferred at birth (Mavrommatis 2021). Yuval-Davies (2011) asserts the concept of autochthony to fully understand far-right claims. Autochthony is a type of racialization that imagines a pure, other-less nation. Unlike "old racism" that constructs boundaries of (un)belonging according to race and ethnicity, autochthony pivots around spatial/territorial partitions including origin, culture and religion as signifiers of problematic differences between groups. These observations are sustained by the discernible shift towards ethnoculturalism and explains why, despite significant policy variations within the broader far-right movement, all parties are unified in opposition to Islam in Europe stance (Godmin 2020).

That opposition imagines a monocultural nation that must be protected from Muslim cultures which are antithetical to "our" values, via robust assimilationist policies and immigration measures. Verena Stolke describes this political vision as "cultural fundamentalism" (1995, 5) designed to define and produce a culturally "pure" nation through policy agendas that uphold notions of western cultural supremacy. Culturalist nation-building and belonging hails not only culture, faith and race but also gender. As Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1989) argue, women's bodies are the symbolic place where human societies write their moral system therefore national belonging requires gendered cultural conformity. Islam-focused cultural fundamentalism insists Islam is bad for women's rights, locating veiled women as victims of Islamic patriarchy, whose oppression symbolizes broader, insurmountable differences between liberal "natives" and the illiberal Muslims. Such attempts have been forcefully rejected as the pseudo-emancipatory exploitation of feminist ideals, vilifying Muslim men to advance anti-Islam objectives and policies (Farris 2017).

The use of feminist language to oppose cultural plurality is not the sole preserve of the far-right, there is a secular, liberal, and progressive anti-veil discourse. Prominent feminist intellectuals, politicians and progressives also juxtapose multiculturalism with women's rights, and in doing so, became entangled with far-right aims (Phipps 2021). Leading feminist scholars rejected multiculturalism as "bad for women" (Moller-Okin 1999, 8) on the basis that minority cultural practices perpetuate female oppression, while simultaneously corroding the liberal bedrock of European societies, therefore, cultural plurality and feminism are irreconcilable. Moller-Okin targeted Islam as "rife with attempts to justify the control and subordination of women". In this worldview, Islamic gendered hierarchies allow male community members to determine the scope of belief and practice for the entire group, including women, which means Muslim women's freedom and dignity is unequal to that of Muslim men. The veil is considered emblematic of unequal gender dynamics within Islam, a visual symbol of cultural oppression and male force over Muslim women's bodies and sexualities (Farris 2017) Dovetailing with the far-right's mono-culturalist project through

assimilationist policies, feminist discourses compel management of Muslim minority rights through legislative reform, including the banning the veil. Such interventions are advocated as a form of progressive "culturocide" (Fekete 2006, 13), that minority women trapped in patriarchal minority cultures, within liberal majority cultures, would be "much better off if the culture in which they were born were to become extinct" (Moller-Okin 1999).

The idea that Muslim cultures are "bad for women" might have remained the primary discourse for understanding veiling, but for the post-9/11 security agenda. The Muslim-centric analysis of extremism redefined Islam from religion to extreme political ideology, ushering in a shift in the racialized gendering of veiled women. Existing constructions made way for veiling as symbolic of unwilling citizenship and the essentially violent, permanently foreign terrorist "other" in "our" midst (Haddad 2007). Within national security strategies, the Prevent agenda is notable in its aim to pre-emptively govern risk through the targeted securitization of Muslim political and religious lives and cultural symbols (Kundnani 2015). From its inception, Prevent has been steeped in ideological culturalism that insists Muslim unwillingness to integrate and celebrate "British values" creates populations vulnerable to radicalization (Khan and Mythen 2021). It has criminalized the entire community based on the assumption of a mechanical or "conveyor belt" process of radicalization by which an individual is propelled from cultural and religious conservativism to extremism (Kundnani 2015). Prevent seeks to interrupt this process through the ideational discipline of Muslims, by modifying their culture, rather than challenging structural inequalities and social attitudes.

This culturalist nucleus of Prevent was formalized into law under the 2015 Counterterrorism and Security Act, which includes a duty for a broad range of civic institutions to monitor "failure to uphold British Values" and have "due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism". The process of embedding ideological culturalism within institutional structures naturalizes the policing of cultural plurality by "racial profiling and state-sponsored Islamophobia" (Asquith 2015). As social perceptions filter through culturalist counterterrorism discourses and their insistence that cultural diversity and social solidarity cannot co-exist, embodied Islam is fixed to extremism and unwillingness to embrace "our" values. As such, counterterrorism in the UK has constructed Muslim cultural practice as "other". Indeed, the *niqab* was explicitly associated with Muslim separatism and contrasted with "British values" by the then Home Secretary, Jack Straw, who declared the *niqab* "a visible statement of separation and difference" making "better, positive relations between the two communities more difficult" (5 October 2006). Assimilating the veil into the fight against extremism has resulted in palpable adverse consequences for veiled women's rights, liberties, and safety (Zempi 2016).

To recapitulate, one of my aims is to reject ideological culturalism's fundamental assertion that individual identities are perpetually bound to their hereditary cultural category. Instead, I shall define identity as a continuing, contextually contingent, and often contradictory narrative communication of one's subjectivity (Yuval-Davis 2010) that is "formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us" (Hall 1996, 598). In what follows, I weave together Michel Foucault's (1976, 1977) ideas around the self as a site upon which socially and historically situated discourses act and Floya Anthias' (2008, 5) idea of "translocational positionality" for clarity on identity as multi-vocal, self-reflexive and agentic.

On identity: discourse, translocations, and agency

Societies naturalize certain epistemologies, which gain the status and currency of *default* sense-making discourses. These *discourses*, given their power relational constitution, determine, define and organize what counts as "genuine" knowledge, while simultaneously suppressing alternative perspectives. Discourses are circuitous processes, permeating the social body to tacitly define how subjects perceive themselves and others who are differentially located in relation to social structures (Foucault 1977). While hegemonic discourses are profoundly normalizing, they do not have the luxury of guaranteeing an epistemic totalization. This is because, as discourses, they present possibilities for resistance and self-empowerment, as well as submission and obedience (Foucault 1976). Agency is derived from communicative practices between multiple social and historical positions that allow reflexive critique to counter-balance discursive domination with techniques of self-cultivation (McNay 1996). Of course, Foucault's critical theory is not wedded to any kind of emancipatory logic and vision, not least because he thinks there is "no single locus of great Refusal" (1976, 96). Instead, Foucault's ideas are geared towards self-cultivation, localized cases of resistance made possible by self-reflexive critique.

Turning now to Anthias's concept of translocational positionality (2008, 5) which describes identity as relational and involving inter-connections between social group categories. While translocational positionality draws on intersectionality, it is not equivalent to intersectionality. For, construing identity positions as locations involves not just fluid and overlapping identities, but also conflicts and inherent contradictions in multiple locations. Because translocational identities are unavoidably relational and self-reflexive, with each location functioning as a counter-discourse that enables comparison and self-evaluation, they logically resist naturalization and subjection to any single discourse. The internal logic of these identities constitutes a specific type of agency, namely the kind of activity set against

the backdrop of intersubjective negotiations enabling individuals to name, question and defy received discourses and do so with intention (Ghorashi 2016; Harding 2004). Furthermore, translocational positionality disrupts the central claim of ideological culturalism, reducing cultural heritage to one of many intersecting and contingent subject positions.

The study

The qualitative study reported on here gathers the reflections of 18 young hijabi Britons living in Greater Manchester, aged 18–26, who self-identify as Muslim and wear the hijab. Of those, 11 always wear the hijab in public places, 5 wear it most of the time and 2 during festivals and when visiting sites of religious significance. They were recruited using purposive sampling through existing community ties. Mancunian Muslims make up 15.8% (79,486) of the city's population (World Population Review 2022) and the vast majority of UK Muslims are of Pakistani descent.

It is worth unpicking the research process and researcher-participant nexus as sites that hail structurally embedded translocational positionalities. I am a Muslim woman of Pakistani heritage who wears the hijab in contexts where religious deference takes primacy. I perceive myself as negotiating similar discursive constellations as the participants in relation to imperial white-supremacist patriarchal dominations, including the discourses of assimilation described earlier. I approach theorizing British Muslim identity as localized "liberatory practice" (hooks 1994, 59) fundamentally linked to processes of self and collective (re)narration. Each implies the other, there is no gap between the lived experiences of being Muslim, engaging in Muslim-focussed social justice work and researching and theorizing. As such, and to ensure methodological rigour I deployed "strong objectivity" (Harding 2004, 11), a self-reflexive analysis of positionality that confronts pre-existing biases coupled with conscious engagement with hijabi standpoint to access a more rigorous form of objectivity than traditional, "value-free" models that obscure and reproduce existing ideologies arising from social positions and scholarly training.

My positionality as both community-insider and researcher-outsider presented opportunities and challenges. At times, participants referred to me as "sister", recognition of commonalities in our intersecting subject positions, facilitating acceptance and rapport for a deep and granular engagement in both English and heritage languages. Conversely, occasional shifts in power dynamics resulting from fluctuation between "sister" and "researcher-outsider" disrupted rapport, creating some discomfort. Such occurrences were navigated through transparency and collaborative reflection, a process that enhanced overall ethical proficiency in the research setting (Chadwick 2021).

The research design consisted of two interconnected phases of qualitative research to access multiple levels of information. The first phase comprised of two focus group discussions lasting between 90-120 minutes, followed by individual semi-structured interviews. The sequential format allowed various levels of information gathering. Focus groups foregrounded group reasoning and collaborative dialogue to find dominant social representations of the veil circulating within the group, allowing their collectively constructed discursive positions to emerge (Litosseliti 2003). In-depth interviews generated "thick" narrative accounts (see Geertz 1973) of participants' experiential awareness of issues emerging from the group discussions. The data analysis involved transcription and subsequently, the constant comparison method, a core aspect of the grounded theory approach, which alongside purposive sampling, (Strauss and Corbin 1998, 28–52) ensured categories and themes were identified from British hijabi realities.

With the two sequential phases, saturation seemed to have been reached. Raw data was subject to open and axial coding, the outputs of which were grouped into ideas and then finally, clustered into broader categories to identify recurrent themes. While various issues arose from the data analysis, special attention was paid to participants' experiential awareness of being visibly Muslim within current social conditions and three notable themes emerged.

The white-scripted hijabi subject

The most salient theme arising from the data can be dubbed "the white-scripted hijabi subject". Participants testified to being addressed in ideologically embedded ways, whereby their personhood is simultaneously erased and re-inscribed as the Muslim "other" during interactions. The usage of "white" rather than "non-Muslim" mirrors participants' language, whiteness was invoked more often than non-Muslimness. Further, "racism" and "Islamophobia" were used interchangeably aligning with Modood's (2018) argument that Islamophobia has religious and cultural dimensions, but equally bears a physical appearance and ancestral component making racial and religious discrimination inseparable. Yasmin pithily describes that inseparability here:

> People say you can't be racist to Muslims because we're not a race. Can they not see my brown skin? I never know if racists are telling me to get back to my own country because of my skin or my hijab.

In the following testimonies, the hijabi subject is produced from the standpoint of a white spectator who disintegrates her personhood re-inscribing it in line with dominant projections.

> Hafsa: I've stopped talking about why I wear a hijab with white people. They've made their minds up before I open my mouth. They just

need to see my brown skin and headscarf. "Hafsa, come on, you can't tell me women dress like that because they actually want to" or "Does your dad make you do it?" They say ignorant, racist stuff all the time. I can't stand it.

Yasmin: It's true. They just need to see us to tell us what they already think. Like my friend's mum, white, obviously. I was at her house, and she started making this big thing about helping me if I wanted to dress like her daughter, how I deserve to be able to live how I want … she even said I had permission to take my scarf off at her house and be free. She actually said that. I'm fine as I am, thanks.

Foucault's disciplinary gaze is a social standpoint that is a "productive and normalising force that makes it possible to quantify, classify and punish" (1977, 184). While the disciplinary gaze as localized enactment of structurally embedded discourses is essential for understanding how everyday culturalism functions, Foucault occludes how racism moulds the structure of power and how bodies are regulated in space and place. The symbolic and material intersections of culture and race, of brown skin and Islamic embodiment, are central to the regulation of the racialized Muslim women. To understand how the disciplinary gaze addresses them in structurally embedded ways, the analysis is developed using Frantz Fanon's post-colonial framework (2008, 1994).

Fanon's "white gaze" (2008, 95) is a viewpoint embedded in the anti-Black power configurations of colonial society. During interaction, the Black body is vulnerable to the white gaze, it is overdetermined from the outside (2008, 95) and has no resistance to the moment of perception when Black personhood is reduced to the epidermal and, therefore, to racist colonial ideologies. Fanon notes:

The white gaze, the only valid one, is already dissecting me. I am *fixed*. The Whites objectively cut sections of my reality … I see in this white gaze that it's the arrival not of a new man, but a new type of man, a new species. (2008, 95)

Reduced to the epidermal, Fanon finds himself disfigured, emptied of his own reality and re-inscribed. Conscious that his body means something else to others, he experiences himself through the white gaze, as a historically placed Black object, the Black "other". Hafsa and Yasmin's experiences resurrect Fanon, describing a powerlessness when being addressed by a white gaze that reduces them to the Islamophobic formations of ideological culturalism. Compellingly, they both note they are not required to speak, merely be seen as "brown skin and headscarf" to be placed within discursive systems.

The functioning of everyday culturalism described here intersects with Fanon's assertion that racialized people are vulnerable, simultaneously erased and reinscribed by the white gaze upon perception. Yet, to fully understand the specific social pathology of everyday culturalism at play

here, it is useful to synthesize those insights with his analysis of veiling in Algeria under French occupation. Fanon asserts the culture and gender locations of racialization were fundamental to the binary divisions between colonizer and colonized. Algerian society was essentialized as deeply patriarchal and symbolically fixed to the veil, which became a portal through which to denounce Muslim men as "medieval and barbaric", and pity Algerian women as "humiliated, sequestered, and cloistered" (1994, 38). Gendered and culturalized racism permeated the colonial imaginary to the extent that the everyday questioning Muslim gender relations became ordinary. Colonial entitlement to assume the role of righteous interrogator is illustrated by Fanon's example of "ritual questions" (1994, 39), disingenuous, cunning queries designed to elicit responses that confirm the culturalist prejudices of the speaker. The speakers in these accounts revive those rituals and the structural hierarchies in which they are embedded. Hafsa and her father are imprisoned in the colonial-era fantasy that veiling is synonymous with asymmetrical Islamic gender relations, while Yasmin is addressed through a notion of agency that is exclusively associated with Eurocentric symbols that are assumed to bestow emancipation. The myopic ritual questions endured by the women are emblematic of what Halleh Ghorashi labels the "culturalisation of emancipation" (2010, 77), whereby arbitrary cultural differences are essentialized to assert binary projections of inherently liberal or illiberal cultures. Relentless focus on Muslim gender relations deflects attention from pervasive gender inequality embedded in dominant cultures, functioning to give the impression that "western" women *qua* non-Muslim women are neither oppressed nor bound by gendered norms. This obfuscation serves to falsely fix emancipation itself to western cultures while patriarchy becomes the exclusive domain of Islam.

Participants inhabit complex, fluid, and sometimes conflicting subject positions, yet their narratives reveal a rigidification of boundaries between "native" and Muslim cultural practices. Discussing lifestyles, some participants described choices that transcend culturalist binaries, asserting faith and their right to fully participate in society. Strongly identifying as Muslim is not experienced as exclusive of other identifications claimed simultaneously, a phenomenon that has long been documented. Abu-Lughod (2002) notes that members of Islamic, Christian, and Jewish religious communities engage in merging holy texts and religious ways of life with modern practices and ideals without the need to harmonize them.

Zahra: I met my husband at university. Honestly, before I was married, I'd introduce him as my boyfriend, and the comments. One time, my friend actually thought it was ok to question me, she expected me to explain myself to her "how can you be Muslim and have a boyfriend?" Can you imagine how bold and entitled you have to be to ask that?

| Maya: | Yep, I get it all the time, "how can you wear a hijab and go out?" Being Muslim isn't about being perfect, I go out, so what? It's nobody's business. I'll mix it up and do what I want. |
| Amina: | I've had the going out one. A friend from uni invited me out. I didn't wear my scarf, because I only wear it when I want, and that time, I didn't want to, I wanted to wear a dress and heels. She couldn't stop asking me, what does it mean for me as a Muslim? Being in a bar, dressed, you know "like that" without a scarf? It meant nothing, I felt like a non-scarf day. |

Their narratives align with Anthias's (2008, 5) claims that identities are elastic, contextually contingent translocational positions that intersect, collide, and contradict. The young women note their choices are often fluid and conflicting, but that they do not need to meticulously reconcile all the identifications they lay claim to. Amina asserts "I'll mix it up and do what I want", foregrounding certain aspects of the self while consciously marginalizing others in line with specific contexts. Here, gender, consumption patterns and lifestyle choices are variously centred, and crucially for this paper, their accounts reject ideological culturalism's fundamental premise that identities are solely bound to hereditary culture. However, while the women retain an agency that enables both Islamic and "western" lifestyle choices, the disciplinary gaze rejects merging of identity positions as inherently problematic. Indeed, everyday breaches of culturalized boundaries between Muslimness and "westerness" are sufficiently jarring for citizen judges that they demand explanations for what they perceive to be transgressive behaviour.

The analysis demonstrates that, for the hijabi women in this study, there is little exteriority from ideologically aligned everyday culturalism. Their identities are reconstituted through white imaginations and positioned within dominant discourses. Everyday culturalism insists on rigidification between culturalized boundaries to the extent that perceived breaches are authoritatively challenged and even rejected. Despite this, there is evidence the young women consciously assert different identity locations without the need to meticulously reconcile them. Their testimonies undermine the argument that Islam is not liberal enough to belong in Britain and suggest some non-Muslim Britons are not progressive enough to accept the full and elastic lexicon of identities chosen by hijabi women. However, simply celebrating agency derived from translocationality would be short-sighted, underestimating the profound detrimental impacts of everyday culturalism.

Everyday culturalism: harm, silencing, and exclusion

This section focuses on the impacts of everyday culturalist "othering" experienced by participants. The data reveals two persisting themes: first, while the specific content of everyday culturalism varies, from explicit and

unambiguous to subtle and slippery, the impacts of harm, silencing and exclusion remain consistent. Second, the victims of cultural racism are subject to structurally embedded, complex, and contextually contingent identity translocations and the behaviour of perpetrators follows broader patterns of gendered white supremacy.[1]

Racism follows gendered patterns of whiteness that are embedded in white supremacist systems. Here, whiteness is understood as the racialized privilege of white skin that is produced by Eurocentric ideologies (Harris 1993). White supremacy necessitates a particular symbiotic configuration of white gender dynamics; white women's inherent virtues of purity, goodness, and victimhood require white men's rageful and punitive protection (see hooks 1981; Hamad 2019; Hill Collins 1990). In what follows, I examine the everyday violences of gendered whiteness as narrated by participants.

The idea of white male rage as punitive protection of the nation can be mapped on to anti-Muslim hate crimes. Burnett notes veiled women are most frequently victimized by white men who often justify hatred as patriotic protectionism or "public duty" (2016, 9). The white masculinities described in the following testimonies epitomize the rageful protection of national boundaries.

Khadija: I don't know a single hijabi who hasn't been told to "go home" at some point. It's just part of our lives. My cousin was walking alone, and this guy called her a "sand-N word" and shouted in her face, "get the fuck out of my country".

Maryam: I had to get off a bus once because a group of men were making monkey noises and calling me a terrorist and asking if I lived in a tent. I thought one of them might pull my scarf off.

Closer inspection reveals how the women's complex translocational positions (Anthias 2008), embedded in imperial, white supremacist patriarchal structures are variously hailed in these hate-filled occurrences. Khadija's cousin and Maryam suffer racial slurs and gestures blended with Islamophobic language, highlighting the inseparableness of race and faith in cultural racism (Modood 2018). Further, the gender positions of victims are contextually expedient for white male abusers as hijabi women make ideal victims. Not only is their faith membership undeniable for targeting purposes, but they are stereotypically gendered as submissive and powerless, therefore unlikely to retaliate. The impact of such hate is far-reaching and profound. Religious victimization hurts deeply because it constitutes a deliberate rejection of core personhood, inducing feelings of social exclusion, anxiety, and fear (Chakraborti and Zempi 2012, 272). Further, those multiple effects reverberate beyond the individual, eliciting "shared suffering" amongst target communities (Walters et al. 2020, 143).

While much current literature has discussed white male cultural racism in the context of hate crimes, intersecting structurally embedded privileges wielded by white women remain comparatively underexplored. During a group discussion about interfaith and race female friendships, Maryam and Aisha decried tacit cultural racism and lack of solidarity from white women who, they feel, are aware of the machinations of patriarchal power, who demand accountability and meaningful social change in gendered relations yet resist addressing racial privilege accorded by whiteness and their roles in reproducing white supremacy *qua* white people (Accapadi 2007; hooks 1981).

> Maryam:　White women should have our backs. They rant about feminism and stuff, so know how this shit works, right? Those same women say I can't be a feminist because I wear a scarf. When I tell them that's racism, they will literally pretend I'm mad, or I misunderstood. It's worse than being called the P-word, at least that's honest, in-your-face racism.
>
> Aisha:　Yeah, I get you. I stop being friends with racist feminists. I can't be around that kind of hidden racism, it's too hard. When you try to explain it, they still know best and talk over you … deny it … White women will never know racism and sexism at the same time, but they never, ever admit it.

Gayatri Spivak's "epistemic violence" (1988, 282–283) makes sense of experiences in which perpetrators of cultural racism deny being implicated even as they are held to account. It encapsulates the elimination of knowledges possessed by oppressed people through the privileging of Eurocentric epistemic practices. Here, knowledge around intersecting oppressions suffered by Muslim women is disappeared to privilege the single axis of power experienced by white female speakers. Kristie Dotson (2011, 236) examines the nature of epistemic violence in linguistic exchanges and asserts that it operates through the refusal of hearers to genuinely recognize those attempting to testify from oppressed positions "due to the hearer's pernicious ignorance". Pernicious ignorance is a type of illiteracy, intentional or unintentional, that harms another person or group (Dotson 2011). Aisha avoids further epistemic violence by self-excluding, making way for dominant forms of knowledge to maintain supremacy. While Maryam's testimony is discredited using Islamophobic tropes, a mechanism Fricker calls "testimonial injustice" (2007, 25), an epistemic violence perpetrated against members of groups whose testimony is disbelieved because of prejudicial stereotypes about those groups.

Abandoning strategic self-protection to demand justice and accountability from ideologically aligned people is risky. Studies show, young Muslims who assert their right to be conspicuously Muslim while demanding equality, do so knowing interactional insecurity may follow (Khan and Mythen 2021; Mir

2011). Hamad's (2019) analysis of female friendships across race and faith lines provides insights into the machinations of cultural racism and structurally embedded patterns of white femininity. Hamad asserts that pinpointing racism perpetrated by white women poses a threat to the cardinal virtues of white femininity and is ruthlessly eliminated to maintain the racial status quo (see also Di Angelo 2011; Hill Collins 1990; Phipps 2021).

> Zaineb: I was friends with a group of four white women. They'd been saying racist stuff for ages, and I'd let it slide. In my heart I knew if I said anything, I'd lose out, I was the only brown person. One day, one of them said something about bombing Afghanistan to save Muslim women who can't go to school and have to wear a burqa. It tipped me over the edge, How the fuck dare you say that so casually? Don't you know that Muslim women never get saved? They get killed. Are you going to save them once you've killed them and their kids with your bombs? It's just an excuse to steal the oil. After that I called them all out on everything they'd said and done.

Zaineb is induced to shed self-protective silence by an act of flagrant everyday culturalism that advocates for "saving brown women from brown men" through western military interventions (Spivak 1988, 93). She vehemently resists, noting the historical misappropriation of feminist ideals to justify genocidal violence and colossal wealth extraction from Muslim countries (see Ahmed 1992). From this point, Zaineb sets out on a quest for genuine testimonial recognition and justice, but as Dotson (2011) asserts, successfully holding privileged positions accountable for epistemic violence "on-the-ground" is virtually impossible. Upon being probed about her friends' reactions to her resistance, Zaineb testifies:

> I can't tell you how bad their reaction was … what they did to defend themselves was even more racist than the things they'd already done. The words weren't even out of my mouth, and they denied everything, told me I got it wrong. When I wouldn't back down, they said I was a bully and made people feel bad, that they couldn't be around me anymore. One said the way I was talking was aggressive. The other one just went completely silent, didn't even acknowledge me. The worst was the one friend who privately admitted she'd witnessed some of the racism, but never spoke up, she just disappeared. Never did the right thing.

Zaineb's demand that her friends take responsibility for their racism is denied, instead she is discredited, disowned, silenced, and excluded. Accustomed to absolute epistemic privilege, the white women experience being held accountable as harm. This process is illuminated by Hamad's concept of "strategic white womanhood" (2019, 105) an interactional and linguistic mechanism that allows white women to marginalize racialized women who challenge racism. Hamad claims white women typically deny racism when

they are challenged, instead labelling the act of pointing out racism as the real, and only, aggression. In this way, they can reverse the roles of victim and oppressor, returning to the structurally sanctioned victim status of white femininity to shield themselves from accountability and thwart racial justice in interactions. Hamad further contends, white women often forbear from correcting each other's racism, to collectively implement epistemic violence. Here, "pernicious ignorance" (Dotson 2011, 236) is a joint enterprise, mobilized through collective denials and role reversal, argumentation, admonishment, and complicit silences. Epistemic privilege conferred by whiteness *is collectively denied as it is communally wielded* to erase an ideologically insubordinate testimony. For Zaineb, the mental health costs of sustaining white femininities are profound:

> I was traumatised, they tipped me over the edge, I had to go to the doctor for help. Not one of my friends backed me up … they're all still friends without me. White people stick together. That's how racism works. That's the price you pay for standing up as a Muslim.

Maryam, Aisha, and Zaineb's testimonies lend texture to empirical evidence that shows two decades of endemic Islamophobia has created the necessary social conditions to induce acute negative mental health outcomes for Muslims (Awaad et al. 2021). Further, the data presented in this section inverts longstanding, often cited claims that the failure of multiculturalism in Britain can be indexed to self-segregationism amongst Muslim groups who have failed to integrate (Casey 2016). On the contrary, persistent everyday culturalism operationalized by structurally embedded whiteness cumulatively erodes convivial social relations through localized harms, practices of epistemic silencing and exclusion.

Resistance through re-narration

The experiential vignettes presented thus far demonstrate how everyday culturalism produces space and place that connects complex, structurally embedded identity translocations to processes of harm, silencing, and exclusion. However, while it would be easy to think that those subject to persistent everyday culturalism are rendered powerless, participants' overriding responses were prideful resistance through an ethics of self-cultivation geared towards re-narration.

Muslim identities, like those of other minority ethnic groups, have long been expressed in relation to, and as resistance against, exclusionary racist discourses (Modood 2005). Commensurately, the participants' narratives show a symbiotic process between their objectification as the cultural "other" and re-narration of their subjectivities as a form of localized refusal, prideful resistance, and political mobilization.

As colonial and contemporary discourses perpetually re-invent the veiled prototype to suit shifting ideological ambitions for Muslim populations, Muslim women *reactively* and with prideful resistance devise counter-proto-types (Ahmed 1992; Fanon 1994). The manifestation of veiled counter-proto-types as resistance transcends history and national boundaries. Fanon (1994) describes a historical dynamism in veiling practices related to the develop-ment of colonialism in Algeria, when the veil was removed in service of revo-lutionary action, rather than acquiescence to French propaganda. Conversely, Haddad documents the post-9/11 emergence of "hijab as icon" (2007, 253), as increasing numbers of women chose veiling as a public defiance in the face of the vitriolic Islamophobia that took hold in the public domain. While Alayan and Shehadeh (2021) demonstrate that Palestinian counter-prototypes are highly attuned to the specific spatial conditions of political subjugation. In the West Bank, where interactions are limited to tense encounters with sol-diers, women don the hijab as a "defiant symbol against the Israeli occu-pation" (2021, 1051). In East Jerusalem, their veils still symbolize identity and resilience, but embodied defiance is consciously muted in consideration of how they might be perceived by Jewish-Israeli civilians. The conscious, pri-deful, and reactive resistance demonstrated by this literature resonates with the accounts of Mancunian hijabis in this study. Noor's resistance takes the form of a rational, cost–benefit analysis, calculating the personal costs of defiance versus strategic self-muting.

> Noor: For me, if you speak up you lose, if you don't speak up, you lose. If I speak up and defend Islam, I face more racism … if I don't speak up it hurts me inside for a long time. I let myself down, I let my community down. Might as well speak up, at least that way I have myself respect … I'm proud of who I am, the pain of speaking up is worth it.

Noor decides augmented feelings of self-worth, pride and self-respect derived from defending community and religion, outweigh the potential social costs. Her statement is the distillation of discursive agency, a volitional capability of resisting subjugation to cultural racism, asserting instead, a pri-deful, positive Muslim social identity. The ability to imagine oneself otherwise is also apparent in the following conversation.

> Chaman: It's important to me when people say things about my scarf or Islam that I defend myself, it's hard to do it, but I can't control what they say in the papers and online, but I can defend myself and be proud of myself. I feel good explaining why they're wrong about me, about my religion.
>
> Rani: To be honest, sometimes I love it when that happens when people assume stuff about me because of my scarf or my religion. I love taking my time to show them they're wrong, that they are just plain racists. Holding a mirror up so they can see themselves makes me feel better.

The women's demand for *genuine* (as opposed to ideological and white-mediated) reciprocal recognition is clear. They reject being positioned as culturalized objects and insist on narrating their own experiences. In doing so, they demonstrate the bidirectionality of the social gaze, here it is raised by Rani to "hold a mirror up" to whiteness; a lucid act of resistance and self-care that engenders pride. These testimonies bear out existing scholarship that reports a positive relationship between accentuating Islam's positive attributes and mental well-being amongst Muslims (Abu-Rayya et al. 2016) and that public defence of Islamic symbols and beliefs stimulates self-worth (Khan and Mythen 2021). While the accounts show re-narration supports agency, allowing a counter-narrative that subverts everyday culturalism, participants understand that localized resistance is not linked to the dissolution of ideologies.

> Yasmin: I go on marches for Palestine, our Shia group collects literally tonnes of donations for local food banks, and I went on the BLM march. For me, this is about being a good Muslim. I do it for myself, know I did the right thing. I know nothing's going to change in Yemen and in Palestine, I know racism won't end just cos I march.
>
> Hafsa: I know, in our lifetime we won't see a free Palestine or less racism. But I won't stop marching because I do that for me. It's funny because when we went on that BLM march, I was thinking "I bet most of these white people are racist to Muslims in their lives, I bet they don't do the right thing when it really matters". Bad, isn't it? I was literally thinking, they're doing it for insta.
>
> Karimah: We don't have any real control. They are going to bomb our countries and racism is going to carry on. it doesn't matter if we stick up for ourselves. I only do it for myself when people are racist, so I don't feel like a victim.

The conversation again shows how activism and everyday defiance offsets victimhood and objectification. Despite individual-level benefits, there is an awareness that resistance is not emancipatory or linked to structural change. Both women note the permanence of racism and Islamophobia despite growing social awareness related to the movement for Black Lives and that western influence in, and extraction from Muslim countries continues apace (see Andrews 2021). Therefore, the analysis is careful not to overstate the transformative potential of resistance through re-narration and aligns with Foucault's conception of agency as discursively confined (1976).

Conclusion

Ideological culturalism is everywhere, contouring space and place via the abundant tacit and explicit forms of everyday culturalism described by the

young hijabi women who took part in this study. Their testimonies illustrate that the significance of being and living as the visual distillation of Muslimness cannot be over-stated. Not simply another "other", they are normalized as the absolute opposite to the notion of "Britishness" itself. The grounded theory informed qualitative study centres their testimonies to present a deep and granular understanding of three emergent themes: the erasure and re-inscription of hijabi selfhood to reflect dominant discourses; persistent explicit and tacit violence, silencing and exclusion; and translocational positionalities that allow reflexive resistance and re-narration for powerful, yet ultimately non-emancipatory benefits. My argument consolidates existing literature and advances novel insights into how everyday culturalism follows patterns of gendered white supremacy. It evidences differences in how white men and women wield whiteness against hijabi women, while highlighting that regardless of the form, the functions of harm, social exclusion and negative mental health outcomes remain consistent. This contribution intends to provoke dialogue between scholars in multiple disciplines and race-focussed policymakers who are invested in exploring the links between the psychological vulnerability of young Muslims and the hostile conditions of their lives.

Note

1. The gendered processes elaborated here, while derived from a small sample and non-generalizable, represent patterns of behaviour articulated by this group of participants.

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Data availability statement

Restrictions apply to the availability of these data. Informed consent was obtained with the understanding that the data would be retained for up to 3 years after the research is completed to achieve the research purpose that data would be destroyed within three years. That timeframe has now passed.

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