MUSLIMS IN THE UK AND EUROPE V

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INTRODUCTION – POWER, CREATIVITY AND ETHICAL IDENTITIES

This volume presents a series of papers from the University of Cambridge, Centre of Islamic Studies fifth Annual Postgraduate Conference held on 18 June 2018. The Centre of Islamic Studies annual conference aims to bring together work in this growing field and to provide a forum for critical reflection. The finished papers included in this volume were developed with only minimal editorial intervention. Alongside the proceedings from the Centre of Islamic Studies’ previous annual conferences, they aim to provide a series of snapshots which showcase the themes, quality and approaches of young and early-career scholars conducting research into Muslims and Islam in the UK and Europe. As in previous years, the focus is less on theology or comparative religion, and more on understanding Muslims’ experiences and forms of agency alongside an analysis of the social forces and historical contexts that have shaped these.

Two analytic concerns thread in and out of this collection. One feature that stands out across many of the contributions is attention to the forms of power within which Islam is being articulated in diverse ways in Europe in the contemporary moment. Ranging in their geographical scope from London to Berlin to Lisbon, these authors highlight the workings of different forms of power. Abdalla focuses on the secular liberal discourses of the nation-state, highlighting the ways in which articulations of liberal Islam in Germany are shaped by the secular tenets of the nation state. He argues, for example, that secular power is evident in interactions between worshippers and visiting groups, as their Berlin mosque becomes a space in which they seek to present themselves as intelligible dialogue partners for a wider national body of “concerned citizens” who are anxious about
illiberal trends in Islam. Another significant context for the articulation of contemporary Islam is the capitalist-consumerist marketplace for identities within which ethical and spiritual trajectories are worked out, which can be glimpsed in Khan’s account of a Sufi-inspired community hub in London. She describes how some who frequent this space, who are attracted by the opportunity to engage in spiritual practices without affiliating themselves to a Sufi order, also purchase Sufi paraphernalia as part of their cultivation of a “post-tariqa” Sufism. Another context highlighted in this collection are powerful transnational movements of scripturalist reform, such as those affiliated with the Deobandi school, which have shaped the contexts with which other expressions of Islam need to reckon. While Deobandi formulations of Islam are often sharply critical of charismatic Barelwi Sufism, Soares argues have they have also shaped the institutional expression of charismatic Sufism exposed to that criticism. He describes how Barelwi Sufis in Lisbon have adopted a Deobandi-style missionary-focused mode of organisation in order to assert a more self-confident public presence.

The second, complementary, concern evident in this collection is the desire to highlight the complex and incomplete ways in which power often works to shape expressions of Islam, always leaving room for individual agency and creativity. This can be seen, for example, in the concern, shared by several of the contributions to this volume, to challenge one-dimensional portrayals of the relationship between religious faith and social action. Rather than assuming that such relationships are fixed, as notions of “Muslim identity” and attention to visible sartorial markers often imply, these contributions instead draw attention to the diverse constructs which individuals of Muslim background fashion between their faith and the social contexts in which they act. Burney draws attention to the diverse kinds of
connection that women who participate in welfare initiatives and interfaith groups in southeastern England make between their Islamic faith and the wider society in which they act: that society being one which they seek both to sustain and to transform. Vince too focuses on the diverse ways in which religious education teachers in the UK make connections between their Islamic faith and their professional practice as teachers, which leads them to reject categorisations of their professional identity as “Muslim RE teachers”. Sairah-Alqasim’s contribution also shows that the relationship between Islam and law in the UK is diverse because of the range of different legal domains to which understandings of Islam and of Muslim needs can be relevant. One result is that it is hard to reduce these relationships to a single theological or conceptual framework, which complicates the task of prescribing a curriculum for “Islamic law” in the British context. Notwithstanding these challenges, she argues that it is important when developing legal educational curricula to highlight the fact of legal pluralism and the relevance of Islam to legal needs and norms for many people in Britain.

Thematically, these articles continue many of the concerns of previous years, such as a focus on social activism, law, secularism, and education. Two of the contributions strike new thematic notes, with their analysis of “post-tariqa Sufism” – that is, forms of Sufism in which allegiance to a personal, often charismatic, teacher, and affiliation to a Sufi order or brotherhood distinguished by its spiritual genealogy, are no longer central. Khan describes the case of Rumi’s cave, a community organisation in London inspired by the legacy of Jalaluddin Rumi. Founded in 2011 by a Sufi shaykh from Sudan, the organisation offers individuals a space in which to “cultivate their personal and spiritual development”. As a community hub, the space offers welfare services to the local community, regardless of religion, including a wellbeing café that seeks to combat social isolation;
it hosts talks on academic, philosophical, mystical and philanthropic topics, and attracts many who are “not necessarily inclined towards Sufi tradition”. It also functions as a mosque, hosting congregational prayers and a weekly khutba. The founding Shaykh teaches virtues of charity, humility, forgiveness and respect for the elderly, connecting them to the Qur’an and hadith and framing them as a spiritual journey towards God. Yet he does not make formal initiation or affiliation (bay’ah) to him or to a Sufi Order a requirement for participation. Khan refers to this as “post-tariqa Sufism”, arguing that such religiosity “blurs the boundaries between spiritual and Sufi”, challenging reified understandings of Sufism.

Soares also describes the emergence of a post-tariqa Sufism among Barelwis in Lisbon. Originally of South Asian ancestry, Lisbon-based Barelwis moved from Mozambique to Portugal in the aftermath of the 1975 civil war. At first they formed shared institutions with Deobandis, even though Deobandi scripturalism often frowned upon Barelwi customary practices. These tensions grew through the 1980s with the growing influence of Deobandi-aligned Tablighi Jamaat missionary movements, which led to the formation of separate Barelwi and Deobandi institutions. Soares argues that Barelwis adapted to the new context, and defended themselves against scripturalist criticisms, in part by recreating themselves as community-development charity and welfare institutions, and heritage preservation organisations, often acting in collaboration with local civic authorities. Barelwis in Lisbon also formed affiliations with institutions based in Leicester in Britain and increasingly focused on missionary activities after the style of Tablighi Jamaat. In doing so, they moved towards a post-tariqa configuration of Sufism in which features such as hierarchical master-discipline relations, spiritual contemplation, and notions of sacred geography, became less prominent.
While these two settings are marked by significant historical and political differences, in both cases post-tariqa Sufism emerges through a dynamic relation with cultural forms familiar to the local and national arenas. In Lisbon, collaborating with local civic institutions and adopting their organisational forms have enabled Sufi networks to contend with the power of scripturalist articulations of Islam. In London, adopting cultural forms such as the mixed gender community hub, and locally salient formulations of ethics and self-development such as “wellbeing” and “spirituality”, has enabled the institution to attract a public used to navigating a consumer marketplace of identities and sometimes wary of affiliating themselves with explicitly religious institutions. Yet amidst the undoubtedly significant emergence of post-tariqa forms of organisation, it is also noteworthy that in both cases, more traditional “tariqa” forms of Sufism remain present. Among the Barelwi networks described by Soares, traditional-style Sufi orders led by charismatic shaykhs claiming a spiritual genealogy have continued to operate, and play a critical role in cementing the transnational links between England, Mozambique, Portugal and India. In the London community hub described by Khan, the shaykh fosters an atmosphere described as “spiritual but not Sufi” yet also guides some attendees towards the possibility of formal adherence to an Order and towards regular spiritual practices. These findings on the interplay between different organisational forms and modes of adherence speak to but also nuance a broader recent scholarship on charismatic Sufism, which observes that diasporic contexts have sometimes seen new charismatic Sufi masters emerge and found new Orders.

Abdalla offers a contrasting account of the articulation of Islam with contemporary forms of power. His case study of a mosque in Berlin, opened in 2017, that promotes itself as LGBT-friendly and as a beacon of gender equality, offers a sophisticated analysis
of the emergence of a liberal Islam in relation to the national arena in Germany. He sees this not as a relation in which the Islamic is shaped by borrowing, negotiation and adaptation of multiple institutions and influences, but as one in which secular power has defined in advance the parameters of Islamic imagination and expression. He argues that secular power is evident in the ways the founders of the mosque describe Islam as needing to “catch up” with modernity, as defined by secular notions of progress; in describing their mosque as “up-to-date” and “viable for the future”, the founders constitute a reformed, liberal Islam by placing it within a distinctly secular temporality, in which there is no room for any “divine or extra-historical authority”. Abdalla presents this way of configuring Islam as part of a secular governmentality which reinforces the primacy of the nation state. Sermons are delivered in German at the mosque, with Arabic recitations of the Qur’an categorised as an aesthetic experience comparable to the enjoyment of an opera sung in Italian. Meaning is organised in a “secular-national paradigm”: national because German is seen as sufficient to conveying the Qur’an; and secular because the sacred is authorised not in its own terms but through appeal to the realm of aesthetics.

Burney describes a different kind of relationship between Islam and secularism in Europe, highlighting the agency of community activists in Britain who seek both to sustain the institutions of the nation-state and to reimagine them in ways that challenge secular norms. She writes against the grain of much Western academic and popular discourse which has tended to describe Muslim women as “passive victims of a patriarchal system inherent to their faith and culture, needing the ‘emancipation’ that only a secular, liberal system could provide”. Instead, she highlights the work of social activists active in sustaining community life in settings across Britain, for example by organising and participating in welfare initiatives. Burney argues
that in doing so, they embody a form of multiculturalism which has gone beyond seeking the political accommodation of diverse cultures, and seeks rather to contribute to a pluralist society through acts of “positive, proactive and engaged citizenship”. Crucially, in the process they maintain a distinctive and critical orientation to wider society, framing their participation as something that is both “very British” and that at the same time challenges a secular worldview. For example, her respondents value their participation in interfaith initiatives both as a way of contributing to wider society and building bridging ties beyond Muslim communities, and as a way of challenging the secularisation of British society which some see as a feature of “following European policies”.

Another significant feature of Burney’s contribution is her argument that it is important to move beyond studying only “visible and institutionalised forms of Islam”. Her focus is on community activism undertaken outside of explicitly Islamic institutions and by women who are not “visibly Muslim”, yet who nevertheless construe these forms of participation in terms of an explicit Islamic commitment. Her analysis brings to light the diverse ways in which such commitments can inform participation in wider society. This is a theme also taken up by Vince, whose contribution explores the self-understandings of religious education teachers of Muslim background in England. His larger argument is that analyses that foreground simplistic notions of religious identity as the primary attribute of a person of Muslim background risk obscuring the variety of social positions and contexts they inhabit, as well as the varying kinds of attachment that they form to religion. The teachers who were the subject of his study resisted a construction of themselves as “Muslim RE teachers”, finding such a categorisation reductive and arguing that “it doesn’t matter what religion you are as a teacher, it shouldn’t”. Some explicitly articulated their teaching professionalism in
terms of the ability to maintain a distinction between their personal faith and their professional role. At the same time, Vince shows how his respondents also fashioned a rich set of connections between their faith commitments and their profession. Some saw the act of teaching as fulfilling a religious duty to pass on knowledge; others described their faith as informing the kinds of ethical relation which they sought to maintain with their pupils, by putting a high value on attributes such as patience, humility and sympathy. He concludes that one-dimensional notions of “Muslim identity” underpinning the construct of the “Muslim RE teacher” – notions which often reduce Islam to visible identity markers such as “Muslim dress” – fail to account for the diverse and nuanced relations which individuals fashion between Islam and their work as professional teachers.

Sairah-Alqasim explores the complex relation between notions of “Islam” and another professional context in the United Kingdom: the legal sector. Her contribution assesses the call to include more detailed and better training in Islamic law within the legal education sector in Britain. The factors underlying such a call are diverse and include the number of law firms opening offices in the Middle East, the value of Islamic Finance transactions, the acknowledgement of Islamic wills by the Law Society of England and Wales, and the increasing prominence of Shari‘ah courts. Her study of the views of legal professionals and academics highlights that while the very term ‘Islamic law’ means, in the words of one respondent, “a lot of different things to a lot of different people”, almost all agreed that the current field of training did not meet the needs of legal practice in a variety of areas. These included Islamic family and inheritance law, Islamic finance, Islamic commercial law, public and private international law, faith-based schooling, human rights, halal food, arbitration, ethnic minorities and the law, and others. Such a wide set of concerns meant that knowledge subsumed under the category of
“Islamic law” was disparate and fragmented, characterised by “overlapping methodologies and ideologies that may not be obvious to someone outside the field”. One concern among her respondents was the lack of quality assurance of so-called expert witnesses. Another was the fact that much existing education tended to adopt a theological or historical perspective rather than a practice-based approach, leaving practitioners to resort to self-study to make up the gaps in their knowledge. Reflecting on the sector as a whole, Narmah-Alqasim argues that the teaching curriculum should at least acknowledge the existence of different legal systems, concluding that “Muslims are part of British life and therefore need to be represented in teaching in a way that reduces the view of Muslims as ‘other’ or Islamic law as ‘foreign law’.”

Several themes in this impressive set of papers pick up conversations from previous years’ discussions – such as the way that Islamic ethical identities and commitments shape and are shaped by professional contexts in Europe; and the way that citizenship and engagement in the public sphere are viewed as increasingly important arenas in which to reflect on and express the ways in which Islam can be relevant to life in Europe. The question of how Islam is configured by secular power remains a powerful paradigm in certain settings. New themes too are considered in these papers, such as the emergence of post-tariqa Sufism, where the task is to study the adaptations of traditions and institutions in ways that decentre but do not totally displace older forms of charismatic authority and connection. Taken together, these contributions constitute a significant and serious reflection on Islam as a lived experience in Europe, and attest to the ongoing vitality of postgraduate work in this growing field.

Dr Paul Anderson
1

‘Spiritual’ or ‘Sufi’?
Ethnographic Reflections from Rumi’s Cave

AYESHA KHAN

This paper is part of a larger doctoral study on contemporary Sufism amongst young British Muslims. This project is being completed at the Islam-UK Centre, Cardiff University panic.

Research Context

As Muslims arrived to Britain in large numbers after the Second World War, Sufism attracted very few people outside of migrant communities. During these periods, Sufism in Britain was mostly practiced within specific communities and propagated by migrants from the Muslim world. Spiritual practices were largely bound with ethnic identities as these communities prioritised the transmission of cultural and religious learning (Geaves 2009). This helped maintain the Sufi traditions of their places of origin, including their association with Sufi Orders (tariqas) and allegiances to spiritual guides (shaykhs).

Today young British Muslims are exploring Sufism in novel and innovative ways, as they are exposed to new Sufi shaykhs, tariqas and associations. This particularly began from the 1990s through the ‘Traditional Islam’ network (TI) which was promoted to defend Sufism against the growing influence of anti-Sufi groups, such as the Wahabbi and Salafi movements. This movement formed a link between scholars disseminating spiritual knowledge from Britain, North America, South Asia, Cyprus, Yemen, Mauritania, Syria and North Africa, as well as other regions, in an articulate manner, in the English language (Gabriel and Geaves 2014; Hamid 2014). As the focus was on scholarship and learning, it resulted in diverse communities coming together for the study and practice of Sufism.
This was sustained through the Internet and globalisation. Today, many young Muslims can access scholarship outside of the confines of their ethnic origins and religious orientations.

This paper discusses ethnographic fieldwork at Rumi’s Cave, an organisation which facilitates spiritual practice amongst young British Muslims, over a period of three months. The manifold nuances of contemporary Sufi expression are explored through the prism of methodological reflections and the conceptualisation of ‘post-tariqa’ Sufism. Furthermore, this study builds on some of the research questions proposed by preceding scholars, questioning how the term ‘Sufi’ can be rightly applied to a group or persons today (Gabriel and Geaves 2014; Jackson 2014).

Rumi’s Cave

Rumi’s Cave is a community hub based in London inspired by the legacy of Jalaluddin Rumi. The organisation was founded in 2011 by Shaikh Ahmed Babikir, a Sudanese Sufi Shaykh belonging to the Sammaniya Order. Many of the events are premised on Rumi’s universal teachings of love and community service. The Cave was created as a platform through which people could cultivate their personal and spiritual development and served to provide charitable services for local British communities. Rumi’s Cave also have active social media pages with several thousand followers. On Facebook, occasionally the Friday Sermon (Jumu‘ah khutbah) and the weekly spiritual reminders are livestreamed, gathering a national and international audience. Viewers can observe the event in real-time or replay the recording at their own convenience. Since it was first established, Rumi’s Cave have developed two sister bodies: Rumi’s Kitchen and Rumi’s Care, both of which prioritise community welfare of vulnerable adults. Rumi’s Kitchen is a weekly service for the vulnerable and homeless, providing free freshly cooked meals and supportive networks. Rumi’s Care also fosters better community relations by challenging issues of social isolation.
through a weekly wellbeing café and addressing problems of social exclusion through monthly hospital visits. The Cave itself is a ‘safe space’ in which managers and volunteers actively engage local communities, irrespective of their ethnic composition and religious leanings, hosting social and spiritual events and promoting sacred learning.

Methodological Reflections: Advantages and Trajectories

As the organisation had a Sufi impetus, my research interests in this field were embraced and considered pivotal for the understanding of contemporary Sufism. This support facilitated access into the field. During this study, I shared two primary features of my identity with the majority of participants: age range (18-35 years) and religion (Islam). Through my sartorial choices I could be identified as a ‘visible Muslim’ (Contractor 2012) by pairing the hijab with stylish modest wear. Like many attendees, I was also young, female and single, which created avenues for dialogue and interaction. Many of the participants were students or professionals, who quite easily understood my research topic and the reasons behind my presence at events. Nevertheless, during participant observation I stumbled across several impediments whilst trying to conduct informal interviews or when speaking to attendees about Sufism. Rumi’s Cave held multifarious events through which different types of speakers and presenters were invited, drawing different audiences each time. This ranged from academia, literature, religion, philosophy, mysticism to philanthropy, as well as social gatherings and congregational prayer. Thus, many people were attending for the purpose of the event and were not necessarily inclined towards Sufi tradition. Similarly, certain events were not hosted by the Cave. Staff at the centre sometimes invited external speakers and presenters, who were affiliated to other organisations. It was not always apparent that I was conducting research and not simply participating or observing. Although staff at Rumi’s provided me with consent, some external speakers felt they too
reserved this right. This led to some awkward conversations with the host and attendees, as to ensure an ethical research process, I felt I should clarify that I was carrying out research during an event and justify the reasons why.

Predominately, there were limited opportunities to have discussions with participants. When the opportunity had presented itself, I found people seemed disinterested to discuss my research, or Sufism more broadly, and preferred to socialise or form acquaintances. In addition to this, those who were attending events for the first time appeared self-effacing and reserved vis-à-vis regular attendees who had already formed their own cliques which were difficult to penetrate. Participants were also reluctant to share their thoughts and seemed apprehensive about the potential implications of sharing their personal experiences. On several occasions, I found people were indisposed to discuss the organisation as they were attending events hosted at the venue. They became conscious their views could be misconstrued if overheard by others and were concerned they would offend the organisers. Moreover, as a researcher I had to remain cautious, as religious experiences can be considered private, therefore asking questions could be deemed intrusive or invasive.

Fieldwork and Findings

When I first entered the building, I removed my shoes and placed them on the wooden shelf. I smiled as my eyes caught a glimpse of the sign: “please leave your shoes and ego here”. The room had a blue and white theme which was reflected on the painted walls covered with Islamic calligraphy and artwork for an upcoming exhibition. One side of the wall also contained a quote by Jalaluddin Rumi: “Your heart is the size of the ocean go find yourself in its hidden depths.” The audience was very diverse comprised of both men and women, with people belonging to different ethnicities and religious denominations. Dress wear and attire were not regulated,
and varied, from those opting to wear religious and traditional clothing to those without hijab and in Western apparel. Even the hijab styles were disparate! Many attendees were seemingly middle class and had been educated at a British university.

During the research, I found Rumi’s Cave functioned in different ways, including: a community hub, a spiritual centre, a creative space, a mosque (during congregational prayers), an academic platform and a charity organisation. Like many attendees, I shared the similar sentiment of Rumi’s feeling quite warm and homely, relaxing, inclusive and welcoming. I was informed it was each of these categories, as well as ‘family friendly’ and ‘open to all’ and the organisation provides people with a sense of community and a connection with Islam. There have been previous occasions where people have arrived whilst intoxicated or entered with shoes. They were not rebuked, rather their intentions were measured above their actions. One participant described how unlike mosques, “where people can come in and criticise”, the Cave is a “non-sectarian and non-judgmental place”. Musa Ibrahim told me:

“this is a place somewhere between a mosque and a night out. You have to be part of a clique in a mosque, this is more ‘chill’: ‘you can pray here’, as opposed to, ‘this is a place for prayer’...there are multiple benefits for attending events, such as networking, seeking knowledge, social activities, and people can work on their spirituality. There is no pressure, you don’t even have to pray, you’re welcome to just sit.”

Who Qualifies as a ‘Sufi’?: “You don’t have to be a Sufi to be at Rumi’s”

When discussing this research project with participants over lunch, one person jestingly asked me, “are there Sufis at Rumi’s?” This elicited a response from other attendees and people raised questions about who can rightly be considered a ‘genuine’ Sufi today. The group discussed Islam after the passing of Prophet Muhammad, when Muslims began separating religion (Islam), belief (Imaan) and the perfection of worship (Ihsan), instead of seeing them as
one entity. One participant responded, “…therefore early Sufis had to distinguish themselves – which is why they seemed to ‘separate’ themselves”. This led to conversations about contemporary Sufi practice and there were references to a concept of ‘performed Sufism’. Junaid Adam elaborated on this by commenting, “many people idolise a Sufi image and try to fit that, including some of those who attend events at Rumi’s.” The group spoke about how Sufi paraphernalia is both purchased and worn by many young people today so they can be identified as Sufis. For instance, prayer beads will be worn around the neck as a chain or used as a bracelet. This suggests a Sufi identity is formed through external appearance as well as internal spiritual practice.

During ethnographic research, I also spoke to people who attended events at the Cave but had no interest in Sufism. The events did not shape or inform their understanding of Islam. One manager told me this was common, “you don’t have to be a Sufi to be at Rumi’s”. However, most of the performers and speakers are on “some sort of a ‘Sufi spectrum’” and during events they will try to connect their message with the spiritual teachings shared by Shaykh Babikir. The Cave also brings together a unified community of artists, many of whom are inclined to spirituality. One artist professed she was spiritual but not Sufi. She shared insights into her intrareligious transitions. From her experience, Sufi communities and Muslims who were interested in a Sufi-flavoured Islam promote activities which cater to creative traditions. This allows artists and creative Muslims to feel at ease and find a network through which their work is appreciated, although they may not consider themselves as ‘Sufis’. Conversely, when she followed Salafism, she felt her creativity was restricted and she stopped playing musical instruments as it was deemed unlawful. The mawlid event held at Rumi’s Cave was her first experience of a Sufi gathering in Britain. She described this through the following words:
“it was very inclusive. People who came were genuinely interested in artwork, exhibition and performances. I felt there was spirituality in the room. Looking around people had their eyes closed. All dedicated to the Prophet. It was interesting to see women singing with men all in the same room.”

She also spoke of how “strange for her” to want to attend dhikr⁵ and mawlid gatherings as she has never joined in these previously. As her initial experience at the Cave was quite positive, it has encouraged her to explore Sufism by attending more events at Rumi’s in the near future.

**Pre-tariqa or Post-tariqa?**

Religious and spiritual engagement at the Cave is not prescriptive, which allows people the flexibility to proceed at their own pace. During an exchange with a regular attendee and volunteer I was given an insight into how he conceptualised the spiritual activities at Rumi’s Cave. It was amidst these discussions I noticed the similarities and differences in definitions of pre-tariqa and post-tariqa Sufism, and where the two could overlap. I was informed the Shaykh does not call for a formal initiation (bay‘ah) to him or his tariqa as a prerequisite for attending spiritual gatherings at the Cave. This may be considered pre-tariqa Sufism.

However, he does encourage attendees to discover their own spiritual path by searching for a Sufi Order which will meet their spiritual needs. He even refers them to spiritual events hosted by different tariqas and advises to recite litanies that are recommended by other Shaykhs. This helps navigate their spiritual journey towards regular and consistent actions as a form of spiritual training. Consequently, the Shaykh fulfils his role as a spiritual guide when interacting with attendees who visit the Cave, but this role will be different than a Shaykh who leads followers of a tariqa. It is therefore fitting my participant facetiously coined Rumi’s Cave as form of ‘tariqa-diet’, that is Sufism without bayah and ‘added sugars’. Many people have also attended events which were not
related to Sufism nor explicitly directed towards spiritual fulfilment. However, their interactions and conversations with other visitors, speakers and volunteers at the Cave have led them to either take an interest in Sufism or have resulted in taking initiation into a tariqa. This can be understood as post-tariqa Sufism.

Sufism through ‘Ilm, Sunnah and Khidma

Sufi practice at Rumi’s Cave is heterogeneous, through cross-gender conviviality, voluntary social action and community work, as found in earlier research on regional Sufi groups in Britain (Werbner 2002; 2003; 2009). Most of the work at the Cave has a Sufi-impetus, although the events may not explicitly promote Sufism.

One example is through charitable giving and serving others (khidma). As Rumi’s Cave is a registered charity, their work is devoted to support disenfranchised sections of British communities. During my research, alongside weekly soup kitchens, the Cave hosted a ‘Christmas Special’ event, comprised of over twenty volunteers and thirty attendees, belonging to different religious and ethnic backgrounds. Managers at the Cave had fundraised for the event and local British communities donated money towards food and gifts. I noticed how all the volunteers displayed genuine good character. They ensured the guests felt at ease and served them wholeheartedly, sitting with them for several hours and enjoining in friendly conversations. One volunteer told me, “they don’t ask attendees their circumstances or why they attend and neither do they turn anyone down.” The event was held in a mosque and guests gathered in the community hall as volunteers worked in the kitchen. One of the managers informed me the theme was important as festivities are a time of bringing people together and promoting solidarity.

As a participant observer, I was considered a volunteer more than a researcher, so as tasks were delegated I was requested to: set up
the tables, create paper chains for décor, serve food, cut several bags of onions for cooking preparation, dry cutlery and deliver presents to the guests. Men and women worked alongside one another whilst serving food, welcoming and registering guests, as well as cooking and cleaning. It was this ‘hands on’ experience which allowed me to appreciate the work of the organisation and volunteers, who had dedicated time, money and resources to this work. As a researcher, I could only fully appreciate and admire this work when my own body began to tire from working and standing for several hours. This event was quintessential of contemporary Sufi practice, as British Muslims used their cultural context to support their local communities. The work exemplified Sufi principles of hospitality, kindness and humility.

At Rumi’s Cave, Sufi teachings are also shared through sacred learning (‘ilm). As one attendee mentioned:

“a huge part of Sufi tradition is the dissemination of knowledge and sharing Sufi teachings, which is what Rumi’s does. This is what makes it ‘Sufi’ today… Shaykh Babikir implicitly delivers Sufi messages, even when discussing commentaries on the Qur’an”.

During observations in one of Shaykh Babikir’s classes, I noticed he shared teachings which were evidenced in the Qur’an and Hadith, such as, to help those less fortunate, to remain humble, to respect and take care of the elderly, and to be forgiving. He also advised to stay away from backbiting, swearing and jealousy, as they veil you by creating barriers between you and God. This takes you further away from Him and affects your spirituality. Instead, one should strive towards the love of God through good manners and actions. As Sufism is rooted in Islam, it is unsurprising these teachings can be found across both traditions. Consequently, the boundaries between what can be considered ‘spiritual’ and ‘Sufi’ lessons can be quite blurred, and in most occasions the two overlap. When the Shaykh discusses Sufism implicitly, by referencing sacred texts or the Prophetic example (Sunnah), he shares an under-
standing of Islam with everyone, irrespective of their religious leanings and denominational backgrounds. This dismantles reified understandings of Sufism, whether this stems from preconceived negative conceptions or romanticised notions.

**Sufism Online and International Jumuah**

As part of this research, I will examine the role of social media in contemporary religious expression by researching Sufi activity online. Rumi’s Cave run a professional website and are active on YouTube, Facebook and Instagram. Additional accounts, such as Rumi’s Care and Rumi’s Kitchen promote their charitable services. A timetable of events is also posted on the website, Facebook page and through a weekly newsletter delivered via email, which keeps users updated with key information about past and upcoming events. Gatherings that are held at the centre may be recorded and uploaded on social media, or livestreamed, to be observed online in real-time. This allows one to join a gathering without being physically present and observe an event at a time of their personal convenience. Furthermore, one can benefit from gatherings at a spiritual centre or from more than one teacher or guide, without committing to the groups’ traditions (see also Cheruvallil-Contractor 2014). Online streaming can be viewed by both national and international audiences.

On one occasion, I participated in the Friday prayer congregational gathering. The sermon was delivered in English and a stand was set up which held an iPad to livestream the event on Facebook. The speaker himself was a volunteer and not an Imam. He spoke in articulate manner, combining theoretical knowledge with practical advice on the topic of engaging with technical imagery. He told the listeners that although this was indeed a complex but necessary subject, and although it was “a bit random to quote this in a khutba...we can apply spiritual understanding to this scientific understanding”. The view that pictures and photography is
impermissible in Islam restricted many Muslims from engaging with technical imagery, however Muslims must interact with this to stay updated with modern technological advancement. He further warned listeners about the dangers of not doing so, such as being unable to stay protected from coded messages which can influence your thoughts in a particular way. In order to illustrate the advantages of technical imagery, the speaker gave the example of the sermon which was being livestreamed on social media, becoming internationally available. He informed the congregation that this innovation was part of the new era, but was made meaningful for our cultural context. He also related examples of an Imam who provides ‘Snapchat fatawas’7, explaining how this is an example of how someone has understood that technical image can be used wisely to better people’s understandings of Islam. Technology was used in the provision of the Friday sermon and featured heavily in its content, demonstrating the important role that this now plays in religious gatherings. This is most notable when the speaker referenced guidelines and warnings for using technical imagery, which shows that technology is being evaluated by religious communities through a lens of spirituality. As seen in this example, technology has presented a new avenue with which religious communities are interacting, both to expand their outreach, and to materialise spirituality in a new context. Researching Sufism online would therefore be an important element to understand Sufi practice in a contemporary context.

Next Steps for Research

Through this study, I seek to answer what are the current forms of Sufi expression amongst young British Muslims, what is the role of social media in contemporary religious expression and what does this new phenomenon tell us about Islam in Britain. I will observe whether the religious and sociological environment in Britain, in which Sufism is embedded and manifests, has led to the development of new Sufi trends. As this is an ongoing project, the
data analysis is currently incomplete. A tentative examination of findings indicates three primary points of consideration: the economics of Sufism in Britain, the transition of Sufi practice from ‘offline’ to ‘online’ contexts, and whether these forms of practice can be conceptualised through the lens of post-*tariqa* Sufism. Moreover, the economics of Sufism in Britain will explore the charity status of Sufi-affiliated groups that serve British communities and the role of social action. This will be supplemented with ethnographic research material from Guidance Hub, a Sufi-inspired organisation, as well as online research on the purchase of Sufi paraphernalia and the recitation of Sufi poetry on social media. Founded in Manchester, Guidance Hub was established under the patronage of Shaykh Muhammad Al Yaqoubi, a Syrian Shaykh belonging to the Shadhili *tariqa*. Like Rumi’s Cave, many of their events contain a Sufi impetus and the centre host charitable events to support local communities. I will compare and contrast the findings from research in London at Rumi’s Cave against the centre in Manchester. This will allow me to explore whether there is a ‘North-South’ divide and any disparities between religious practice in two different geographical locations in Britain. I will further examine whether concepts of ‘neo’ and ‘universal’ Sufism can be rightly applied to these groups.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the ethnographic findings at Rumi’s Cave reflect new forms of Sufi practice amongst young British Muslims. The Cave provides services equally for Muslim and non-Muslim communities to foster better community relations, whilst also taking responsibility for their social and welfare needs. Although the group’s mission statement is constituted on Sufi principles and has been established by a Sufi *shaykh*, it does not function in the same way as traditional *tariqas*. Rumi’s Cave brings people together from diverse backgrounds and denominations to express Sufi teachings, without calling for a formal initiation to any Sufi Order, or
allegiance to a spiritual guide. From this we can infer post-\textit{tariqa} Sufi expression. The multifarious nature of events, most of which have a Sufi-impetus, makes Sufism palatable for those of different religious predilections. My proposition to future researchers is to continue discovering this holistic approach to Sufism by exploring post-\textit{tariqa} movements in contemporary contexts.
The accommodation of Islam in contemporary Portugal, which occurred mainly from the early 1970s onwards, is usually equated with two fundamental historical processes: imperial cycles and migratory flows. Although this seems to reflect a common context with the Islamic presence in many European countries, it is distinguished by the relatively late phase of these cycles, with the Portuguese overseas empire ending in 1974, when the establishment of democracy in Portugal paved the way for the independence of the former overseas territories, and migration from Mozambique and Guinea Bissau (the ex-colonies which had a significant Islamic presence) only beginning to reach Portugal significantly in the 1970s and 1980s.

The relationship between these two processes – the Portuguese imperial project and the demographic reconfiguration of the metropolis resulting from migrations that followed decolonization – has been one of the main axes of analysis in the academic scrutiny of contemporary Islam in Portugal. This relationship has been frequently equated with other dynamics of expansion of Islam in modern times, namely with the spread of global Muslim networks that pursue specific religious, cultural, and political agendas and which intercept the historical context of Portuguese colonialism and post-colonialism. These networks, which can be conceived as projects of “alternate globalities”, presenting themselves as antidotes to a globalizing hegemonic movement motivated by
Western economic and financial interests, are also competing with each other, moving and expanding in an Islamic “transnational public space”\textsuperscript{10} where people and institutions circulate, and where the most “correct” way of conceiving and experiencing Islam is also debated and disputed.

The matrix of the contemporary Islamic presence in Portugal was established in the late 1960s and early 70s by Mozambicans whose parents or grandparents migrated from India, mainly from the state of Gujarat, to Mozambique at the beginning of the 20th century. It was in colonial Mozambique that they were born and raised until, during the bloody civil war that followed independence in 1975, they were forced to relocate to Portugal. Today, as in other countries with a significant Muslim population of South Asian ancestry, most of Portuguese Sunni Muslims are aligned with one of two global/transnational schools of religious thought that emerged as reformist movements of Islam in 19th century India: The Deobandi school, that follows a scripturalist orientation, and to whom the Qur’an and the Hadith are the essential foundations of religious knowledge; and the Barelwi movement, that legitimizes customary practices and beliefs, transmitted across generations and from master to disciple, synthesizing aspects of Sufism with the Shari‘ah and a particularly intense devotion to the Prophet\textsuperscript{11}.

Several researchers show how this bipartite configuration derives largely from the interaction of globally competing Islamic projects with colonial power in Africa and, later, with the communities that shaped the presence of Islam in postcolonial Portugal. Machaqueiro, for example, showed how colonial authorities in Mozambique interacted in different ways with the deobandi-inspired Islamist currents and with the Muslims linked to the Sufi turuq, alienating the former and seeking to co-opt the latter to establish a modality of “Portuguese Islam” that could facilitate the management of religious diversity in overseas territories during the colonial war\textsuperscript{12}. Vakil pointed out that this idealized concept of a “Portuguese
Islam”, malleable to the cultural context and essentially assimilationist, was mobilized already in the 60s and 70s by the leaders of the first Islamic communities in Lisbon to present the Muslim community to the political power as fully integrated into Portuguese society and not subservient to the expansionist projects of pan-Islamic transnational movements. Since the 1980s, the growing influence of transnational missionary movements of a scripturalist inclination, especially the Tablighi Jamaat, in the Muslim communities residing in Portugal was stressed by Vakil, while other researchers have identified intra-Islamic tensions arising from differentiated alignments with deobandis and Barelwis among migrants from Pakistan and Bangladesh who had arrived more recently to the country, as a result of migratory logics already disconnected from the colonial past. The antagonisms identified at the time, and which resulted in the creation of separate spaces of worship for communities that had hitherto prayed together, seemed to materialize at a national / local level a set of tensions that typified the interaction of these movements in the Islamic transnational space. Since the late 1980s, this growing polarization of the Portuguese Muslim arena has created a very asymmetrical setting in what concerns to doctrinal affinities, with the deobandi mosques assuming great preponderance, supported by a local secular and religious school that provides them autonomy in the formation of the clergy, while Muslims aligned with the Barelwi movement are found only in two small mosques, where congregations do not exceed a few hundred believers.

**How to Sustain a Barelwi Mosque? Searching for Clues in the Periphery**

It is precisely in one of these two Barelwi places of worship, the Al-Qadriyah mosque, that I have developed ethnographic work since February 2018, within the scope of my doctoral program in anthropology. In this context, I try to discern how this particular congregation negotiates and legitimizes religious norms promoted globally by transnational movements and schools of thought in the
face of local or national challenges and constraints. However, these local conditions assume here a central role, since, at the outset, they seem to dictate an extremely peripheral condition for the Portuguese Barelwis. In fact, if this doctrinal orientation is traditionally based on the relationship with holy men (pirs) and spiritual masters (murshids), on the access to sacred places bearing barakah and to other charismatic resources, the absence of sheikhs from Sufi turuq, and even of its delegates (khalifas), in the Portuguese territory seem to turn Portugal in a problematic country for the sustainability of Barelwi Islam.

Thus, the main goal of this project is to identify and characterize strategies of sustainability among these Sufi-aligned mosques in countries such as Portugal, that are very peripheral in relation to the spiritual and political centers of Sufism – and to transnational context that informs the identity and religious imaginations of these congregations. My working hypothesis is that, in the absence of local charismatic resources, the Portuguese Barelwis capitalize strongly on references from their colonial past (in the case of those coming from overseas provinces) and feed on the occasional presence of sheikhs, ulama, khalifas and missionaries who circulate in the transnational space of “charismatic Islam”, passing fleetingly and irregularly across Portuguese territory.

However, the postulate of this hypothetical ultra-peripheral condition must necessarily be put in the context of recent theories that point to deep reconfigurations in the dialectic between center and borders in a religious context. Beyer, for example, underlines that as globalized structures, contemporary religions have become “multi-centered such that the claim to authenticity and authority of any particular variation is no longer nearly as much dependent on geographic location, concentration of adherents or longevity of existence”. This formulation may be useful for examining the Barelwi mosques and their respective transnational circuits as particular examples of what Hermansen16 call post-tariqa sufism,
new articulations of the sufi networking in which attributes traditionally associated with Sufism – strong hierarchical relationships between master and disciple, emphasis on contemplative spiritual practices, importance of *barakah* radiating spiritual centers – are metamorphosed or assume a secondary role as a way of adapting to various circumstances of modernity.

But, first of all, and in order to examine how Portuguese Barelwi mosques mobilize resources that allow them to sustain themselves in this seemingly adverse environment, it will be useful to look briefly at the first decades of the “new Islamic presence” in Portugal, and to some of the doctrinal cleavages (and associated transnational affiliations) that contributed to shape the contemporary Islamic panorama in Portugal.

**Doctrinal Schisms in the Outskirts of Lisbon**

In colonial-era Mozambique, since the 1950s that the sufi *turuq* that had arrived in the territory in the late XIX century, contesting the old Islamic Swahili authority, faced the opposition of Deobandi missionaries and of a new generation of Islamic clergy trained in Qur’anic schools of the Arabian Peninsula. During the colonial period and also after independence, in 1975, Sufis and scripturalists disputed the favours of the political power and tried to undermine each other’s exclusivist allegations of “orthodoxy”. This resulted in the formation of two Islamic superstructures that incorporated mosques and madrasas across the country: the Islamic Council, aligned with the deobandi movement, and the Islamic Congress, that favoured a more charismatic religiosity and managed to congregate most of the Sufi *turuq* in the provinces of the North.

This means that, when Indo-Mozambicans arrived in Lisbon in the late 1970s and early 1980s, they already reproduced a wide variety of affiliations to more customary or more scripturalist forms of Islam. But, in a country where not a single mosque existed, these
differences were, at the beginning, put on hold and priority was given to the construction of mosques that could accommodate Islamic worship as a whole\textsuperscript{19}. In Almada, the Al-Madinah mosque was the first to be inaugurated in Portugal, in 1982, and the following year saw the inauguration of the Aisha-Siddika mosque, in Odivelas. Only after the foundation of these places of worship in the suburbs was the Central Mosque of the capital inaugurated in 1985, and given its central status as headquarters of the Islamic Community of Lisbon and main focus of visibility for Islam in Portugal.

The first 15 years witnessed a sometimes precarious coexistence of different religious sensibilities in the mosques of Almada and Odivelas, where religious practice common to all Muslims was complemented by rituals and events specific to each doctrinal inclination. At the beginning of the 1990s, with the growing presence of the Tablighi Jamaat missionaries in the governing bodies of the associations that run these mosques, the coexistence of distinct doctrinal inclinations became somewhat problematic. The annual celebration of the \textit{mawlid} (the birthday of Prophet Muhammad, whose signalling is not accepted by Wahhabis and Salafis), the reception of foreign guests to conduct devotional music sessions (\textit{mehfil}) in the prayer room and to lecture about contested religious particularities was increasingly questioned by members of the congregation aligned with a scripturalist religiosity. Speaking nowadays about this period, deobandi Muslims avoid considering these religious events as un-Islamic or as unacceptable innovations (\textit{bid'a}), and prefer to emphasize their unsuitability to the sacred space where they were performed: “these practices are not forbidden by Islam, but a mosque is not the proper place to do perform them”, states a former imam of the Odivelas mosque.

The schismatic process in Odivelas and Almada occurred almost simultaneously, more due to the same climate of growing tension among Indian Muslims of the Lisbon area than to a concerted
strategy on the part of the leaders of both communities. In the Al-Madinah mosque, for example, the turning point arrived when, at the end of an event conducted by an Indian sheikh who was visiting the mosque, several Muslims stood up to send greetings (*salaam*) to the Prophet. According to a strict scripturalist interpretation, this ritual component can indicate that the status of the Prophet is somewhat different to that of any other deceased person – i.e., that after his death, Muhammad inhabits some intermediate realm between the living world and the afterlife, and somehow, in certain conditions, he can be present among the congregation – and is therefore considered a forbidden innovation. This is the basis for the derogatory epithet “salami”, with which deobandis sometimes classify Barelwi Muslims. In any case, the sending of greetings to the Prophet on that day was followed by protests from other Muslims, who loudly expressed their disagreement inside the prayer room and, after the event, clearly stated that this could not happen again, as it was contrary to “proper Muslim behaviour”\(^20\).

As a consequence, in the mid-1990s, a minority group of Muslims that favoured Sufi-inspired Islam stopped attending prayer at the Al-Madinah (Almada) and also Aisha Siddika (Odivelas) mosques and established two new places of worship: the Ahle Sunni wal-Jamaat madrasa (currently the Al-Qadriyah Mosque), in the municipality of Almada, founded in 1996, and on the following year the Kadria Ashrafia darul-uloom (currently the Gausiyah Mosque) in Odivelas.

At that time, the survival of these new mosques seemed doubtful to those Muslims that stayed behind, and even to the members of the new congregations themselves. “They said we wouldn’t last three months”, confided one of the founders of the Ahle Sunni wal-Jamaat madrasa, “but here we are still, after all those years”. The fact that there were no international institutions linked with Barelwi Islam formally established in Portuguese soil, the minority status of Portuguese Muslims who identified with this school of thought
and the almost null expression of turuq or Sufi orders in the country seemed to indicate that Portugal was too peripheral in relation to the usual transnational circuits of “charismatic” Islam, where human, spiritual and material resources circulate to fulfil the needs of Muslims who identify with the Barelwi movement and the variants of Sufism often associated with it. In face of this potential unsustainability, these new mosques had to create or to reconfigure transnational links to other nodes of the global Barelwi network.

Finding a Place in the Global Sufi Network

In the case of the Gausiyah mosque in Odivelas, this sustainability was achieved mainly through transnational links between Portugal and the UK, particularly to the Mozambican community living in Leicester. Through these connections, the Gausiyah mosque acquired formal affiliation with the Indo-British Spiritual Foundation, an institution headquartered in Leicester and devoted to “the propagation of the spiritual and moral principles of the Sufis through a global network”, of which it is currently the Portuguese branch. The Gausiyah mosque also capitalized on the new influx of south Asian migration that, since the late 1990s, was arriving directly from Pakistan and from other European countries of the Pakistani diaspora. This migratory wave no longer reflected a specific post-colonial context but was mainly related to issues of access to European citizenship; it was mainly composed of non-EU nationals residing irregularly in other European countries who intended to capitalize on exceptional periods of legalization promoted by the Portuguese immigration authorities during the last two decades. Through these newcomers, it started a regular collaboration with the Pakistan-based Dawat-e-Islami, a missionary organization that seeks to emulate the methodology of the Tabligh Jamaat in a Barelwi context, and that assists the Gausiyah mosque during special events and celebrations such as the religious procession (juloos) that every year signals the mawlid in the streets of Odivelas.
As for the Barelwi mosque of Almada, where I’ve been developing my ethnography, institutional affiliations with global organizations were not formally established for several reasons, chiefly among them because of the subaltern status of this place of worship in relation to the main Barelwi mosque of Odivelas, of which it was considered a smaller branch. In practice, the Barelwi mosque of Almada was supposed to draw on the institutional resources gathered by Odivelas, but, as this never really happened, the congregation dwindled and the Al-Qadriyah mosque became more and more invisible in the public space.

This situation started to change in 2012, with the arrival of new key members of the congregation that sought to renovate the leadership of the Al-Qadriyah mosque, to revitalize its religious life and to give some visible expression in civil society to the Barelwi community of Almada. This involved the reactivation of transnational links with Mozambique, not through the formal affiliation with Islamic institutions – as the Odivelas mosque had done – but through an effort to reproduce in Portugal some of the strategies that Mozambican Sufi groups and associations had effectively used in the last decades. But, to better understand these reconfigurations, we have to take another look at Mozambique and to more recent developments in the ongoing Barelwi / deobandi antagonism.

**Reinventing Islamic Presence in the Mozambican Society**

Since the end of the civil war and the introduction of multipartyism in 1994, strategies of cooptation of Islamic organizations by political parties have oscillated according to electoral circumstances, and political affiliations between the main doctrinal currents of Islam and dominant political parties remain unstable and prone to unexpected realignments. Rivalry between Sufis of the Congresso and scripturalists of the Conselho became a constitutive feature of Mozambican Islamic landscape. Sufi-inspired Islam is still dominant in numerical terms, but scripturalists are much more
affluent in terms of economic resources, enjoy greater visibility in the media and their leaders have higher standards of religious and secular education.

Since 2000, wahhabi and deobandi clergy seem to have occupied most of the Islamic public space in the south of the country, including the capital Maputo, and the president of the Conselho is nowadays a well-known spokesman for scripturalist Islam due to its regular presence in national newspapers and the dissemination of his vastly popular books. But, while in the south Sufi Muslims are more preoccupied with defending some traditional bastions of charismatic Islam, like the mosques in the Mafalala quarter of Maputo, against the attacks of scripturalists, in the North they seem to be gathering growing support from the population. Celebrations of the mawlid have been increasing year after year, and the 2013 municipal elections in Ilha de Moçambique – a UNESCO classified place of religious and historical significance – resulted in the election of Said bin Gimbá Amur, the sheikh of the Shadhiliyya Yashrutiyya tariqa, for mayor of the island.21

Most importantly, in the last two decades, Sufi brotherhoods sought to respond to the longstanding lack of government investment in the north of the country and, to some extent, managed to reinvent themselves in the form of community development organizations and educational foundations22. Instrumental to this repositioning was the emergence in 2004 of CIMO – Islamic Community of Mozambique – a new associative structure founded by a former leader of the Islamic Congress, whose main focus – at least in terms of public visibility – has been the assistance to populations affected by malnourishment and natural disasters, conflict mediation in the work environment and conservation of historical and cultural heritage. Simultaneously, the CIMO has managed to reclaim public space for Sufi-inspired Islam in North Mozambique, organizing and leading impressive mawlid celebrations, promoting the signature of a memorandum of cooperation between Sufi brotherhoods in
Ilha de Moçambique and revitalizing the pilgrimage to the Dargah Sharif of Nova Sofala.

Despite these reconfigurations of Sufi Islam in Mozambique, it seems that the traditional “brotherhood” structures continue to operate in parallel, and even in close conjunction, with new forms of Islamic organization aimed primarily at welfare, education and heritage making. The rise of CIMO as the new main institutional umbrella for Barelwi Islam in Mozambique is a particularly good example, since it coincided with the growing influence in the country of a tariqa that, up until then, did not have a significant presence – the Ashrafiyyah – but to which the president of CIMO is bound, acting as its sheikh and representative in Mozambican lands. This order, whose silsila (lineage or spiritual genealogy) goes back to the founders of the Chistiyyah tariqa (of which it is sometimes considered a branch), has become an important element in cementing the transnational links between Muslims of Mozambique, Portugal, England, of course, the birthplace of the Ashrafiyyah founders, the Indian subcontinent.

Renewal at the Al-Qadriyah Mosque

CIMO’s rise as the new representative of Sufi Islam in Mozambique seems to have had unexpected repercussions on the Almada mosque where I have been conducting fieldwork. In fact, after nearly 20 years operating in precarious conditions, with aging leaderships and a very small congregation, the Al-Qadriyah mosque is currently undergoing a period of renewal that, in practice, draws inspiration from the strategy favored by CIMO in Mozambique and tries to reproduce some of its strategies of public affirmation and resistance against the attacks of Deobandis and Wahabbis.

This was precipitated by the arrival in 2012 of a young Mozambican Muslim with extensive work experience at CIMO who took in his hands the task of converting the informally connected Barelwi
community of Almada into a legally recognized association, inscribed in the Registry Office; and in 2014 of a new imam for the congregation, the son of one the mosque’s founders, who was already born and raised in Portugal and who for 6 years had been studying in a Barelwi Qur’anic school of South Africa. The new association representing Almada Barelwis, the “Islamic and Cultural Association of the South Riverbank”, was formally constituted in February 2018, and its statutes mimics CIMO’s own legal statute. More than a mere formality, this document establishes a series of doctrinal preconditions to which its members must adhere, and which distinguish them from the dominant scriptural currents in the Portuguese Islamic landscape. The projects planned by the new association are also, to a certain extent, a reflection of the reorientation of the Mozambican sufi organizations for community development. With planned activities such as the distribution of food and shelter to homeless people and the participation in sports events and in cultural celebrations in collaboration with the city hall, the small Barelwi mosque essays for the first time an approximation to other non-Muslim interlocutors – Catholic entities, the local government, NGOs – and a first step towards a visible place in the public arena. With this strategy, the Al-Qadriyah mosque is, on the one hand, trying to appropriate some public space in the Almada municipality, which until now was occupied exclusively by the deobandi-aligned Al-Madinah mosque. But it is also affirming its autonomy vis-a-vis the other, more expressive, Barelwi mosque in Odivelas, and trying shake off the dependency and subaltern place it comparatively had until just a few years ago.

The affinities between the Al-Qadriyah mosque and the Mozambican CIMO are also reflected, as was previously suggested, in the affiliation to similar “traditional” Sufi structures, namely the Ashrafiyyah tariqa. This manifests clearly in the Al-Qadriyah mosque, where the vast majority of congregants – and most of the religious and secular leaders – who have established a covenant (bayat) with a Sufi sheikh did so with an Ashraf master living in
India or in Mozambique. The president of CIMO himself has several mureeds among the Muslims who attend Barelwi mosques around Lisbon. Also in the Gausiyah mosque of Odivelas the proximity to the Ashrafiyyah materializes through the membership of this place of worship in the Spiritual Foundation organization, founded and chaired by Hazrat Syed Muhammad Jilani Ashraf, the actual representative of the Ashraf lineage.

Post-Tariqa Structures, Unstable Networks of Charisma

In narrating her experience with Pakistani Barelwis living in England, Werbner finds in the intimacy that the murids establish with their sheikh the main aggregating factor of the circles of dhikr and contemplation that she attends, and an essential element for the construction of a Sufi/Barelwi identity of her interlocutors. The sheikh is described as being “like a magnet,” and to be in his presence is a profound and deeply moving experience that, to a large extent, shapes the religious subjectivity of his murids.

In the UK, the most expressive country of the entire Pakistani diaspora, these migrant communities have settled for several decades and the diverse expressions of Islam originated on the Indian sub-continent are widely represented, often with branches, variants and adaptations that already emerged on European soil. Under these circumstances, old dichotomies in the discourses about Sufism are questioned, namely those that oppose center to periphery, west to east, tradition to innovation. In fact, as noted by Dressler, Geaves & Klinkhammer, several countries in Europe and North America are turning more and more into new centers of charismatic irradiation, as the diasporic context itself sees the rise of new Sufi masters and the founding of new turuq (or other forms of organization of Sufism), and as older masters die and are buried on European or American soil.

In Portugal, circumstances such as the relatively recent implantation
of Islam in contemporary times and its lack of expressiveness in the religious landscape of the country, the underrepresentation of Barelwis in the face of scripturalist Islam and the very transitory presence of recent south-Asian migrants (for whom Portugal is primarily a crossing point for other EU countries), account for the fact that the emergence of these new centers is still in a very embryonic stage. Instead, Portuguese Barelwis try to access communication channels that allow them to approach spiritual and institutional centers located abroad, both in the countries where Islam is historically present (Pakistan, India, Mozambique) as countries of the diaspora where new centers have recently emerged.

In terms of institutional sustainability, these Barelwı mosques resorted to transnational connections that somehow reflect the refashioning of old Sufi structures – the *tariqa* or Sufi brotherhood – into new organizations that can have a more effective presence in civil society. Because these mosques are multi-ethnic places of worship, where Portuguese of Indo-Mozambican descent continue to occupy the leadership but a large part of the congregation already comes from recent migratory waves composed of Pakistanis and Indians, these networks are particularly broad and diversified, and may include Mozambican associations with an assistentialist vocation, such as CIMO, missionary and proselytizing organizations such as the Pakistani Dawat-e-Islami, or Indo-British pedagogical and ostensibly “spiritual” enterprises such as The Spiritual Foundation. All these – and even the Barelwı mosques themselves – could be classified among the “post-*tariqa*” or “quasi-*tariqa*” refashionings of Sufism\(^\text{26}\) that have been gaining ground over the traditional orders or brotherhoods. In these more recent configurations, sheikh-mureed hierarchical relationships and forms of piety associated with ascetism and contemplation are replaced with a greater emphasis on missionary work and the propagation of faith, with a more cross-cutting structure of power relations centred in the ritual practice within the mosque, and with a dwindling importance of the traditional Sufi centre (the *khanqah*
or *dargah*, in South Asian Islam) where traditional *turuq* members used to gather and worship.

As for the members of the congregation, their religious subjectivities seem to be significantly shaped by the connections they establish, with varying degrees of commitment and involvement, through transnational connections to institutional and charismatic sources of power located in a multi-centered global network. In this unstable network of references, material and spiritual resources circulate in an unpredictable and irregular way through the transnational space, and their presence in the Barelwi mosques where I have been working is always uncertain. In November 2018, for example, the very arrival of the Spiritual Foundation’s leader, Hazrat Syed Muhammad Jilani Ashraf, a venerated Ashrafi sheikh who patronized the foundation of the mosque and continues to be a *murshid* for much of the congregation, was announced only two days in advance, which led many people to miss his presence at the mosque. So, if the Barelwi mosque can certainly be regarded as a place of worship that shares many features of so-called post-tariqa Sufism, on the other this configuration still feeds on religious structures and devotional practices closer to “traditional” orders and brotherhoods. At least to some members of the congregation, the mosque serves as a sort of spiritual interface that allows them to meet, contact, communicate and establish “vertical” relationships with charismatic religious figures who circulate along the Islamic transnational space.

In the future, my analysis will move away from the articulation of the mosque with other institutions – what some authors call “transnationalism from above” – and will pay more attention to the effect these global connections have on the day to day life of the congregation. Drawing on the work of other researchers in periphery contexts of the sufi diaspora\(^27\), I’ll examine “transnationalism from below” and look at how these charismatic relations between sheikh and murid can take the shape of complex and demanding
initiatic paths, but can also contribute to solve more pragmatic issues in matters of authority, gender, marriage and old age that emerge from the vicissitudes and social redefinitions of life in the diaspora.
3

Rendering Islam Liberal: Time, Space and The Imperative of Intelligibility

ISKANDAR AHMAD ABDALLA

In 2017 a liberal Mosque has been opened in Berlin, accommodated in a back building of a protestant church. The inauguration of the mosque was accompanied by an intensive media coverage in Germany, but also in several places around the world. “In our Mosque, Women and Men shall pray together and it will be possible for women to lead the prayers and deliver sermon,” declares the mosque’s founder Seyran Ateş. In addition to that, the mosque promotes itself as “LGBT-friendly.” Muslims with various sexual orientations or identities are explicitly welcomed.

The following analysis combines methods of ethnographic inquiry (participant observations and informal conversations) during a short period of a preliminary fieldwork and discourse analysis of materials published by public figures associated with the movement of liberal Islam in Germany. Beyond the question of whether Islam is compatible with western liberal traditions, this paper tries to address the (in)compatibility narratives themselves, the affective structures of their representations and the power dynamics they imply. The liberal approach to Islam will be understood here as a mode of appropriating identities and practices, whereby I attempt to call into question the postulation of the liberal as ultimately liberating or merely reducing the constraints of religious norms. Instead, I want to study the liberal as coupled with regulative imperatives, as an endeavour to reproduce norms and practices. Specifically, the productivity of this endeavour will be examined here by linking specific concepts of time and space to the formation
of a liberal Muslim identity, addressing the question of how a liberal approach reorganizes Islam in time and space to render it intelligible to public sensibilities.

“The time for change is today!”: Setting Islam on the Track of Time

“Dear Muslims, our age is the era of critical Islam-reform, whose main task is to understand Islamic history in a more differentiated manner and to redefine our belief. Only we, Muslims, can emancipate ourselves from our historical Unmündigkeit (immaturity) by means of reflective reason and without another’s guidance. Pondering our faith, without taboos, dogmas or prohibitions on thought seems today more necessary than ever, so that we can catch up with western modernity. Elsewise we will remain passive observers of the historical processes. What is here at stake is a European Islam to which Kant’s pathos of enlightenment […] is of an overriding importance.”

Abdel-Hakim Ourghi

“How is History a priori possible? Answer: when the fortune-teller himself makes, and organizes the events that he had foretold.”

Immanuel Kant

The room hosting the inauguration’s press conference of the liberal Mosque in Berlin was jam packed with people. Hundreds of journalists and TV reporters crowded into it to capture a moment described by one of the members of the founding board, professor Abdel-Hakim Ourghi, as “historical.” “Today, we are writing history anew!” he adds. “We are setting up a new basis according to which Muslim identity shall be rediscovered.” “The time for change has come […] the time for change is today! […] it is a message of love to our Religion, to our community, to the universal values of gender equality,” said another female member of the founding board. As some of the attendants cautiously expressed doubt regarding whether the mosque can survive in the future given the limitations of the number of community members and the available financial resources, Abdel-Hakim Ourghi enthusiastically grabbed the
microphone, assuring attendees that in the future the community will grow, as “Muslims know that Islam suffers from an identity crisis at the time being […] and they will gladly welcome the idea that reforming Islam is being implemented in reality.”

The first words of the inauguration conference mark the novelty of the liberal endeavour in temporal terms. The new space became a signifier for a new history, a locus at which a reorientation in the temporal trajectory of Islam is being inscribed and its identity is “rediscovered”. In other words, the new space reifies a new moment in time and processes it as a break within/against Islamic temporality(ies) towards an envisioned future.

The proponents of a liberal Islam in Germany repeatedly refer to their approach to Islam as “modern” and “zeitgemäß,” which can be translated into English as contemporary, up-to date or being able to stay current with the times. Such attributes are often associated with a form of Islam that is also “secular and European” or even utterly German: “Time has come to speak of a German Islam instead of Islam in Germany, not to speak of the conservative one, but rather of a modern and a humanistic Islam compatible with the fundamental values of the West.” Ourghi diagnoses throughout his book – composed, in the style of Martin Luther, of 40 theses that claim to constitute a reformist manifesto of Islam – a state of an Islamic “stagnation,” of an Islam that “rests at standstill,” “outdated,” “fossilized,” and accordingly afflicted by “identity crises.” For this reason, a liberal reformist agenda must undertake the mission of putting Islam back on the track of history, as “only liberal Islam is zukunftsfähig [viable for the future].”

The notion of a temporal disjuncture between what Muslims think and where/how they live form a recurrent trope in the rhetoric of liberal reformists. “Bodily we [Muslims] live in the present, but we think in spirit of the 7th century,” declares Ourghi in the first thesis, titled “Es ist Zeit für einen Europäischen Islam” [It’s Time for a
European Islam. A liberal approach suggests hence to resolve the dissonance created by an Islam which is regarded simultaneously as contemporaneous and non-contemporaneous. In so doing, it induces Muslims to think of their history as “merely collective memories,” to cast their religious belonging as “a private issue” and thus to reconcile their identity “with the principles of western culture.” This will eventually lead them to be “citizens of their countries in the first place.”

By extension, the harmonizing procedure invoked by the liberal approach amalgamate neutralizing Islam within its geographical context in Europe and relocating it in the correct temporal scale set by the western/European modernity that Muslims “need urgently to catch up with.” In her study of the work of Franco-Maghrebi intellectuals arguing for a reformed Islam in France, Ruth Mas calls to attention a similar pattern of constructing Islam as “out of time” and Muslims as “anachronistic, out of harmony with the present, [need] to ‘set time right,’ to temporalise and be temporalised along the fixed temporal architectures of ‘our’ secular time that stratify Islamic histories, traditions, subjectivities and sensibilities.”

Mas does not just simply suggest to posit “secular time” in opposition to traditional forms of what might be understood as Islamic temporalities. Rather, she perceives the former as immanent to secular governmentality, structuring its forces and capacities, securing its continuity by modulating experiences of time it marks as different, and thus reconfiguring correlations between past and future. Mas makes use of Reinhart Koselleck’s examination of the conceptual shifts modernity evoked in understanding history, whereby the plurality of specific histories is subsumed in one single universal history; Geschichte überhaupt (history itself), one that continuously supersedes itself, setting progress as the primary category for the determination of time and thus renouncing any divine or extra-historical authority. Following his line of argument, Mas highlights a further thought of Koselleck that offers insight into the manner by which this concept of time operates: the
notion of prognosis “as a conscious element of political action” that turns history into a feasible arena for rational forecasting, and political intervention impelled by the future. Mas, reading into this notion of prognosis, foregrounds what she calls “anticipatory expectations of apocalyptic futures” that work to sustain secular time by affectively endowing Islam with apocalyptic properties.

I argue that a further investigation of this idea in the context of the demands for liberal Islam in Germany is highly instructive. The frequent proclamations that the “time has come” to free Islam from the constraints of its history; its “outdated medieval views, […] authoritarian collectivity” and “historical immaturity,” to quasi-adjust the temporal axis of a “backward oriented Islam” towards the future, all these claims go hand-in-hand with discursive portrayals mobilized to animate the apocalyptic features of the present moment that reform is supposed to counteract. Such portrayals work through a two-fold mechanism. On one hand, the present moment that necessitates reform is being affectively constructed as the time where “the dark, scary side of Islam triggers discomfort in the world,” the time of Islamist terror that evokes fears and poses threats to “Islamize the whole world” or to “Islamize modernity and counter enlightenment,” not only to thwart the progression of history, but also to reverse its movement. On the other hand, reform is being perceived as a means to save Islam itself from a destined self-destruction.

Liberal Islam presents itself as an alternative for those Muslims who became, in terms of their religious beliefs, “heimatlos [homeless],” who, in the face of the ongoing terror, turned their back on their faith. Liberal reform delineates the way out of an “identity crisis,” of the “pathological condition” of Islam, consequently making it the only possible way to make Islam “viable for the future.” The two facets of this apocalyptic portrayal are placed in juxtaposition in a quotation by Seyran Ateş that has frequently circulated through several media reports. “We, liberal Muslims, have to save Islam
from the fanatics […] we liberal modern Muslims, must give a face to an Islam that is up-to date. (zeitgemäßen Islam)”.

Drawing on Walter Benjamin, Ruth Mas emphasizes a further feature of secular time that “characterizes state sovereignty by ascribing universality to the uninterrupted continuity of time as progress, [that is, of its] evacuating and homogenizing capacity.”

One possible reading of the reformist attempts to detach Islam from the binding structures of its collective history, and thereby untangling the complexity characterizing its temporal experience, would be to understand this reform venture in relation to a homogenizing agency of a dominant template of time that aims to flatten religious experiences of history and locate it on the coordinates of its axis. The modern, the enlightened, are rehearsed here as tantamount to Europe/the West and in reference to the history of the latter, all other histories “must establish their significance and receive their meaning.” Future visions, and the apocalyptic scenarios they imply, operate affectively to keep this axis in a stable hover by organizing experiences of difference, conceived of as irregular or inexplicable to the universal logic of time, alongside its linear structure. In this vein, modernity, deemed as the moment to which Muslims must catch up, is not only a stage of history, but rather its staging. The future envisioned by liberal reformists like Ourghi insinuates models of intervention, of reorganizing Islamic difference that simultaneously make this future feasible, intelligible to a western experience of time that became the history itself; that is, in the words of Kant, a priori possible. The future envisioned by liberal reformists like Ourghi insinuates models of intervention, of reorganizing Islamic difference that simultaneously make this future feasible, intelligible to a western experience of time that became the history itself; that is, in the words of Kant, a priori possible.
Encountering Islam in Space

Seyran Ateş, the mosque’s founder, stated that she wanted to create a space for Muslims in the west that embodies “a living synthesis between West and East, the Orient and the Occident […] where we [Muslims] do not have to renounce the western culture we live within and profit from.” A space where those Muslims “who live out a tolerant and modern Islam become visible.”

Can we go a step forward with the idea of an evacuating and homogenizing time highlighted in the previous chapter and interrogate its possible implications in a new space that by the virtue being “liberal” aims to enhance the visibility of those Muslims professed as “modern” and thus self-evidently “tolerant”?

Timothy Mitchell engaged also critically with the experience of modernity as an arrangement, in the centre of which the west is located in relation to discordant geographies of the non-west, and for its layout historical time serves as a qualifying measure; thus, constructing the modern as a temporal object as much as a spatial one. Along this line of argumentation, I suggest in the following to think space and time together as a space-time continuum or “time-space compression,” to examine the embodied modes of spacing time and timing spaces.

In the case selected for scrutiny, I suggest that the notion of rendering Islam modern or zeitgemäß can be studied in relation to a specific set of embodied practices in space; rituals, movements, orderings, the whole repertoire of operations that aim to reproduce, situate and temporalize a space associated with Islamic beliefs and re-configure its functions, more precisely to appropriate Islam within/through space so that it can be “eligible for the future.” I regard such spatial operations, despite their embodied qualities, as transcendent to the level of functionality; to the uses of space itself, as they denote modes of (liberal) identification; strategies of positioning that proactively engage with the circulating discourses
about Islam in Germany, and thus are discursively contingent. I also suggest to integrate these spatial operations within the hegemonic horizons of expectations mapping the proper location of religion/religious difference within the secular state, drawing the boundaries between the private and public, and determining the correct patterns of functionality assigned to religion. The new liberal mosque intends to be a non-denominational Muslim space. “Sunnis, Shiites, Sufis and Alawites and all others groups and confessions who want to support peace and the inner Islamic dialogue are welcome in our mosque.”

Moreover, women and men pray side by side, women can lead the prayers, deliver sermons and take over other functions usually associated with the position of an Imam. I have noticed that during the prayers the rows are aligned and straight in accordance with the traditional conditions for congregational prayers, yet, they are not compact; in the sense of not leaving any gaps between individuals within the row. When I asked whether leaving gaps is intended and if so, what might be the reason for that, I got different answers. One of my interlocutors notes that leaving gaps is preferable since women and men are praying side by side. Another one thinks that leaving gaps is more appropriate for the German cultural context: “People here [in Germany] need to keep their own personal space intact. They do not like it when they are touched by others.” A third one agreed on that adding: “Actually, I find it better this way. I feel more free and I can better concentrate in the prayer.”

In the mosque, there is no fixed preacher. Rather, some of the active community members, females or males, take turns in delivering sermons. Sometimes the preacher leads the prayer herself or himself and sometimes someone else does. After the prayers, the preacher usually turns around to warmly greet the praying community, but also to welcome the guests who have been watching the rituals from the beginning. The sermons themselves are all delivered in German and they varied in length and in range of the treated themes as well;
historical ties between Europe and the Islamic world, rational thought in Islamic history, human rights, women rights, right up to more general topics like, “what is spirituality?” or “what is doubt?”. Many of the sermons, even if they include some Qur’anic references tend to employ a general language and deal with issues valid to a wider audience. Knowledge of Islamic rituals, traditions or legal discourses is by no means essential to grasp the content or the messages it implies. The Friday prayers are held consecutively in Arabic and German. The traditional Arabic recitation is followed by a German translation for the recited Qur’anic passages, read out loudly by the Imam. Particularly, this innovation has triggered several debates I have witnessed.

A Muslim visitor noticed once that, albeit his admiration to the liberal project itself, he feels unenthusiastic about reading out the Qur’an passages in Germany during the prayers. For him, and even if his Arabic is not good enough to understand the whole content, the translation distorts the spiritual experience of the prayers. Instead, he suggests to read the translation or engage deeply with the meaning of the passages at a later point of time. Another visitor disapproves:

“I have to disagree with you. For me, this is a very beautiful gesture … I am a guest here… I come every now and then and I feel warmly welcomed in as much as I understand everything, the sermon is in German and the prayers as well ... I am catholic … I know how it feels like when the liturgy is performed in Latin … your reason is then simply on hold … you are just bodily present… this does not make the people more pious I believe.”

On the other hand, some other visitors, many of which apparently have never been to a Friday prayer before, expressed their admiration to the recitation and the melodies it entails. Although there is lack of consensus among the community members I talked with regarding this issue, the prevailing view is to keep the prayers both in Arabic and German. One of my interlocutors argues that the Qur’an recitation has two sides, one is meditative and the other
is content-based. The beauty of the melody is significant for the first and the meaning for the second. Consequently, reciting in Arabic would keep the meditative side intact, whereas the German translation would make the meaning of the verses accessible to German speakers.

Joseph Massad reminds us that we should address the question of translation as a question of epistemology, to see the act of translation as “enmeshed in a web of […] power contexts that determine the act itself, its structures, its imperatives, its effects and its publics.” In such a perspective, it is not only relevant to interrogate these contexts of power by inferring the claims of accessibility translation promise to consider, but also by looking at what is intentionally left untranslated or considered to be untranslatable. Upholding the Arabic recitation while complementing it with a German translation, can be understood as a compromise to preserve the tradition on one hand, and on the other hand to compel oneself to the imperatives of intelligibility by making liturgy commensurable to the logic of the nation state, accessible in its language. That is not to deny, that those German native speakers among liberal Muslims, innovatively engaging with the traditions, might primarily do so to facilitate their own access to the text.

Nevertheless, such a shift in handling the sacred text, albeit its attempt to overcome the linguistic constrains, restructures the position of individuals in relation to the religious in a manner that subjugate both to an overarching national reference, towards which commensurability is solely meant to be measured; the German language.

In this sense, every individual effort done to grasp the meaning of a “foreign” sacred text is not only regarded as futile, but they also disturb the flow of an intelligible communication presumed to be accessible for the proxies of power. Interestingly, keeping the Arabic recitation intact is justified as an “aesthetic necessity,” in order not to relinquish the melodic character of the Qur’an.
“Like, when you go to an Italian Opera, you enjoy the music without necessarily understanding the text,” explains one of the community members to the guests. In such a view, the sacred is authorized in the realm of aesthetics, it is even prompted to operate within the boundaries of the latter, as long as it does not hinder the process of constructing meaning presumed to be organized in a secular-national paradigm. This echoes what scholars have often argued, that the doctrine of secularism as state’s tool of political sovereignty does not aim to banish religion, but rather to stipulate how religion should function in different realms. In the specific case under study, the active role played by the guests as observers, the fact that the rituals are performed before their very eyes are not be undermined, as the following section will illustrate.

Tolerant Selves, Liberal Others

Few weeks after the opening I started to visit the mosque regularly, mostly for Friday prayers. I also got involved myself in many activities of the community. The number of regular attendants or those who consider themselves community members remained relatively limited and varied only slightly throughout the period under scrutiny. Nevertheless, journalists never ceased to visit the mosque, also politicians, public figures and visiting groups from all over in Germany. Some of interlocutors expressed their feelings of unease or disturbance by the ominous media presence, what induced the community later to prohibit filming or capturing photographs during the prayers. During my visits, I myself got several press inquiries which I politely rejected to answer; Why do you come here? What make you prefer to come here instead of other mosques? (the journalist own assumption) How does it feel to pray next to a woman? How does it feel to be in the first gay-friendly mosque in Germany? Another journalist wanted only to record my voice while reciting the Qur’an, in order to use it as an ambient sound effect for a radio report.
The visiting groups usually come to the mosque in organized tours: local church communities, school classes, pensioners’ associations, refugee aid initiatives, activists in the field of migration and integration, and LGBT-activists, but also individual visitors and curious tourists, both Muslim and non-Muslim. Assembled in semi-circles, sitting on the ground behind the praying community, the guests watch the prayers and join an open discussion afterwards. The community members describe the short history of the mosque and some of its activities, and the guests ask questions on topics ranging from Islamic beliefs, or theological positions, to questions regarding how Muslims in Germany and worldwide perceive the innovations created by liberal Islam, or about the personal biographies of the community members themselves. The following example illustrates the kind of encounter that takes place and that is crucial to my argument:

*Person A of a visiting group (A reform church community):* “We all know each other from the church. We came together many years ago because all of us were eager to find a liberal manner of believing and living out religion. […] Last year was the reformation year. We decided to engage with the legacy of Martin Luther together … in fact he achieved a lot … but still … many centuries have gone and there is a lot of violence in the world … Then the question came up: What about other religions? Which efforts have been done there to tackle violence? We then decided to engage ourselves with Islam. We were so happy to find that there is a liberal movement within Islam… we heard about the mosque a lot in the media …we felt then … well … that we can find a common ground … that we can attach ourselves to you [uns andocken]” *Person B:* “I think it very important that we get to know each other. I am so much interested in to know the people sitting here. Who are they and so forth.”

*Community Member:* “My name is […] I come from […] I used to go praying in several mosques in the city, but after sometime I decided to keep my distance from the mosques here … they are
namely very conservative... Salafi and fundamentalist ideas are very dominant there... I did not feel comfortable... the mosques felt foreign to me, but also foreign to this country... I feel German. My friends are Germans... I have been living in Germany since so many years... I speak German... I dream in German... and I want to embrace and live out an Islam that belongs to Germany, not necessarily to my home country. What was in my home country, belongs to my home country”.

The above examples provide insight into the interactional structure that renders the mosque as a space of encounter and maps the geometry of relations engendered in it. Islam is here an object of both appropriation and observation. The two procedures are integrally linked, and their dynamic connectivity is a condition and possibility for the practices produced in space and the Muslim identity they mark and promote. The encounter is put forth and monitored by an interplay of different subjectivities:

First, a Muslim subject that constitutes itself in relation to public sensibilities and to the Muslim majority. Its identification with the liberal works performatively on different registers: to maintain a sense of belonging to a national community where Islam triggers suspicions and to pursue models of acting and believing that enactment for them the ideal of a “good life,” of being a good Muslim and a good citizen at once. Aspiring to attain this ideal, they develop practices of self-crafting that take place within the framework of an imposed set of norms. In this sense, I argue the urge for reform is a product of an active engagement with the circulating discourses, particularly those discourses that construct Islam as violent, oppressive, misogynistic and homophobic, thus contrasting it with a tolerant liberal West. Such engagement encompasses forms of critique but also of subversion, endorsement or internalisation. The reformist attempts to handle the stigmatisation of Muslims in Germany do not necessarily take an antagonistic stance; rather, they operate by embracing Otherness within Islam or the Muslim
communities themselves, by claiming to be a liberal Other: modern, secular, contemporaneous, transparent and intelligible to a “tolerant” Public.

Second, a public concern manifesting itself as an urge for knowledge generation about Muslims and Islam that implies regulative propositions to adopt it to public sensibilities, with less or no tension.

A closer look at the affective economies within which public concerns about Islam are embedded would allow us to further understand how the aspiration for a liberal Muslim other corresponds with a parallel aspiration to stabilize a liberal tolerant self. The emergence of a liberal Islam that additionally marks itself as European inevitably denotes other forms of Islam as illiberal and thus suggests negotiating the line between the tolerable and intolerable. By reading them as politically and historically contingent discourses of power, Wendy Brown shows how tolerance discourses construct and position liberal and non-liberal subjects and regulate the presence of the Other inside and outside the nation-state, not only by marking the tolerable objects as marginal, deviant and inferior vis-à-vis those (selves) who practice tolerance, but also by circumscribing the limits of tolerance and thus justifying dire actions when these limits are breached.⁷⁹

Conversely, we can argue that the promotion and maintenance of a liberal Other, that on one hand concedes its status of difference and on the other hand appropriates it to merit tolerance by professing itself to liberal values conceived of as universally common, stabilize a doctrine of tolerance, that is – even if it might render its normativity invisible – contingent upon cultural norms and claims of power. It works to produce identities and designate the realms of the tolerable versus the intolerable. It is important to note, however, that the case under study demonstrates how deeply this process of stabilization is embodied, in the sense that it reorganizes bodies of Muslim others by means of differentiation
and displacement in relation to an imagined collective body of “the concerned citizens,” of the German nation. Tolerance can thus be analysed in affective terms as a positive attachment to different others that dialectically emphasizes the generosity of the tolerating self.

Highly instructive in this context is Sara Ahmed’s account of the idea of the nation’s conditioned love of difference. Ahmed points out how the ideal of the nation is being stabilized through being “plural, open and diverse; as being loving and welcoming to others.” The nation is being constructed as an ideal “in its capacity to assimilate others into itself; to making itself ‘like itself’ by taking in others who appear different.” Yet this love of difference, this “taking in,” is conditioned by deeming the nation itself as an object of love. Love endows the nation with cohesion, and thus it needs to be secured. To this end, the others can/should be different, and meanwhile they are expected to refuse to keep their difference to themselves, “but instead give it back to the nation, through speaking a common language and mixing with others,” thus displaying intelligibility, which is deemed to be the reciprocal of love for a difference-loving nation.

By the same token, securing this love implies excluding those who cannot reciprocate it, whose difference cannot be taken in by the nation. Tolerance works affectively in a similar vein. For the concerned public, it is a primary signifier for the self, the very quality of differentiation according to which attachments and detachments are based; liberal selves move towards liberal others, as they can establish a connection to them by virtue of their assumed liberal sameness. Likewise, this movement towards an other, who is also to a certain degree compatible with the self and intelligible to it, implies a simultaneous movement away from those others labelled as illiberal and deemed incapable of exhibiting tolerance, which is paradoxically the very sign of sameness, of relinquishing difference.
British Muslim Women: Enabling Social Contribution Through Strong Hybridised Identities

SALEEMA BURNEY

Introduction

It may be argued that while a number of studies since the 1970s and 80s have documented the more macro-level, institutional and politically contingent aspects of Muslim life in Britain, much less attention has been focused on the daily lives, motivations and voices of the individuals themselves who make up Muslim society. That we can no longer ignore the vast majority of Muslims who are living beyond official bodies and institutions is also plain (Jeldtoft and Nielsen, 2012:3; Dessing et al, 2013); a study of selective Muslim institutions, economic trends and radicalisation issues raised by the media leaves us with a partial and reductionist picture. It may be suggested that research into Muslim communities in Britain may do better to recognise that ‘focusing only on the visual and the ritual narrows down Islamic identity considerably’.

Even less, furthermore, has been studied with regards to Muslim women in secular, Western societies specifically, other than the more visible and sensational aspects of their lives, such as the ‘hijab’ and problems of FGM and forced marriage. As with much of the coverage of Muslim women in the West, both academic but more so popular media coverage highlight these women as passive victims of a patriarchal social system inherent to their faith and culture, needing the ‘emancipation’ that only a secular, liberal system could provide. While such coverage is necessary in highlighting oppressive practices, we need to move beyond a mere
reactionary approach to ‘Muslim’ issues raised in politics and the press. Instead, a more proactive approach to research topics must be forthcoming, an approach especially with regards to women that asks: what are Muslim women’s own concerns, voiced on their own terms?

Indeed, only recently has research turned away from the narrow ‘veil and victimhood’ approach to Muslim women to examine more nuanced areas such as youth work with Muslim girls and participation in labour markets and civil society. It is the contention of this paper that, with increasing numbers of Western Muslims themselves entering academic and popular discourses, the time has now come to shift this narrative in ways that do justice to those it purports to ‘represent’.

While at no point denying that deeply ingrained patriarchal practices can indeed undermine Muslim women and their well-being, this paper suggests that widely-held grand narratives such as those alluded to above can be unhelpful to individual women, and to descriptions of them. The simplistic dichotomy between modern and traditional women, for example, can be of limited value when describing not only most women in the West today, but also those working and living in the Muslim world more widely.

This project can be situated within the nascent body of research that examines the lives of ‘ordinary’ yet socially engaged British Muslim women, women at grassroots level who are giving back to the communities in which they live and work.

Methodological Reflections

‘The challenge, then, is to develop tools that will allow researchers to enter into the experiences and meanings of another, to access the private moments of human perception, thereby enabling one to bridge the gulf between subject and object.’

My study examines the lives of publicly active British Muslim
women working at grassroots level; I have favoured the ‘unheard’ social activists whose work sustains local communities across Britain.

My methodological approach owes much to the elucidation of an ‘Islamic’ feminist approach by Sariya Contractor. In her quest to ‘De-mystify the Muslimah’ in Britain, she charts her journey from suspicion of feminism to an awareness of its possibilities for religious women, a journey which closely mirrored my own. In particular, I have employed a ‘feminist-pragmatist’ methodological approach to research; ‘feminist’ because it gives voice to a marginalised group, ‘pragmatist’ because I hope for my results to contribute to the wider debate on community relations in our country. In my study, I use the tools of a feminist methodology which allows alternative and contextualised views, involves participants fully in the research process and gives centrality to their experiences and motivations. In addition, I have privileged self-definition and self-expression; as such, I do not see my study as a work of representation of the wider Muslim community, but rather a case study which gives voice to an unheard group.

Significant research questions for my study have included: the exploration of empowering factors for these women, how they view their position as women of faith in a secular landscape and their vision for the future of British Muslims.

In conducting the fieldwork for this study, which concluded in the summer of 2017, I employed a qualitative and inductive approach. I used an interview guide to suggest themes for discussion rather than ask closed questions, and was able to conduct 25 in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus groups in the area of London and its outskirts.

In the initial stages of sample selection, I faced a conundrum familiar to many of us who study religious communities: namely, that using visible and ritualistic measures for ‘religiosity’ can be
problematic. For if indeed a select group of Muslim men and women are visible as religious (through, for example, mosque attendance or hijab wearing), we know that there exist a significantly larger group of people who identify with the Muslim community culturally and sociologically, but do not exhibit the usual ‘markers’ of religiosity. Only very recently has the work of scholars such as Neilsen and Jeldtoft begun to move away from studying ‘visible and institutionalised’ Islam to a more subtle focus on less ‘hypervisible’ forms of practice in the Muslim community. It is here that my study fits in, and my respondents have been chosen neither for their ‘visible’ Muslimness, nor for their affiliation to mosques and other Islamic institutions. Through personal contacts and selected gatekeepers in roughly six different geographical locations in and around London, I chose respondents who were actively involved in community and public life and self-identified as Muslim. They hailed from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, reflecting the demographics of British Muslims: Pakistani, Indian, Bengali, White, Mixed, Black British, Arab, Somali and Mauritian.

Taking a step back from the minutiae of my study, ethical concerns demanded that I assess the possible impact of my researcher ‘role’, and exercise reflexivity in my practice.

For example, subtle ethical concerns such as the Foucauldian stress on power and ‘political’ implications in research discourses could not be ignored. In the words of Kvale, ‘the research interview is a specific professional conversation with a clear power asymmetry between the researcher and the subject’\(^92\). As the interviewer, I remained aware of the broader implications of this potentially asymmetrical relationship between myself and my respondents: had my being ‘in control’ of the interview agenda put me in a position of power ‘over’ the interviewee? On the other hand, would a dominant and verbose respondent cause me to lose control of the interview situation?
Most importantly for me, I developed the ‘working alongside’ approach to my interviewees, whereby the concerns of the respondents were as valued as my own research agenda. I aimed for these women to be ‘collaborative partners rather than passive subjects in a research process’93, in a method which employs the ‘tools’ of feminism in its simplest form as a struggle for the rights of women, but with the inclusive and contextual concerns of third-wave feminism.

It may be apt to discuss issues of researcher positioning at this point. Only recently have Muslims in Britain become subjects of study for researchers from their own communities. And while one may see the goal of classical fieldwork as obtaining sufficient familiarity to understand and empathise with an ‘alien’ culture or phenomenon, it could be posited that for an indigenous researcher like myself the aim would be to achieve sufficient distance to be able to study a familiar group in a familiar setting, yet still obtain valid, reliable results. The end goal for both ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ researchers may well be the same, but without doubt one must reflect on how to walk this ethnographic tightrope.

While the study of one’s own culture is by no means new to the social sciences, what very quickly becomes apparent to a researcher in such a position is that being an ‘insider’ is a complex and multifaceted role to play, with much to reflect on. How one delineates ‘insider’ status is also by no means straightforward. The term can, variously, refer to shared ethnicity, religion, nationality, or even class. Facing this conundrum, for my own purposes I settled on the belief that to be aware of these many facets of my identity, in relation to my ‘insider’ status, would be a good starting point for my research. Furthermore, I found that while initially I identified with my Muslim female respondents as an ‘insider’, in the course of my work I encountered aspects of my identity (as an academic, for instance) in which I felt like an ‘outsider’ to the very same women. My position as a PhD student, especially of an institution such as
SOAS, marked me (or caused me to be perceived) as an ‘outsider’. In the words of Altorki, referring to researching one’s own society, ’there is no agreement on the criteria defining this entity.’

In reflecting on this issue, my introspection led me to concur with cultural anthropologist Kirin Narayan that, in reality, indigeneity and exogeneity actually occur along a spectrum, and cannot be seen as discrete qualities.

**Emerging Themes**

Amongst other themes, the women in my sample spoke about their experiences as women of faith living in a secular society, their strong desire to establish cross-cultural weak ties and their vision for the future of British Muslims. For this paper, I have isolated three significant themes emerging from my data. They are: the influence of faith on their lives, their experiences of public engagement with non-Muslims and what they would like to see for the future of British Muslims, both individually and as an intrinsic part of the fabric of British society. All names used are pseudonyms to protect identities.

**Faith Matters**

In conducting my fieldwork, and providing a space for previously unheard Muslim women’s voices to share their experiences of life in Britain, I was struck time and again by the inadequacy of secular worldviews in explaining the lives that these women have consciously created for themselves. In the sage words of the late anthropologist Saba Mahmood:

“we can no longer arrogantly assume that secular forms of life and secularism’s progressive formulations necessarily exhaust ways of living meaningfully and richly in this world.”

The centrality that the women in my sample gave to religious
conviction became a uniform thread throughout my fieldwork; this was the case regardless of the extent to which the women were practicing their faith on a daily basis, and regardless of the extent to which they identified with the wider Muslim community in their local area. It took the form of public assertions of faith in conversations with non-Muslim friends and colleagues, requests for prayer space at workplaces, imbibing one’s children with a strong sense of their spiritual heritage and even being the powerful motivator behind robust social contributions.

Eminent social scientist Tariq Modood has contributed widely to our understanding of the trajectory of ‘multiculturalism’ in Britain as part of the framework for locating Muslim involvement in public British life. Similar to Bhikhu Parekh⁹⁷, Modood favours a nuanced and multi-layered definition of the concept; for the purposes of my thesis, it is his most recent and progressive formulation that resonates, a framing of multiculturalism that goes beyond a focus on exclusion, Islamophobia and minority status. It is Modood’s third level of multiculturalism which my respondents are helping to build… ‘a positive vision of society as a whole- but remade so as to include the previously excluded or marginalised on the basis of equality and belonging’⁹⁸. The idea being that we must now move beyond, one again, ‘veil and victimhood’ and an exclusionary focus on political accommodation of diverse groups.

Most significant for our purposes, however, is the recognition that the ‘Muslim’ question in Britain has turned from a focus in the 1960s-80s on ‘ethnicity’ to ‘religion’. Muslims, increasingly since the Rushdie Affair of the 80s and the highly visible terrorist attacks of this century, are being viewed in terms of their faith, and are also increasingly identifying as such⁹⁹. Combined with what Jeldtoft¹⁰⁰ terms the ‘hypervisibility’ of Islamic symbols and praxis in contrast to other forms of popular religion which have been relegated to private spheres, this means that for Muslims, newly assertive in their religious identity, ‘equality’ is no more just a question of having
their religious and cultural difference tolerated in the public sphere. Indeed, as far back as 1997, Modood had argued for a discourse of equality that emphasises ‘the right to have one’s difference recognised and supported in both the public and the private sphere’. Minority heritage, in his vision of a ‘new’ multicultural Britain, must be encouraged and supported ‘rather than contemptuously expected to wither away’.

Serena Hussain, in a thematic examination of the 2001 National Census results, uses Census data to support the view that Islam is being asserted more confidently and visibly in British public spheres, and there is growing evidence to suggest that greater participation of Muslim women in the public sphere does not lead to greater secularisation.

My study has used a qualitative approach to explore, amongst other factors, the religious commitment of a group of publicly-engaged Muslim women who have been chosen neither for their ‘visible’ Musliminess, nor for their affiliation to mosques and other Islamic institutions. Data returned has ensured that the relationship between the public engagement of Muslim women and their faith commitment remains an enduring and significant theme in my research.

The experience of my respondent Aini, a mother-of-4 pharmacist by day and experienced community madrassa manager and Scouts leader by evening, is illustrative. When speaking about what sparked her interest in and passion for community work, she told me:

‘Once I started practicing and perhaps it’s the personalities I’m with… it’s like my life, my death, everything I do is for you Allah, it’s that understanding that Islam (and) worshipping Allah isn’t just praying, it wouldn’t be good enough basically, that is very selfish. I would see that as really selfish, and I don’t see Islam as something selfish, you need to serve and that’s the example you have in the Prophets and the companions and all the inspiring (people). I read the life of Imam Hassan al-Banna and I found that so inspiring. What I found inspiring was that he developed hospitals, schools, educated and
had welfare programs and it was taking his faith and translating it, looking at the action that came with it, that’s what Islam is, and Iman is action.’

Similarly, Baha, a mother and school teacher turned academic, told me of a significant moment in her life which then guided her subsequent community and public interactions:

‘And I think since then, when I saw the persecution of Bosnians, their religion took on a new meaning for me, and since then, it’s been part and parcel of everything that I do. So, it’s in my work, it’s in my house, it’s in my family. When I engage with people, the first thing I always think of is that I’m a Muslim, whatever I do, I’m going to leave an impression on them, because of who I am and what I look like.’

A younger participant, Saba, charted the development of her spiritual journey for me. She holds a senior management position in a large charity, and grew up in a Muslim household where, in her words, she and her siblings were ‘never compelled, but gently encouraged’ and given a wide choice on matters of religious practice. She described her relationship to faith as:

‘… a really positive relationship in the sense that I’ve always seen it (as) something that guides me, that inspires me and ultimately strengthens me. So, it strengthens me in terms of like… it teaches me patience and the value of patience. It guides me like when you think, “Oh, this is a dilemma” and you go, “How would he answer that question? How would he have this conversation that is difficult to have?”’

We see here faith in its various manifestations as a motivator, as an intrinsic identity and as an enabler in daily social interactions. In all cases, it forms a core component of respondent identity, and inspires and motivate them in their social contribution.

The empirical evidence arising from my study gives weight to the findings of a recent report produced by the Ipsos Mori Institute, in conjunction with the Aziz Foundation and the Joseph Rowntree Trust, amongst others. In a review of existing research on British Muslims, they conclude that statistical evidence shows that:
Religion is a far more important part of their life for most Muslims than it is for other people in Britain, and is central to their sense of identity.\textsuperscript{103}

\textbf{Weak Ties and Strong Aspirations}

Another significant, and totally unanticipated, theme emerging from my data has been the strong desire of my respondents to initiate relationships outside Muslim communities.

I quote Aini again, speaking here of her realisation, as she raised her children, that mixing with non-Muslim mums and colleagues enriches her own life:

‘I had this long gap (between jobs), when I started having children and I didn’t work and then I wasn’t mixing at all and I’m very much with the Muslim mums’ home-based network and the Madrasa. I think that could make you insular, … I think what it does is because you are not talking to people who are not Muslims, you are perceiving all your ideas say from negative media, you are thinking – they must be thinking this or that. … Once you get to a non-Muslim school and you start talking to the non-Muslim moms it’s after this that it is quite reassuring that on the inside, people are just moms and they all have similar worries actually. If I wasn’t mixing I would perhaps become a bit narrow… The more you mix the more you value people.’

Another respondent, a very different type of community activist, was Isra, a self-made mental health practitioner who had come through a traumatic history of domestic violence and divorce, and had done so with incredible resilience. Her experiences had given her much cause for reflection and change, she explained to me, and while she did not have very many non-Muslim friends when growing up, she now actively encourages her three children to develop friendships across faith and culture:

‘Even with my children, I have embedded that in them, no one is different. All of them have brought friends home. Mashaallah, Uzma has got friends… I’m so proud of her… her friends are from outside … her friend keeps fasts with us. As long as you communicate with people, they understand. It’s just
that barrier, we think… oh no! stay away from them! When Uzma went there, the dad had found the qibla direction for her, they found a white sheet for her, and they were reminding Uzma when to pray!

Similarly, Shabnam, an IT consultant and mother of four who has led on a number of Luton grassroots initiatives, told me:

‘Unfortunately, most of my friends are still Muslim. And I don’t like that… I would prefer to say that all my friends are mixed… I wish that it was like that for me, and I hope that it will be like that for my children. When they come home and say their friend is a nice Chinese or black girl, I prefer it…’

Building on the work of economic sociologist Mark Granovetter 104, I employ the term ‘weak ties’ to describe these relationships; and while Granovetter’s model is used most frequently in the business world to understand how individuals may build economic capital, my respondents desire to build social and community ties without regard for economic gain. A ‘weak tie’ for my model is a link between two individuals from different religious or ethnic communities characterised by casual acquaintance, less frequent interaction and low levels of emotional investment. However, it forms a crucial bridge between different communities, communities between which individuals would not normally have strong relationships.

More specifically, the women in my sample had strong aspirations to establish ‘weak ties’ across communities defined largely by religion but also by ethnicity and social class, with the aim of improving community relations through deeper understanding. This was frequently expressed as an urgency for the future of religious minorities in Britain.

Looking Ahead… Visions for the Future

I concluded each interview by encouraging my respondents to look ahead, and share their vision for the future of British Muslims and community relations. Data returned on this gives us hope for a positive future for British community relations, one where change
may well come from within the Muslim community, rather than imposed from above.

For the women I spoke to, this theme brought together the previous two in a vision that incorporates religious identities, in this case Islamic ones, in the wider secular landscape.

Irum, an experienced lawyer and one of my more high-profile and nationally involved community activists, upheld lofty aspirations for the future:

‘I’m hoping that in 5/10 years’ time, there will be a much more integrated and cohesive society, where we have managed to improve the situation of the Muslims, socially, economically, academically, all that… I’m hoping that the UK can turn its situation around, we become world leaders and to get this right, and I would love to be an activist in that time, teaching others how to do it. But we’re going in reverse, following European policies, which are secular based, and we need to stop that. That’s why the inter faith movement is really important, because all people can see that the secular agenda doesn’t work for all of us.’

We see here that Irum expresses aims and aspirations not just for the Muslim community, but also for Britain more widely, and sees herself as firmly embedded in the fabric of this country. Concurrently, she criticises the ability of secularism, as she sees it, to accommodate women of faith.

Cheryl, a convert to Islam and a mother and academic, frames her vision in terms that emphasise the replacement of ethnic and cultural attachments with a spiritual universalism:

‘I think British Muslims have to create an identity as British Muslims and not as Pakistani Muslims who happen to be living in Britain, or Somali Muslims who happen to be living in Britain. You can keep your roots; you can accept your culture. It has to be a home which acknowledges all of those things and moves forward to an ever-increasing spiritual place. So, I am talking from a spiritual point of view as opposed to from a cultural or ethnic point of view.’
Finally, one of the most powerful manifestations of this pluralistic vision came from Shabnam. You may remember the 2015 North Carolina shooting of three young community activists: Deah Barakat, Yusor and Razan Abu-Salha. With passion and awe, Shabnam recounted how this incident changed the course of her life:

‘(It was) … A light bulb moment for me… they had made an impact at a very young age on the community as a whole… (explains at length how the funeral was attended by many people of no faith and other faiths). They left a legacy for young people… so that they can contribute to society, but that they’re not so self-conscious of their religion that it holds them back. That incident had a real impact on me… I thought, if I die tomorrow, there won’t be a massive congregation of mixed people.’

The Possibilities and Potential of Hybrid Identities

The data shows Muslim women articulating lived, ‘modern’ Islam in creative ways, and in a ‘newly-assertive’ mode of being. They are challenging the precepts of secularism, and demanding a ‘third space’ for their sacred yet very British worldview.

To give a conceptual framework to the negotiated strategies employed by women seeking alternatives to the liberal worldview, I appropriate the concept of hybridised spaces inhabited by individuals mediating multiple identities. In particular, critical theorist Homi Bhabha employs the term to move away from the notion of fixed and ‘authentic’ cultural identities. ‘All forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity,’ he argues, ‘but for me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge’.

For my study, the idea of a constant flux and negotiation of identity resonates; in particular, the concept of crafting a ‘third space’ seems apt in describing the strategies employed by Muslim women in trying to ‘marry’ their presence in a Western, liberal context with
their cultural and religious identification. Bhabha, in the realm of postcolonial studies, has employed this term to denote the struggle of hybridised individuals caught between their relatively ‘new’ environments and memories of cultures left behind. In particular, he argues against the homogenisation and essentialisation of the experiences and hybrid cultures of immigrants and displaced peoples who are faced with the dissonance of sometimes opposing loyalties. Looking to the future, in his case beyond the continuing reach of colonial powers, he envisions the creation of a ‘third space’ as an opening up of sites for negotiation: ‘Something opens up as an effect of this dialectic, something that will not be contained within it, that cannot be returned to the two oppositional principles. Once it opens up, we are in a different space, we are making different presumptions and mobilizing emergent, unanticipated forms of historical agency’106. One could venture that, in fact, the on-going construction of robust and positive identities is indeed empowerment itself, an empowerment that enables previously subdued voices to rise over and above ‘two oppositional principles’, allowing alternative worldviews to emerge.

In creating new sites for negotiation and mutual exchange, Muslim women are subtly instigating the small changes that will allow for greater accommodation of faith identities in secular Britain. They are no longer on the sidelines, spoken about and spoken for. The case of Maryam is illustrative here; she takes on the job of organising her office Christmas party so that she can negotiate ‘alcohol-free’ social spaces, and reflected on such practices:

‘I feel there is often misunderstanding in our society about different groups of people and it is important to break down barriers and try to understand each other rather than constructing divides and creating labels for each other. At the bottom of it, we have to remember that we are all human beings… I think you just need to take some time to get involved, which in fact a lot of Muslims are doing without being credited for it.’

Similarly, Isra does not hesitate to explain her need for prayer space
at the start of each new job. On being asked about her experiences practicing faith in the workplace, and in public dealings, she elaborated that, in her view, the Muslim community needed to develop confidence in communicating with non-Muslims:

‘…they respect me openly for praying… I think it’s very easy, it’s just how WE perceive it, because we don’t have the confidence ourselves. They made a prayer room for me, (and) my manager talked about it. What I’ve experienced, when I didn’t have confidence, people saw me differently. Because I have that confidence in me, people see me differently. I am proud of who I am!’

In the words of Aune et al\(^{107}\), the alternatives thus created ‘may be described as both/neither spaces; … such spaces are particularly prevalent for women and the women who use them often conceptualise them in this way even when others might not.’

**Concluding Reflections**

This paper has established that religious conviction is in fact alive and well in the West, and that minority communities especially value religious identities. Using the lens of Religious Studies, thus, to explore modern-day societies can uncover valuable insights.

In addition, an overview of current research on Muslim communities in Britain shows that micro-level issues and non-institutional, individual concerns are under-represented. The day-to-day concerns of Muslim women, furthermore, are only beginning to be explored in a positive, non-political and nuanced manner. The popular narrative in Britain, unfortunately, continues to misrepresent and misinform when it comes to portraying Muslim women.

My study aims to contribute to a more sensitive and self-defined narrative of these women. I have found that the socially active women in my sample are constructing robust identities, and that a significant number of them are empowered by their faith.
In addition, it highlights successful forms of Muslim *engagement* with wider society by identifying the strategies used by my respondents to create a ‘third space’ for themselves in the secular landscape of Britain today. In this way, they indicate possibilities for diversity and engagement through contribution *to*, and not assimilation *with*, wider British society. In addition, the practical impact of my work will add to the re-appropriation of the skewed narrative created for Muslim women by popular media discourses.

This paper suggests that the robust identity constructs and social contribution narratives of these women can contribute to the development of Western Muslims in their ‘new’ environment. Looking ahead, the women themselves may pave the way for a pluralist society in which minority frames and contributions are valued, and also provide an example of positive, proactive and engaged citizenship in contrast to disaffected citizens and disengaged ideologies.

But above all, I hope to have given voice to women who are ‘working tirelessly out of the spotlight for the good of their communities’¹⁰⁸, women for whom an integral part of being British Muslims is to engage with other people and collude in good causes.

And it is this collusion and contribution that matters, for…

‘…they are pushing ahead towards greater integration of their communities into wider society… In doing so, they are positively contributing to Muslim public life and to civic society in Britain, spearheading change and transformation in both.’¹⁰⁹
“I’m not a Muslim RE teacher, I’m an RE teacher who happens to be Muslim”: Framing Personal Faith and Professional Identity in the Case of ‘Muslim RE Teachers’

MATTHEW VINCE

Introduction

In light of Prevent and Fundamental British Values (FBVs) there has been a proliferation of research surrounding Muslims and education in Britain. For Panjwani and Moulin-Stożek, this increased focus on Muslim identities has marked a ‘religious turn’ within sociological and educational debates, where religion is supplanting “prior categorisations of ethnicity, race, or nationality”. However, rarely has this scholarship considered the experiences of Muslim teachers, who represent an intersection between the State and Muslim identities.

Such sudden growth has, however, begun to expose the limits of the theoretical assumptions underpinning this religious turn. Specifically, Panjwani has argued that the religification and racialisation of Muslim identities within this turn has led to two layers of reductionism in its analyses. Religification concerns “how the identity attribute of Muslimness came to be functionalised as the primary attribute for a large number of people in Britain”. A limitation of this attribution is that their entire diversity of being is compressed into the single attribute of ‘Muslim’, precluding any understanding from other social positions they inhabit. Racialised approaches also reduce Muslims to certain essentialised ways of being. Based on concerns with visible markers of identity, a particular image of the ‘practicing Muslim’ is privileged by virtue of this analytical focus.
Reminding us that “no Muslim is just a Muslim”, Panjwani suggests that “there is a need to reconsider the primacy of the religious attribute… by humanising Muslims, by taking account of their religio-secular contexts and by reconsidering their varying attachments to religion”. In this paper I evidence this critique through the narratives of Muslims working as Religious Education (RE) teachers in English state schools. I claim that these teachers’ resistance to my construction of them as ‘Muslim RE teachers’ suggests a resistance to the attribution of ‘Muslim’ as their primary attribute, over and above their attribution of ‘RE teacher’ in their school contexts. In doing so, I posit that there is a need to apply new theoretical tools to better articulate the ways in which Muslims are occupying diverse social positions.

A Brief Overview of Theoretical Approaches to the “Muslim Teacher”

Racialisation and religification dominate the theoretical construction of Muslim teachers. Muslim teachers, a “new sub-field” in the BME teacher discourse, have been primarily viewed through the lens of race. Where Bhopal draws attention to the embodiment of race as a site of conflict with teacher professionalism, the Muslim body represents a contest between the “good Muslim” and the “good teacher”. Visible Muslim practices, such as prayer, wearing a hijab or growing a beard, and abstaining from alcohol, are seen as professionally risky, resulting in social isolation and as presenting barriers to career progression. Thus, Osler argues that racism prevents Muslim teachers from actually “being Muslim” in school by preventing them from engaging in these visible practices. With the Prevent policy assemblage, Farrell argues that FBVs have created a ‘constitutive “outside”’ between Muslim teachers’ religious values and notions of professionalism, further intensifying these processes of marginalisation.

However, by establishing the link between visible markers of Muslim identity and degree of racialisation, in this analyses Muslim
teachers are constructed as teachers who do traditionally Muslim things. The contention that structures of institutional racism prevent Muslims from ‘being Muslim’ rests on the theoretical assumption that being Muslims means ‘practicing’, and that barriers to these practices mean they cannot be Muslim. Therefore, by reducing Muslim identity to visible markers of identity, invisible ways of being Muslim within teaching are not articulated in these analyses.124

An approach that begins from a faith perspective on Muslim teachers brings this into stark relief. Mogra’s work is important in this regard because he begins from the recognition that the voice of faith is sorely missing from the racialisation perspective.125 Adopting a ‘spiritual’ approach, he finds that their faith remained socially, psychologically, religiously, and morally important in their teacher role, acting as a guide that shaped their interpersonal, social, and moral actions. Here their Muslim identity was present not in the form of explicit practice but as an underpinning ethos.

However, by seeing Muslim teachers through the lens of ‘spirituality’, Mogra does not actually consider how Muslim teachers engaged with their wider professional framework. Notions of the professional frameworks in which they are situated are set aside in terms of a solely Islamic framework of meaning-making. Thus, Mogra religifies his participants by reducing them to their faith and excluding other frameworks from being sources of identity construction in their contexts.

The theoretical shortcomings that Panjwani raises are ubiquitous in these racialised and religified constructions of the Muslim teacher. By solely focussing on the Muslim identity-attribute, these approaches fail to articulate their attribute as teachers; the very position that they inhabit in their school contexts. Hence, they are reduced to being “just Muslims”.
The Study

Importantly, this literature formed the basis for my construction of the ‘Muslim RE teacher’: the primary unit of analysis in my doctoral study. This label reflected the supposed primacy of the Muslim-identity attribute for these teachers, and the assumption that their ‘Muslimness’ would be put first. Framed by these approaches, my doctoral project set out to explore the capacity in which ‘Muslim RE teachers’ make their work ‘fit’ with their faith, drawing upon a lived religion approach. However, the study became soon concerned with how this label was contested by the participants.

‘Muslim RE teachers’ are a critical case because of the subject they teach. Due to the subject’s unique focus on personal beliefs and values, RE teachers’ beliefs and values form an explicit part of their notions of professionalism, especially around issues of neutrality, impartiality, and criticality which are at the heart of state-school, non-confessional Religious Education. Moreover, the RE classroom has been a site where Muslims are vulnerable to securitisation discourses as a space where religion is the explicit focus of inquiry. As such, RE reifies issues pertaining to Muslim identity in the context of wider educational policies, where ‘Muslim RE teachers’ are tasked with embodying seemingly paradoxical positions: as ‘Muslim’, ‘secular/non-confessional teacher’, and as ‘agents of Prevent/FBVs’.

The analysis in this paper focuses on the narratives of two Muslims who work as RE teachers in English secondary schools: Ayesha and Sajid. Ayesha, a 32-year-old South Asian woman, has been an RE teacher for 7 years, and works in a large inner-city academy in the Midlands. Despite the diversity of the school’s student body she is the only Muslim staff member, and is visibly Muslim – wearing the hijab in school. Sajid, a 25-year-old Asian man, has taught RE for 5 years in a large Muslim majority school in South-East England. He has already reached Head of Department and has achieved wide recognition in the role.
I have decided to focus on a small number of narratives to draw attention to the dynamics between these participants’ identities as Muslims and RE teachers. Narrative analysis has been established as a way in which to unpack notions of personal and teacher identity. The way teachers about their educational values, visions, and practices provides an “important ‘window’… on the everyday situations in which teachers act”. The selected narratives reveal the ways in which most of my participants talked about their educational values, visions, and practices as Muslims and as RE teachers.

These two narratives sit within a qualitative research project conducted with twenty-one participants. Data collection involved interviews with all the participants, followed by three periods of para-ethnographic shadowing. The research design intended to first capture the participants’ own narratives about themselves and their work, and then to see how these narratives manifest in their everyday working life. The research project has been ethically approved through the Cardiff University School of Social Science Ethical Approval Committee and the guidelines set by the British Educational Research Association.

The Narratives

Talking Identity

Throughout the project I was struck by how contested the label ‘Muslim RE teacher’ was. Ayesha brought this immediately to my attention during the pilot study. Instead of a “Muslim RE teacher”, she understood herself as “an RE teacher who happens to be Muslim”:

Like yes I am Muslim but I don’t necessarily identify myself as a Muslim teacher? I’m an [RE] teacher who happens to be Muslim, like I’m not a Muslim teacher... in that sense. Like the kids don’t know, the kids ask me and I say my religion or lack of is not relevant to the subject that I am presenting, rather than oh she’s presenting her view, you know they might
deduce or induce that I am a strong Muslim, like where I am from and stuff, but it’s not part of my identity as a teacher necessarily.

For Ayesha, distinguishing her personal faith from her professional role was integral to her identity in school. This was made clear by her declaration that her Muslim identity is “not part of my identity as a teacher necessarily”. Her Muslim identity, seen in relation to her teacher identity, was side-lined as something she “just happened to be”. This was despite her identification as a “strong Muslim”; someone for whom Islam shaped their everyday social life.

Sajid expressed similar commitments when asked about his teacher identity:

  An RE teacher who is a Muslim, because if I put the word Muslim first it implies you’re some kind of religious leader. My profession is as an RE teacher, and it doesn’t matter what religion you are as a teacher, it shouldn’t.

His explicit reference to the order of “RE teacher” and “Muslim” is partly a clarification of his role as an RE teacher in a secular context, understood in opposition to a religious instructor. However, his emphasis of this distinction also stresses a degree of separation between his personal faith and professional role. This is illustrated by his assertion that religious convictions “shouldn’t matter” in the role of the RE teacher.

Both Ayesha and Sajid’s narratives demonstrate a commitment to distinguishing between their positions as Muslims and as RE teachers. Where notions of neutrality, impartiality, and criticality are bound-up with the concept of the professional RE teacher, Ayesha and Sajid are actively engaged in identity-work in order to embody this commitment. Essers and Benschop found that Muslim businesswomen actively engage in similar identity-work to manage the “oppositional demands” of their faith and their role. By creating boundaries between their simultaneous identities as Muslims, women, and entrepreneurs, they created new opportunities for being within their working contexts. In this way, seeing
their identity as “RE teachers who are Muslim” reveals a creative space in which this identity-work can occur.

Yet, Ayesha and Sajid felt that teaching RE overlapped with their personal faith in diverse ways. Sajid saw his role as fulfilling a religious duty:

Islam has a huge tradition of teaching and learning – its always existed. The Prophet did it, his family did it, so again going back to previous questions about how it influences my life – my job is an expression of my faith as well. When I go to work from 7:30 till 5 I’m worshipping God in those hours. So I never see it as a job, I see it as part of my daily worship.

Although they are able, and willing, to separate these identities, this does not mean that one identity is supplanting the other. Rather, a more nuanced picture emerges in which their personal faith is engaged in a dialectic with their professional role. By reflecting on the ways in which their values as Muslims and as educators overlap, their identities as Muslims continue to be present, but in more subtle, invisible ways.

Talking Practice

This dialectical relationship is also encapsulated in the way they talked about their teaching practice. Ayesha’s discussion about her Muslim identity in relation to her work exemplified this simultaneity:

I think the concept of honesty is... y’know like God sees everything and lying is obviously not a good thing, so I just try to be honest and fair. And that comes from my personal faith into my profession, so obviously I try to be fair. And I will do my best to help, and that’s very much part of my personal faith. Y’know I don’t think I’m necessarily a good person intrinsically, you know a lot of my decisions are based on my faith and what would God want me to do, would my Mum be happy knowing I did this, in that sense Islam maybe dampens down some of the more negative aspects of who I could be. I have a very quick temper, y’know the whole idea of patience and stopping being impatient comes from my faith.
In this account, Ayesha identifies how she is a Muslim at school; through her “patient” manner and “fairness”. Having admitted that she has a “very quick temper”, her faith is a way in which she manages her relationships with her pupils, particularly at more challenging times. So, rather than a set of outward practices, her Muslim identity becomes embedded in her work in a much more implicit way; as her “morals” and working ethos – the very way she ‘is’ an RE teacher.

For Sajid this simultaneity is even more pronounced, reflecting his specific values as a Shia Muslim;

Yep absolutely. So in terms of a “Muslim” pedagogy, the Prophet for example, and y’know the Imams and his family, they’d always sit with the people – there was never any air of superiority, yeah there were the people who knew the most in the room, but they would sit with the people. So y’know when I teach I always use language like we – we’re in this together kind of thing, and when a student is going through a hard time I’m going through a hard time with them, and when they’re experiencing joy I’m experiencing it with them.

Here, Sajid’s values as a Shia Muslim were encapsulated in classroom pedagogy. He actively drew upon the teaching styles of the Prophet and the Imams, as well as the notion of the ummah, to create a classroom environment in which they were “all in this together”. As he sees teaching as an act of faith, this suggests that he imbues his actual teaching practice with this spiritual significance. Thus, the way he teaches is a way in which he performs his ‘Muslimness’ in the secular teaching role.

The ways in which these teachers were ‘being Muslim’ in their role as non-confessional RE teachers reveals the diverse, contextual, creative configurations of faith that Muslims are engaged in creating. These participants attended to their faith in their role primarily through their ethos and character – through behaving in a ‘Muslim’ way – as opposed to specific visible practices. Moreover, this was done in a way which drew in the professional frameworks
of the RE teacher; as forms of classroom pedagogy, or as forms of subject knowledge.

Discussion

This image disrupts the latent essentialising tendencies of racialisation and religification because they do not look obviously religious. Scholars have lived religion have brought to our attention the conceptual blindness that looking for the ‘religious’ brings, limiting study to the mosque, the church, and the congregation.\textsuperscript{135}

As a result, the religification of their Muslim identities, through the label ‘Muslim RE teacher’, misattributes their Muslim identity as their foremost identity in school. This is most apparent in their resistance to the label ‘Muslim RE teacher’ itself. Implicit in this label is that the separation between their Muslim and teacher identities is not present, or possible, because everything would be seen, and taught, through an Islamic lens. The preferred notion of the ‘RE teacher who is Muslim’ disrupts this conceptualisation by illustrating that their identities as Muslims and as RE teachers coexist and are engaged in a constant dialectic in their school contexts.

Consequently, their religification risks obscuring the complex and creative boundary-work that allowed them to occupy the role of the teacher by reducing the various repertoires of meaning-making available to them to just an Islamic one. Much of the discussion in these narratives centres on the ways their values and practices as Muslims overlap or are separated from their values and practices as educators, drawing on both educational and Islamic frameworks to construct their identity at school. They are not ‘just Muslims’, but both Muslims and RE teachers.

Similarly, reducing their Muslim identity to visible markers of Muslimness fails to articulate the full diversity of ways in which they embodied their faith through their roles as RE teachers. We can see
in these narratives that their faith identity was primarily invisible. It was enacted through their professional practice, social relationships, ethos and, particularly in Sajid’s case, the very act of being an RE teacher. The lack of reference to aspects of visible Muslim practices, such as prayer, dress, and ethnicity, reveals much about the importance these teachers ascribed to such signs of identity in this context. This brings previous assumptions about visible practices underpinning Muslim identity into sharp relief, and consequently begins to address scholarly misrepresentations of the diversity of ways in which Muslims can ‘be Muslim’.

**Concluding Remarks**

The notion of the “RE teacher who happens to be Muslim” at the heart of Ayesha and Sajid’s narratives offers a stark reminder that ‘no Muslim is just a Muslim’. Throughout this article I have tried to illustrate this through their resistance to the label ‘Muslim RE teacher’, and the complex ways they engage in identity-work to bring together their simultaneous identities as both Muslims and as RE teachers. Thus, I contend that Panjwani’s critiques of the theoretical religification and racialisation of Muslims within sociological and education research is worthy of serious consideration. By reducing them to their Muslim identity, their identity as educators is ignored. Yet as agents acting within school contexts their identities as educators are a fundamental part of their everyday lived reality.
Abstract

Legal education is arguably a cornerstone of an effective and robust legal system, its purpose being to equip legal professionals with the skills, knowledge, integrity, and sense of independence that will enable them to play their appropriate role in maintaining the rule of law. The legal education sector is rapidly changing in accordance to recent reports in the United Kingdom, with one of the catalysts for this change being the much-debated globalized legal marketplace, a significant result of which has been the growing influence of ‘Islamic Law’ in England and Wales. This paper briefly explores one element of a doctoral study, which examines overall, the extent to which knowledge of ‘Islamic Law’ needs to be provided as part of the legal education for legal professionals in England and Wales. The early research findings indicated that legal practice is broadly and frequently affected by ‘Islamic Law’. Legal professionals from a range of backgrounds have also indicated that there is a need for knowledge in the area to meet the needs of clients, many of whom are British Muslims. Despite the influence and at times acknowledgment of ‘Islamic Law’ in legal practice as well as a concern for its consequences, legal professionals practising in this area are largely operating in limbo. This paper examines the challenges in providing legal education in ‘Islamic Law’ for legal practice in England and Wales by interpreting research findings resulting from a set of elite interviews conducted with legal professionals in the field. It explores the meaning of ‘Islamic Law’ in this context and analyzes how it is currently provided for in legal education in the region. The paper then discusses briefly any shortfall in the provision of ‘Islamic Law’ in legal education and what the future prospects of legal education of ‘Islamic Law’ for legal practice may hold, in order to enable legal professionals to more competently engage in the legal practice thereof, and uphold the rule of law.

Introduction

‘Islamic Law’ is one of the oldest continuing legal traditions, and is applied, fully or partially in over fifty countries. It has affected the legal, political, and economic world, whether it be through legal education and the designing of curricula involving ‘Islamic Law’, law firms opening up offices in the Middle East, or the courts of England and Wales having to address increasingly foreign
elements of ‘Islamic Law’.\textsuperscript{140} In legal practice, there has been a general increase in ‘Islamic Law’ in Commercial Law\textsuperscript{141} and there have been a number of high-value Islamic Finance transactions taking place in a market estimated to be worth $400 billion globally,\textsuperscript{142} with the government of the United Kingdom even offering guidance as to how Islamic Finance operates.\textsuperscript{143} There has also been recognition of Islamic arbitration in matrimonial affairs,\textsuperscript{144} the acknowledgement by the Law Society of England and Wales of Islamic wills,\textsuperscript{145} and speeches by the Archbishop of Canterbury advocating the benefits of ‘Islamic Law’.\textsuperscript{146} Most recently, the UK government launched an inquiry into the increasing use of ‘Shari’ah councils’\textsuperscript{147} and released its report from an independent review into the application of ‘Shari’ah Law’ in the United Kingdom.\textsuperscript{148}

As a result of the large Muslim community of England and Wales (over 3 million Muslims as of 2014),\textsuperscript{149} “the UK…[is] proceeding towards a sort of cooperative overlapping between the two legal systems and cultures, despite initially considered as incompatible.”\textsuperscript{150} This dual existence, whether it be legal pluralism\textsuperscript{151} of two different religious legal systems, or cultural pluralism,\textsuperscript{152} where British Muslims attempt to maintain their identities and values, creates a mixed legal or hybrid legal environment.\textsuperscript{153} A YouGov\textsuperscript{154} poll conducted in 2014\textsuperscript{155} found that 63 percent of British Muslims were proud of being British. Yet similarly, religion was also shown to be very important to Muslims, for example in the 2010 Ethnic Minority British Election Study:\textsuperscript{156} 51 percent of those surveyed stated that it was extremely important and 43 percent that it was very important, and not a single Muslim respondent said it was not important at all, clearly linking religion to the identity of Muslims. Just over half of the respondents 53 percent also stated that they were regularly religiously active.\textsuperscript{157} Most Muslims surveyed (83\%)—and, indeed, most Britons, regardless of religion (66\%)—agreed that “it is possible to fully belong to Britain and maintain a separate cultural or religious identity.”\textsuperscript{158} These statistics demonstrate that an increasing number of Muslims identify as British as well as
Muslim, holding both their national identity and, their religious practice as paramount and compatible.

These factors, among others, have resulted in ‘Islamic Law’ and English law working alongside one another officially and unofficially in England and Wales. The legal needs of British Muslims is needing to be provided for, which directly corresponds to an increase in legal practice in ‘Islamic Law’, thereby creating a need for knowledge in this area at the legal education stage. Legal education itself is already changing in the United Kingdom, as a result of the globalized legal marketplace, in which the growing influence of ‘Islamic Law’ in England and Wales has played a part. Without legal education being increased in ‘Islamic Law’, Muslims overall and especially Muslim women who are less aware of their religious and legal rights, stand to be at a disadvantage compared to the rest of British society, as the legal professionals representing them are largely operating in limbo due to being unfamiliar with the area. Whilst knowledge may be acquired in different ways, such as through experiential learning, it is argued that the impact of ‘Islamic Law’ and the increasing integration of the Muslim community in the United Kingdom is now such, that relevant aspects of ‘Islamic Law’ that appear in legal practice should be embedded in legal curricula, just as European Union law currently is for example due its influence in England and Wales, to enable those entering legal practice to be able to practise more competently in the area, and to enable equal access to justice to those affected by ‘Islamic Law’.

A two-fold investigation was conducted to investigate ‘Islamic Law’ in legal practice. Firstly, a set of online questionnaires were administered to explore whether there was a need for knowledge of ‘Islamic Law’ in England and Wales for the purposes of legal practice and, the meaning of ‘Islamic Law’ in the context of legal practice. Secondly, a set of elite interviews with legal professionals were conducted, an overview of the data from which comprise the
focus of this paper. The elite interviews were conducted to investigate the meaning of ‘Islamic Law’ in England and Wales in more detail for the purposes of legal practice, how ‘Islamic Law’ is currently integrated into legal education, and how it can be provided as part of legal education in the future to enable legal professionals to competently engage in legal practice. The respondents were at the forefront of their field in studying, practicing, or teaching in England and Wales or linked to England and Wales and who had significant engagement with ‘Islamic Law’ as part of their work or practice, were examined. The respondents included senior barristers, solicitors, and experts in ‘Islamic Law’, university lecturers on ‘Islamic Law’, a founder of a university ‘Islamic Law’ program, a director of a university ‘Islamic Law’ department, a former senior judge of England and Wales, and academic researchers in ‘Islamic Law’. A number of respondents also held masters- and doctoral-level qualifications in ‘Islamic Law’.

What is the Meaning of ‘Islamic Law’ in Legal Practice?

To ascertain if legal education in ‘Islamic Law’ is sufficient, or requires improvement for the purposes of legal practice, the meaning of ‘Islamic Law’ must be defined. When asked about the meaning of the term, the most common response from the elite respondents was that there was no agreed-upon definition or meaning. Responses included: “I think it’s a really hard question to answer”; “the very expression ‘Islamic law’ is itself controversial, and some colleagues object to the very use of the term. They view it as Orientalist and they view it as misleading”; and “it’s a lot of different things to a lot of different people, there’s no real single answer to that.” It was also stated that there were many meanings: “they’re subject to… debate, to deviation, difference of opinion, and none of them is, you know, final.” Others defined ‘Islamic Law’ as a way of life—“it’s part of someone’s entire makeup”—and compared it to English Law: “Western understandings of law are very much focused on the state and an individual, and that’s your legal system
and everything that, you know, everything else is your private business.” Islamic Law’ was also said to “incorporate legal as well as ethical obligations.” The traditional meaning of ‘Islamic Law’, that it derives from the Qur’
an\textsuperscript{166} and the Sunnah\textsuperscript{167} and includes Shari‘ah\textsuperscript{168} and \textit{fiqh},\textsuperscript{169} was also mentioned, but the need to differentiate between the two was emphasized. One respondent who had designed curricula to teach ‘Islamic Law’ stated that “you have to distinguish immediately between Shari‘ah and Fiqh… the being, you know, an ideal, revelation, that a divine law laid down in revelation… through ijtihad you end up with Fiqh, which is a bunch of \textit{hukm} that come from the scholars.” Another defined ‘Islamic Law’ as referring to “the formal processes adopted by certain Muslim-majority countries,” and stated that ‘Islamic Law’ is not one body but a vast area and requires the understanding of different concepts and opinions.

Some saw ‘Islamic Law’ as inaccurately or carelessly defined, leading to misconceptions and misunderstandings of it among both Muslims and non-Muslims. Even those who agreed that misconceptions existed and had extensive legal practice experience, but little ‘Islamic Law’ experience at times referred to “Shari‘ah Law” and ‘Islamic Law’ as one and the same; others incorporated concepts from the Qur’
an and Sunnah within ‘Islamic Law’, including Shari‘ah, \textit{fiqh}, and \textit{siyasa}.\textsuperscript{170} It was seen as positivist\textsuperscript{171} and as the law of a specific state, and a term for which the conventional definitions were seen to have been developed historically. Due to the issue of ‘Islamic Law’ in all contexts originating in the Arabic language, some respondents felt that a unique Western model of ‘Islamic Law’ had developed. The concept of ‘Islamic Law’ in the Western world may not be how the Muslim world defines the term; as one respondent who had researched ‘Islamic Law’ curricula and taught ‘Islamic Law’ courses succinctly put it, “through our teaching we are creating a Western Islamic law… whether we want it or not because of the translation constraint we are actually creating a form of Western Islamic law.”\textsuperscript{172} Overall, given that even those with
extensive experience in the area found the term ‘Islamic Law’ difficult to define, this has an impact on the legal education of such a debated subject.

How is ‘Islamic Law’ Currently Provided as Part of Legal Education? Does it Meet the Needs of Legal Practice in England and Wales?

To establish whether legal education on ‘Islamic Law’ meets the needs of legal practice, respondents were asked about current legal education on ‘Islamic Law’. With one exception, all the respondents concurred that their own training and legal education in ‘Islamic Law’ did not adequately meet their needs and, that current legal education in the area did not meet the needs of legal practice. One respondent, who had founded a successful ‘Islamic Law’ program and had extensively researched in the area, mentioned in regard to an ‘Islamic Law’ module: “you know, the offerings available in the West, in the English-speaking West, were so paltry, inadequate, that I don’t think I lacked much from building on my own.” Another respondent, who had studied ‘Islamic Law’ at the masters level and was a qualified solicitor, agreed but argued for a multi-faith legal education approach, stating:

If I look at the strict legal education… we didn’t [have knowledge of ‘Islamic Law’]. The only reason why I am where I am is because, I suppose, I am a Muslim. I have a keen interest in my religion and that’s why I [do] the research that I do. But if I looked to my undergrad, education and postgrad, no. I cannot recall there being anything to do with religion for any faith in terms of what I might need to do in practice.

The respondents discussed that legal education in the area at the undergraduate or postgraduate academic level was provided as an optional module, if it was available at all and mainly from an Islamic Studies perspective, that being a theological a historical viewpoint rather than ‘Islamic Law’ for current legal practice perspective. Self-study and experiential/informal learning in the workplace were expressed to have been undertaken to resolve the
shortfall, with another respondent, who was at the time of the interview a qualified solicitor based in academia, stating “my education in Islamic law is essentially, self-taught, really, and with the aid of very knowledgeable and kind and helpful colleagues.”

The content of current ‘Islamic Law’ modules, teaching styles, and suitability for legal practice were also questioned. It was suggested that what is currently being taught and when it was taught was too theoretical: “It was lacking in, that it wasn’t taught as though you’re looking at how Muslims in Western societies are applying it,” demonstrating the existence of a gap between the teaching and the practice of ‘Islamic Law’. Another respondent acknowledged that “Islamic law is often taught in a sort of philosophical way…these are the interests of their, of the professors, none of whom really, are really engaged in practical Islamic law.” If and how legal professionals were placed to deal with ‘Islamic Law’ and English law alongside one another was also stated to be a key component that was missing, ill-preparing students for legal practice. A respondent who had completed a doctorate in Islamic Family Law and was now teaching ‘Islamic Law’ pervasively as part of a Family Law module at their university stated that “when I studied it, it was taught as though this is what Muslims say about this thing…most subjects are just taught as though your English law is being applied by secular Western nonreligious people.” In other words, it was taught as “foreign law,” not as law that was applicable to British Muslims in a domestic context.

Teaching methodology was also discussed as being unsatisfactory. One respondent who was a fellow of the Higher Education Academy (HEA)\textsuperscript{173} and had assessed their own teaching methods declared that “many still work with the syllabus that is locked at the beginning of their career” whilst another who specifically researched Islamic Commercial Law agreed that the teaching quality was an issue “on the level of academic writing…there are significant—one does encounter significant deficiencies as well as excellent pieces”
relating to the area of ‘Islamic Law’. This was said to lead to misconceptions in legal education in the area, as “if one is reading it unguided and unassisted, [it] can be misleading, especially some of the more populist literature, some of which is just plain wrong, inflammatory, prejudiced, and of very low quality.” Another who had designed ‘Islamic Law’ curricula mentioned that at times the ‘Islamic Law’ that is taught is dated and irrelevant, and gave an example of “case law from the [1950s] in Pakistan” being used that was not applicable to most cases in England and Wales. How ‘Islamic Law’ is taught was also stated to be dependent on the instructor, with a respondent who was the head of an academic department involving ‘Islamic Law’ suggesting that lawyers who take a more positivist approach were preferable than colleagues in other disciplines:

We have a legal approach. We are all lawyers, or nearly all of us. Nearly all of us, are legally qualified in some way or other…That distinguishes us quite markedly from colleagues in other institutions in the [United Kingdom] and elsewhere who tend to be grounded in Islamic studies.

One of the reasons given for why legal education in ‘Islamic Law’ faced some of the challenges outlined above was the lack of scholarship in the area and the lack of legal expertise in the area at the academic level, which then filtered down to the legal practice level. Even those who had acted as expert witnesses stated that “it comes down to the fact that the person who’s asking for the opinion doesn’t know any better, as to this person perhaps has this view but perhaps there are other views to this that we need to consider,” leading to decisions which do not meet the intentions of the parties involved and can be erroneous. This was agreed by another respondent, who described it as “a vicious circle.” One internationally experienced ‘Islamic Law’ academic concluded that this had led to a vacuum of verifiable expertise in the area: “In the [United Kingdom] you probably have quite a few…that claim to meet, claim expertise and serve as expert witnesses,” despite the lack of a minimum standard or required qualifications. A recurring
theme in the interviews linked to this legal expertise was the need for Arabic language for education in ‘Islamic Law’. One respondent who had studied ‘Islamic Law’ both formally at university in their masters and doctoral programs, as well as through informal short courses, stated that “there’s people teaching Islamic law there, and they’re experts in Islamic law, and they can’t speak Arabic, and I find that really, really annoying,” again reverting back to the challenge of a lack of scholarship in the area. Respondents suggested that despite legal education in ‘Islamic Law’ lacking, increasing the provision of such courses was also challenging as “then one might well encounter the problem of finding competent people.” This was reiterated by another respondent, who was part of a unique academic department holding both ‘Islamic Law’ and English law expertise: “The problem with it then [is that] you need people who are sufficiently familiar with it to be able to teach it, and I don’t know that you’ll have that for every university.”

Respondents were also asked about the areas of legal practice ‘Islamic Law’ has impacted in order to assess the current and future provision of legal education in the area. Legal practice was said to include “Islamic family law including divorce,” “Islamic finance,” “commercial law,” “laws of Middle Eastern countries,” “private international law,” “construction and engineering,” “public international law,” “Islamic law of succession,” “ethnic minorities and the law,” “faith-based schooling,” “human rights,” “Shari‘ah councils,” “halal food,” “sexual issues,” “arbitration,” “immigration,” “comparative law,” “Islamic commercial law,” “corporate law,” “where Islamic law is relevant to English practice,” and “inheritance issues with foreign clients.” The breadth of legal practice areas affected was therefore shown to be wide-ranging. It is these clients’ needs that influence legal practice needs and therefore legal education needs. One respondent expressed that “it is very important to get to know your client and to know what’s important to your client and how to make sure that you act in their best interest…if you wish to make, if you wish to, address their needs
so that you can supply them…good service.” It was emphasized that having knowledge in the area was important to maintain legal standards and the rule of law, as “clients consider that their lawyer has sufficient knowledge of Islamic law to guide them.”

Due to the wide range of the areas ‘Islamic Law’ impacts and differences in opinion on the very definition of the term, the knowledge required was not always clear. The area of ‘Islamic Law’ overall, let alone specifically for legal practice, was said to be extremely fragmented, with overlapping methodologies and ideologies that may not be obvious to someone outside the field. With certain issues in ‘Islamic Law’ in legal practice, “it can be just simply unknown or as yet unclarified what the Islamic position is on any modern legal issue” which therefore leads to “translating between these two systems as an expert…You need the study of Islam, and you need the study of Western law” due to the existence of “pluralism and multiple legal orders.” Given these complexities, the need for increased legal education in ‘Islamic Law’ was emphasized, but not to the detriment of legal education in English law. One respondent stated succinctly that what is required by a legal professional is knowledge of both legal systems and not “so much to reconcile Islamic law and secular law, but to reconcile how these different legal systems would look at the issues…apply it to the case, and then try and produce a solution which would adhere closest to what the parties wanted.”

However, although most respondents supported an increase in legal education in ‘Islamic Law’ to remedy the gap in legal practice, differing viewpoints were also represented. One respondent with extensive legal experience within the judiciary in England and Wales but no ‘Islamic Law’ experience in academia or practice supported the diversification of legal education overall but disagreed with the need to increase legal education in ‘Islamic Law’. Another respondent stated that “we have a tradition in England of learning the law as you go along…I don’t think any ordinary English lawyers
get to know anything about Shari'ah law… I don’t expect that the experts in Shari'ah law in the city are experts as a result of education… you aren’t going to find a huge demand for this…it’s quite a specialist endeavor.” Similarly, another respondent, who acknowledged that ‘Islamic Law’ existed in legal practice in England and Wales, was the head of a Islamic and Middle Eastern law department at a university, and worked extensively with ‘Islamic Law’ in practice, concurred:

I don’t think that Islamic law is necessary as a part of the professional curriculum for an English lawyer… In my view, there are enough modules that exist, yes. I don’t see that it needs to be at the academic level, I don’t see that there [are] any inquiries at the practitioner level. … It’s a specialized topic where there is a relevance, and the specialized topic is generally, as far as I know, dealt with—dealt with pretty well.

Overall, therefore, the rich data obtained from the elite interviews explored only briefly above demonstrate that the meaning of ‘Islamic Law’ in the context of legal practice is varied, incorporating a range of concepts with both cultural and religious elements. The definition for legal practice was shown to differ from a traditional definition of ‘Islamic Law’ due to the breadth of the areas of law it encompassed, the demographics of England and Wales, and the extensive client needs in the region, many of whom are British Muslims. It is argued that the fact of cultural pluralism leads to a need for more substantial acceptance of legal pluralism being required, even without reconciliation. This importance and the existence of legal pluralism can be translated to a significance in legal education of the subject, and therefore in this case, alongside the study of English law, a comparative approach would be useful, or at least education that addresses the existence of two legal systems alongside one another and that emphasizes the need to understand both, without treating one a “foreign” and inferior and the other as domestic and superior, when clearly both are applicable to a number of British citizens.
Conclusion

The Future of Legal Education of ‘Islamic Law’ for Legal Practice

In conclusion, there is a compelling unmet need to improve legal education regarding ‘Islamic Law’ for legal practice in order to better meet the needs of clients and Muslims in the United Kingdom, in its pedagogy, the topics covered, how and by whom it is offered, and the frequency of courses. However, this is not without its challenges. The qualification of experts in the area is questionable, as is the impact of the lack of relevant scholarship on legal education and consequently legal practice. Misconceptions in ‘Islamic Law’ can be attributed to a lack of legal education despite the public interest in it. The future of legal education on ‘Islamic Law’ requires greater emphasis on legal practice and modernized teaching approaches at both the academic and vocational levels. Conceptions of education and practice that allow practitioners to treat Islamic Law as foreign law and to delegate their responsibilities to questionable “experts” have been shown to be flawed.

For future legal education, this may mean that ‘Islamic Law’ is taught in a more practice-focused manner as an additional variable or an additional part of a law course on another conventional area, such as Commercial Law or Family Law, to allow students to understand the links between both. This would still not cover the breadth of ‘Islamic Law’ in legal practice, but would go some way to improve the current status quo. This provides a contrast to the standalone module approach, especially if it is optional. The respondents quoted above have stated that Muslims are part of British life and therefore need to be represented in teaching in a way that reduces the view of Muslims as “other” or Islamic law as “foreign law.” A standalone module could therefore develop topics in more depth that are highlighted pervasively.

As a result of this need remaining unmet, the current lack of legal education in an area of increasing importance is leading to those
needing to practice in the area having insufficient knowledge and experience to meet their clients’ needs, particularly those of Muslims in the United Kingdom. Erroneous and misinformed decisions can have a lasting impact on those affected. There is a pressing gap to be bridged, to ensure that those legal professionals who practice in the area have the sufficient skills, education, and knowledge in the area, on par with other areas of law practiced, to be able to more competently provide legal advice, thus enabling them to better uphold the rule of law.
Endnotes

1 Also referred as ‘the Cave’ and ‘Rumi’s’.
2 Over 9.3 thousand on Facebook and over 2.8 thousand followers on Instagram.
3 Peace Be Upon Him.
4 Annual spiritual gathering celebrating the birth of the prophet Muhammad.
5 Remembrance of God.
6 Charity No: 1102943.
7 A religious verdict.
20 See José Mapril, “Maulana Says the Prophet is Human, not God’: Milads and hierarchies among Bengali Muslims in Lisbon”, Lusotopie 14:1 (2007): 255-270, for a very similar occurrence also in Lisbon, but this time among the Bangladeshi community.


27 See, for example, Mikkel Rytter, “Transnational Sufism from Below: Charismatic Counseling and the Quest for Well-Being”, South Asian Diaspora 6:1 (2014): 105-119, for Pakistani Barelwis living in Denmark.


29 Ibid.

30 Abdel-Hakim Ourghi, Reform des Islam: 40 Thesen (München 2017), 61.

31 Immanuel Kant, Der Streit der Fakultäten, Zweiter Abschnitt (Hamburg 2005), 91.


33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.


37 Ates, Selam, Frau Imamin, 55.

38 Ourghi, Reform des Islam, 146.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., 223.

41 Ibid., 39.

42 Ibid., 41.

43 Ibid., 223.


45 Ibid., 89.


47 Mas, In Apocalyptic Tones of Islam in Secular Time, 89.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 Ourghi, Reform des Islam, 35.
Ibid., 41.
52 Ateş, Selam, Frau Imamin, 22.
53 Ourghi, Reform des Islam, 13.
54 Ateş, Selam, Frau Imamin, 51-61.
55 Ateş, Selam, Frau Imamin, 92.
56 Ourghi, Reform des Islam, 25.
57 Ateş, Selam, Frau Imamin, 94.
58 Ourghi, Reform des Islam, 19.
59 e.g. Ateş, Seyran, „Grüß Gott, Frau Imamin, “in Die Zeit 13.06.2017
20.05.2018).
60 Ateş, Selam, Frau Imamin, 17.
61 Mas, In Apocalyptic Tones of Islam in Secular Time, 88.
62 Cf. Talal Asad, Formations of the Secular. Christianity, Islam, Modernity (Stanford
University Press 2003), 179.
63 Timothy Mitchell, “The Stage of Modernity,” in Timothy Mitchell ed. Questions of
Modernity (University of Minnesota Press 2000), 1-37, 7.
64 Ibid.
65 Ateş, Selam, Frau Imamin, 195.
66 Ibid., 196.
68 Harvey, David, “Time-space compression and the postmodern condition,” in Modernity:
69 Grossberg, Lawrence, “The Space of Culture, The Power of Space,” in Iain Chambers &
Lidia Curti ed. The Postcolonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons (Routledge
70 See De Certeau, Michel, The Practices of Everyday Life (University of California Press
1986), 107.
72 “Shoulder-to-shoulder and foot-to-foot” See for example what Dār al-Iftā’ al-Miṣriyyah
have stated regarding the conditions of congregational prayers
http://www.daralifta.org/ar/ViewFatwa.aspx?ID=12824&LangID=1&MuftiType=0
(accessed 20.06.2018).
73 Massad, Joseph, Islam in Liberalism (University of Chicago 2015), 32.
74 Ibid., 35f.
75 Especially Talal Assad and Saba Mahmood. Cf. Mahmood, Saba, Religious Difference in
76 Personal Conversation (20.10.2017).
77 Personal Conversation (20.10.2017).
79 Wendy Brown, Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire
(Princeton University Press 2006), 1-16.
81 Ibid.,137.
82 Ibid.,135.
83 Ibid., 134.
84 Jeldtoft, N. and Nielsen, J. (eds.), Methods and Contexts in the Study of Muslim Minorities:

Bullock, K., Muslim Women Activists in North America (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), xviii.


Ibid., 522.


Ibid., 597.

Ibid., 605.

Ibid., 604.


Panjwani, “No Muslim Is Just a Muslim,” 597.


130 The participants’ names, ages, schools, location, and the specific name of the subject they teach have been changed to protect their anonymity.


134 Ibid., 405.


136 The meaning of ‘Islamic Law’ is contentious; it is not a “uniform body of regulatory norms” as the phrase may suggest. It is often used interchangeably with the words *fiqh* and Shari’ah, or is used to mean both. For the purposes of this paper, ‘Islamic Law’ will be used to refer to the broad legal tradition encompassing *fiqh* and Shari’ah that is used by Muslims to regulate their daily lives. The meaning of ‘Islamic Law’ for legal practice was established as part of the doctoral study, from which this paper derives.


150 Riccardi, “Women at a Crossroads.”


157 Ibid.

158 Ibid.


162 Moore, *The Unfamiliar Abode*; “Two-Thirds of Married British Muslims…”


164 Salaymeh, “Commodifying ‘Islamic Law’…”


167 (المتوسطة): “The Prophet Muhammad’s (peace be upon him) conduct that has been established as a model for others to follow; this conduct may be expressed in the Prophet’s own practices, his utterances or his tacit approval of events or pronouncements made in presence; with the passage of time it became, after the Qur’an, the second source of Islamic law,” *The Holy Qur’an*, http://www.quranexplorer.com/quran/ (accessed 8 June 2015).

168 (الشريعة): This is “revealed law” derived from the revelation of the Qur’an and the revelations of the Sunnah, the theological tenets and practical rulings that have been legislated by Allah for Muslims. Wael B. Hallaq, *The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

169 (فقه): *Fiqh* linguistically means “understanding” and is most commonly used to refer to the theory or philosophy of ‘Islamic Law’; it is also referred to as Islamic Jurisprudence. It can be separated into *Usul Al-Fiqh* (أصول) (“roots/philosophy”) and *Furu Al-Fiqh* (فروع) (topics).

170 Siyasa is a public or state law and is composed of numerous decrees/laws or regulations. Contrary to fiqh, it is based on the principle of al-maslaha al'amma (المسلحة العامة) (“public welfare or utility”). In the sense of statecraft, it can include the management of affairs of state and, eventually, that of politics and political policy. “Fiqh,” Oxford Reference [Website], http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195125580.001.0001/acref-9780195125580-e-659 (accessed 20 August 2017); “Islamic Law,” in The Oxford Dictionary of Islam, ed. John L. Esposito (Oxford University Press, 2003).

