

## **Performance and Surveillance in an era of Austerity: Schooling the reflexive generation of Muslim young men.**

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### **Abstract**

The last fifteen years has seen a remarkable shift in the educational representation of British born Muslim young men. In the media-led reclassification of them, from South Asian to Muslim, they have moved from ideal student to potential jihadist. This paper draws upon a three year ethnographic study with young Muslim men located within the West Midlands. A shared emphasis on structural issues across critical theoretical frameworks on neoliberalism, government discourses, such as Prevent, (1) and counter narratives on Islamophobia serves to underplay young Muslim men's subjectivity and in so doing limits their self-authorisation. We argue that at a time of intense state/institutional surveillance as a 'suspect community' and the criminalization of ethnic and religious difference that Muslim young men are in the process of negotiating late modern urban masculine identities. Simultaneously, deploying a methodological reflexivity indicates that a re-reading of their narratives provides insights into recent political changes and national belonging.

### **Introduction**

There is a long history of schooling that demonstrates its role in the social and cultural reproduction of British society and accompanying class, racial and sex/gender divisions. The last decade of State-led austerity measures has led to the intensification of such divisions with the emergence of neoliberalism as a key theme of education policy (Sian, 2013). These divisions are becoming exacerbated as the UK acquaints itself with the implications of

leaving the European Union (Brexit). Themes of national belonging and remembering have re-emphasized forms of cultural differentiation that have traditionally underpinned ethnicized distinctions of a 'them' and 'us' sensibility. More specifically, Michael Wilshaw (2016), (former chief inspector of schools) reflecting on the European Union Referendum results suggested that the regional unevenness of improving schools across England was linked to an increasing sense of forgotten communities across a divided nation. Two overlapping narratives of Islamophobia and anti-EU immigration media discourses have been made highly visible in the increased spike in hate crimes (Versi, 2016). Whilst such narratives dovetail with popular media narratives that reduce Brexit to a disenfranchised and discontented white English working class, it is crucial to recognise that such issues connect with broader dialogues of identity that focus on who has the power to authorise and legitimize claims to national belonging.

Political, academic and media commentators have marked out the discursive terrain on which national identity is being negotiated; the re-inscription of existing analytical frames continue to delimit what we are *able* to know and understand. Issues such as austerity, Brexit and concerns about the shift of the Radical Right in the US and across Europe are popularly discussed through discourses of safety, risk and danger. At the same time, frames for understanding such discourses have been simplistically reduced to a politics of colour, often unproblematically extrapolating dominant ideologies of racial oppression onto dynamic social categories such as religion, gender, class and sexuality. Rather than conflate the political with the analytical, it is important to synthesize the descriptive and the explanatory. As Yar (2012, p.113) suggests, 'If descriptive concepts grasp 'what is', and normative concepts grasp 'what ought or ought not to be', then explanatory concepts grasp how and why those states of affairs (already descriptively mapped and normatively evaluated) have

come to be'. In this article we do this by giving epistemological privilege to young Muslim men and explore through their subjectivities, how themes of belonging, identity and nationhood are understood. Through qualitative research, we examine how young Muslim men's reflexive accounts of their schooling, speak to and of neo-liberal discourses. Lindisfarne and Neale (2016, 30) usefully identify three kinds of change to indicate how neo-liberalism works: 'The first concerns the naturalization of inequality. The second is about increased gendered marking. The third requires a consideration of the increasing physical and cultural differences between the elite and ordinary people'. Of key concern is to understand how young men are experiencing such changes. More specifically, in order to capture their accounts, this article explores through empirical research with young Muslim men, their educational experiences in relation to spatialized segregation, young men's negotiation of urban masculine identities and the processes of gendering within schooling contexts.

Making sense of the connections between neoliberal discourses, schooling and Muslim young men is currently highly complex. There is a long (imperial/neo-imperial) history of discarded images of racialized social groups, who are projected across state governance, policy-making and (empiricist) research as a major problem. It is suggested that in the context of the UK, government discourses, such as Prevent, are perceived as an attempted containment of Muslim young men by fixing them into a reified singular category of (religious) identity that serves to underplay their subjectivity and in so doing denies them the social power of self-authorization. This lack of self-authorization has been in the context of a remarkable shift in the educational representation of British born Muslim young men. In the media-led reclassification of them, from South Asian to Muslim, they have moved from ideal student to potential jihadist. One of the tools that has been useful theoretically to anchor young Muslim

men's accounts has been that of post-colonialism. Such a perspective enables us to avoid reinscribing them as the problem, and instead providing a space in which they can represent their own positioning within the education system.

Post-colonialism is being used here to capture how emerging identities are being manufactured, marked by diaspora (movement of people - dispersal), hybridity (mixing of cultures) and syncretism (pluralistic forms of cultural belonging) (Spivak, 1988a and b; Bhabha, 1990; Gilroy, 1993). This provides us with the capacity to acknowledge a more inclusive notion of multiple, decentred nationalisms, racisms and ethnicities, including those of the Anglo-ethnic majority, marked by a logic of relationality and contradiction; exploring the different subject positions that are inhabited within these various categories; and in analysing the interconnections between migration, class, gender and sexuality, taking account of the *positionality* of subjects' different national belongings with respect to one another (Brah, 1996). It is important to recognize that, "colonialism...not just happens from outside a country or a people, not just something that operates with the collusion of forces inside, but a version of it can be duplicated from within" (Loomba, 2005: 16). Most importantly, understanding post-colonial ethnicities as gendered exhibits a complex interweaving of sameness and identification alongside that of difference and dis-identification (see Baldwin, in Troupe, 1989).

### **Theorizing neoliberalism, education and Muslim young men's identity formation and subjectivity**

The last few decades at national and global levels suggests that the globalization of education has witnessed the ascendancy of neo-liberal discourses as of central significance in shaping policies and practices (Torres, 2009). As Cornwall (2016, 7-8) suggests, the concept

neoliberalism is contentious. For example, 'For some, it evokes an economic order, one associated with economic expansion of free market capitalism, outsourcing and commodification.... Yet for others, it is precisely the ways in which neoliberalism engages the production of accountable, entrepreneurial subjectivities, that makes it so invidious and pervasive, and that invite consideration of neoliberalism as governmentability'. Therefore neo-liberalism creates the discourses through which academic achievement and failure become understood and, in so doing, shape social and cultural interpretations of students' behaviours. Furthermore, knowledge within a neoliberal context is becoming understood as a commodity, and hence pedagogy itself is imbricated within marketplace relations (Stromquist and Monkman, 2000). The impact is that in the market, the effectiveness of the teacher / student relationship becomes the responsibility of the individualized learner. As a result, achievement is the responsibility of a pre-social individual that includes the erasure of gendered difference. Alongside this, for Beltran-Carillo, *et al.* (2012, 7), performance, understood as productivity and efficiency to get objective results, is the main purpose and value in neo-liberal contexts. The worth, quality, or value of a person depends on his or her performance in relation to this culture, with a constant assessment and a system of rewards and sanctions that generates competitiveness and high pressure to fulfil standards.

It is suggested that the impact of neo-liberalism on educational policy has resulted in three key implications. First, the effects of the de-regulation of English state schooling emanating from neoliberal policies have resulted in new forms of stratification with the emergence of a diverse range of institutions that have developed over the last 15 years, including academies, voluntary aided, community and free schools. This fragmentation has been accompanied by a new internal hierarchy of schools, with widening selection of students that has differentiated class and racial effects on different regions (*The Observer*, 2013). Second,

there is a significant shifting of representations of minority ethnic/religious groups. For example, during the 1970s/80s, young black men were positioned as a major cultural threat as exemplified by the racialized image of the ‘mugger’ and the racialized label ‘educationally sub-normal’. In contrast, South Asian young men were show-cased as exemplars of a rhetorical moment of successful cultural integration but are now positioned as an institutional threat to the successful transmission of values (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2014). Third, schooling has historically functioned as a social and cultural refuge for the projection of English social anxieties. Multiculturalism is assumed to have failed, with ethnic and particularly religious difference assumed to be creating spaces of cultural separation as minority ethnic groups do not integrate into Britain (Ragazzi, 2015). In response, there is an emerging tension between the cultivation of the neoliberal subject and the identification of religious identities, with a primary spatial image of self-segregating Muslims as a major cultural threat (Miah, 2015, 30).

Although, approaches to neo-liberalism and education provide a productive analysis of how young Muslim masculinities are being reconfigured, there are particular issues with this perspective. As Brenner et al (2010) suggest, often the use of neo-liberalism coincides with a merging or fusing of Gramscian and Foucauldian ideas. This means that neo-liberalism through the dissemination of values of marketization and competition sustains hegemonic relations of capital while also attempting to capture the subjectification of those in education. Thus, there is a structuring of discourses that mobilise political and economic interests that appear to shape subjectivities. What becomes absent, according to Brenner, is a theorization of subjectification. As such, we need to move away from one dimensional accounts that simplistically structure subjectivities, rather: ‘we should try to discover how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really, and materially constituted through a multiplicity of

organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, thoughts, etc...' (Foucault, 1980, p.97) (see for example, Wilkins, 2012). Ensuring a critical evaluation of neo-liberalism provides an opportunity to think through formations of subjectivities within schooling contexts, by noting how neo-liberalism is experienced through a range of social and cultural differentiations, as we illustrate below.

### **Research methods: Young men's narratives**

This article draws upon feminist and post-colonial theorists, such as Brah and Phoenix (2004) to focus on young Muslim men, as a generationally-specific gendered category that remains an under-researched field of inquiry. This article is based upon research with Birmingham-born young men of Pakistan and Bangladesh heritage. It is reported that 21% (approximately 232,000 people) of the population resident in Birmingham identified as Muslim (Birmingham Council, 2013) compared to 4.8% in the UK population (Office for National Statistics, 2012). This is the highest number of Muslims for a local authority in the UK. Furthermore, in terms of ethnicity, the electoral ward of Birmingham records 144,627 (13.5%) Pakistani, and 32,532 (3%) Bangladeshi within these communities. Within this context, such communities are highly diverse. However, this qualitative study does not seek inductive validity by suggesting that the participants represent the experiences of the broader Muslim male population of the area or the general population. Instead, as Crouch and McKenzie (2006, 493) argue:

Rather than being systematically selected instances of specific categories of attitudes and responses, here respondents embody and represent meaningful experience-structure links. Put differently, our respondents are 'cases', or instances of states, rather than (just) individuals who are bearers of certain designated properties (or 'variables').

Our work with a younger generation of Pakistani and Bangladeshi young men, in Newcastle, London and Birmingham, makes clear their geographically-specific local experiences of growing up in a rapidly changing Britain (Popoviciu and Mac an Ghail 2004; Mac an Ghail and Haywood 2005). In other words, the young men in this Birmingham-based study inhabit specific lifestyles and spatial masculinities within a context of diverse social trajectories among a changing Muslim diaspora in Britain. Though the research for this article was carried out in 2008-2011, we continue to carry out research in the local area. Researching young Muslims men's schooling experience is of vital importance and insights from their own interpretive schema can help gain an understanding into the contemporary changes that are taking place in relation to national identity. Therefore, it is the exploration of their meaningful experiences that was a key objective of the research design.

Our research set out to enable the research participants to inhabit an alternative representational space that provides insightful narratives about the complexity of their subject positions across public and private spaces. During a three year period, 2008-11, we have recorded the experiences of 48 Pakistani (30) and Bangladeshi (18) working-class young men, aged 16-21. In this paper, we draw upon the accounts of 22 of the young men who were attending full time education at the time of the research. Of these, 10 were Bangladeshi and 12 were Pakistani. The majority of the young men (38) (19 in this paper) attended local secondary schools, sixth form colleges and further education colleges. However, participation in education among young people of Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage is much more fractured and non-linear, including part time courses over a number of years often to accommodate family responsibilities (see Bradley and Devadason, 2008). The research groups contained a mix of Bangladeshi and Pakistani young men, who shared friendships and were part of a broader social community. Furthermore, although they were diverse



individuals, in terms of ethnicity, age, academic achievement, past experience and social status with different current experiences of being in education, work/training or unemployed, they held a shared critical reflexivity of ethnic majority assumptions of Muslim identities.

While carrying out empirical work with young people, we were introduced to two young men who were politically involved in the local area. In turn, they introduced us to other young people and subsequently led to further snowballing of other friends, family and community representatives (Patton, 1990). Access was greatly enabled by our being known for our social commitment to the local area, working with families in the local community. Group and life history interviews provided the framework through which to explore a range of critical incidents experienced by these young men. The group interviews were carried out at local community centres and they not only provided a space for multiple and often contradictory voices, they also enabled the researcher to observe young men's masculinities in action. Life history interviews were carried out in a variety of places, including at youth and community organizations and local cafes. These interviews lasted around 45 to 90 minutes and provided more in-depth insights into growing up, family, schooling, social life and local community. These interviews were supplemented by a range of other research strategies that included observations, informal conversations and interviews with parents and local community representatives (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000). The datasets from each of the methods was subject to thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) enabling us to explore '...the underlying ideas, constructions, and discourses that shape or inform the semantic content of the data' (Ussher et al, 2013, 3). The subsequent analysis was taken back to the young people themselves not simply as a form of 'face validity' but also as a way of exploring the practical and political implications of the findings. All participants were anonymized and given pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality.

### **Spatial segregation, local zoned schools, neighbourhoods and home**

In mapping the cultural histories and geographies of the shifting populations of local regions across Britain, several interconnecting features are highlighted in the young men's narratives. Significantly, for them, predominant versions of the self-segregating Muslim operating within the state's imagined 'no-go' spaces of the Mosque, the Madrasa, the ethno-religious neighbourhood, the 'Muslim family' and the 'Muslim school', lacked authority due to the nature of the racially divided city imposed upon their community. The young men captured this division through their perceptions of teachers' relationship with the local neighbourhood within which the school was situated.

Azam: They don't know anything about us, about the way we live.

Abdul: It's funny the teachers talk about the refugees and the asylum seekers and the need to care about them and include them. But they know nothing about them. Migrants live round here now and go to our school but teachers would never live here or send their kids, their own kids here.

Many of the students were critical of their teachers' comments outside their subject expertise, particularly with reference to the local neighbourhood or the changing cultural dynamics of the wider city. For example, Abdul and Azam highlight how schooling relationships become framed through notions of 'othering' that disrupted teacher narratives about inclusivity and togetherness. This illustrates the complexity of how neo-liberal practices operate in schooling spaces. For Phoenix, (2004, 228) neo-liberalism is: 'an economic system and philosophy based on laissez-faire free market values and freedom of globalized corporations.'

It enshrines values of competition, entrepreneurialism, market participation, privatization, lack of state intervention, individual responsibility (e.g., employability), surveillance, assessment, and managerialism'. Therefore there is a broader state function that promotes and implements policies that facilitate competition, entrepreneurialism and a reduction in the role of the state. There is also the shaping of individual subjectivities based on the cultivation of knowledge and skills that are deemed to be in global market demand. The implication of individual responsibility is intersected with ethnicity and spatial location, and as the young men indicate above, they experience this as a responsibility that has shifted from that of the school to that of the individual. Furthermore, crucially whilst the pervasiveness of neo-liberalism is reconstituting relationships between local institutions, the state and global markets, the individualizing process is also forging particular forms of (young Muslim) masculinities (Blackmore, 2000), beyond the generational specificity and collectivist position of multiculturalist policy that has operated in Birmingham schools and nationally for the last few decades.

In discussing education policy with the students, to what they referred as 'old multiculturalism' seemed to have little generational resonance for them, most of whom attended schools with significant minority ethnic populations. They adopted a range of perspectives in outlining the social and cultural backgrounds of their education. For some students, there was a naturalness and comfortableness about attending the local school, while others spoke of their increasing awareness of being culturally positioned as the religious or racial outsiders in the city. Another group of students explained that while they operated with a different value system to that of the neoliberal assumptions of their local school, they created a range of strategies to ensure they successfully negotiated their educational trajectories. In so doing, this cohort illustrates their agency as a reflexive third generation of

Muslim young men, who have rejected the simple oppositional logic of earlier generations, who experienced different forms of a racially structured schooling system.

Miah's concept of 'spatial narratives of Muslim geographical space' (2015, p. 56) illustrates the local dynamics within which diasporian groups operate, highlighting their agency in decision-making, for example, around school choice. The young men suggest through their accounts of family remembering that these 'spatial narratives of Muslim geographical space' are lived out within the context of the wider society's changing value system. They recalled family discussions that offered interesting interpretations of contemporary neoliberal schooling, Muslim areas, individual aspiration and social mobility that served to challenge the assumption of the official ascription of an oppositional logic operating between Muslim communities and the wider society. Crucially, neo-liberal assumptions about self-entrepreneurism do not connect with these young men's approach to schooling. In the extract below we see how for them after going to university, they will return to home to find work. They highlight a value system that places the family as a key component of their identifications.

Saad: You got to remember it's different for us. At school they push you all the time to work hard to get on. The key words are aspiration and success, and then get away. They don't mean to be bad. But they're talking about our areas. They're talking about us getting away from the bad area round here, away from Muslims, isn't it really? You see what I mean, they just don't see it.

Javed: They just have a different way of looking at things, like for them. Their kids when they go to uni, they leave home and that's it. But for us, we want to look after our family.

Saad: Probably, for them school is just a place to work, even the good ones wouldn't see it like us. For us, we'll get a good education, go to a local uni or even if we go away for a course, we want to get a good job and career, so we can come back and look after our family, or whatever, we look after our family.

Irfan: It wouldn't make sense to just dump your family. I don't think teachers would ever think that when they talk like they do, this is our home.

In earlier work, we have identified the range of investments that young Muslim men have in their families. It was argued that these men were developing a different kind of emotional language and engagement with their families that appeared to differ from that of their schools. For example, whilst schools were promoting an individualization of student career trajectories, as seen above the young men framed this trajectory within the context of their investment in family life. Thus, whereas schools might view family life as a constraint to their potential futures, restricting their choices, young men in our research, pointed to a strong need and investment in cross-generational support that could be found within their families. It became evident, as indicated by the young men above that even when they did move away from their families to pursue their careers, it was done so with the intention of returning back to be close to their families and local neighbourhoods. This has significant implications for how we begin to understand young Muslim masculinities.

The focus on career and individualization connected with broader neo-liberal discourses of performativity. However, these young men didn't simply see performativity as a pressure upon individuals, it was also part of a broader configuration of schooling practices.

Shabbir: Like before when our parents came here, they said professional people lived round here. That was better then, cos kids would have a lot more role models.

Amir: Yes, and people, professional people and everyone just sent their kids to the local school, so it was like a real good mix of kids, so everyone got a good education.

Mairtin: So, what changed?

Amir: We're British now (laughing).

Kashif: That's the point. It wasn't about Muslims changing. They changed the schooling across the country with league tables, a bit like the premier league. Everyone wants to be a premier club. Round here you go round the schools on parents' evenings when your brother's going into secondary and it's like a big sale.

Yasin: Yes, the schools changed but so have Muslims. Everyone, including Muslims get on in life differently now, I think. In the past people helped each other more, now you look after yourself more.

The marketization of schooling has resulted in packaged experiences that become a measure of quality and success. The emergence of the 'experience economy' (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) is accompanied by schools promoting their USPs (Unique Selling Points) to potential customers. Here, schooling has become more than a traditional life stage process; it has been transformed into a customized institutional delivery of skills and knowledges that is premised

on a social imaginary of facilitating the future social and economic success of the nation state in the global world (Rizvi and Engel, 2009). The young Muslim men make sense of league tables through sporting tropes, using the English Premier League to capture the measurability of success. Understanding schooling as a 'big sale' as Kashif points out, helps to contextualise open days, promotional literature and parents' evenings becoming places where the value of the school can be promoted. Wilkinson (2016) highlights the customization of schooling is resulting in the institutional use of brands to appeal emotionally to parents. Schools therefore have become part of a broader 'brandscape', where the brand is promoted and celebrated and not simply the product, as Wood and Ball (2013, 47) suggest, 'while they appear in a wide range of formats, brandscapes have one common element: the generation and exploitation of affect in the consumer subject'. Thus the application of this economic model to education has resulted in a situation where: 'The value of knowledge is now linked to a crude instrumentalism, and the only mode of education that seems to matter is one that enthusiastically endorses learning marketable skills, embracing a survival of the fittest ethic, and defining the good life solely through accumulation and disposing of the latest consumer goods' (Giroux, 2012, 43). The young men in this study have tended to identify the negative impact of neo-liberalism on their local schooling. Nevertheless, different individuals did and will in the future in terms of their careers take up different positions with reference to producing and inhabiting diverse individualised masculine identities and subjectivities.

### **Negotiating young urban masculine identities and subjectivities: diasporian space and the cultural invisibility of the white working class**

In focussing upon the negotiation of masculine identities and subjectivities among young Muslim men, one way to conceptualize responses to changing definitions of socio-cultural biographies in a school context is to view them as a set of narratives of 'self-production' that

are dispersed through a multiplicity of power relations. As Knights and McHughes (1990, 287) argue: '...individuals are not the passive recipients or object of structural processes, but are constructively engaged in the securing of identities'. A major limitation of much theorizing of third generation Muslim young men's relation to British society is that conventional notions about national/ethnic/religious inclusion/exclusion appear as a simple one-dimensional product of these young men's cultural context. By theoretically shifting from a focus on product to process, these notions can be seen as examples of 'doing culture'. What becomes of central importance is to explore the constitutive elements of the young men's identity work, in relation to emerging diasporian selves and identities that is played out within specific institutions. As we indicated in the introduction, state schooling remains of central significance to these young men's negotiation of diverse biographical trajectories. For example, in the following narrative, older teachers, who were well known in the community and operated with a social democratic pedagogical model that has been displaced by neoliberalism, were seen as an essential resource for these high achieving young men in the negotiation of future identities involving higher education and professional careers.

Zain: Teachers always had to make all the changes from the government when we were at school but the thing was that there were some teachers who had been at our school for years and they were great, they really helped us.

Mairtin: So, did they help all the students?

Malik: Well, they would have but it was also about us, we worked hard and wanted to get on and we'd heard from our families that had been at the school that they were really good



teachers. They just really loved their subject and they knew our older brothers and that and they knew we would work hard.

Malik: But obviously it's not all Muslims cos there were those who didn't work hard, so it's about making choices, about what you want in life and the friends you choose and your family supporting you. But also we were lucky with these teachers, cos they really cared, not just with the top groups but with anyone who worked hard and needed support.

The above extract provides an insight into how the teacher – student relationship has changed. For these young men, older teaching styles were connected to values of care and understanding that were embedded in a broader network of family and community. Within a British context, postcolonial analysis at a theoretical and empirical level is assumed to provide a framework to explore the developing identities of the children and grandchildren of post-war Asian and African Caribbean immigrants, as is illustrated above (Ali, et al, 2006). Here, the young Muslim men illustrate its productive capacity as a future analytical framework to provide an inclusive understanding of student subjectivities that are in the process of being produced within the context of neoliberal schooling, as a central element of the local expression of an increasing sense of social selection, cultural exclusion and national division. The experience of schooling as inclusive to one of performative is further captured in a focus group discussion below.

Mairtin: So is this the same for everyone?

Yasin: Well families want the best school now, they talk like that. But yes, your religious values are of course still there. It's like they're all mixed up with the general values everyone

lives with, looking after yourself and your family. And the only thing they're looking at is exam results.

Mairtin: So, what do you think of that?

Shabir: We always come back to the same thing when we talk about this, it's really complex. Because it's definitely not being about really being bright or not bright but who the teachers think are, we had mates who were just as clever as us and they just gave up. There was no-one there for them.

Amir: This is the main issue, round here, for all kids, Muslims or white kids, not segregation and all that stuff but having a school that looks after all the students whatever their ability or whatever. Giving teachers the time to talk properly with students.

The prioritizing of exam results appears to produce a process of selection that, in their experience, 'pushes the bright ones' at the expense of those who may not be seen as 'high achievers'. This is countered by Shabir who argues that it also about teacher inclusivity. Reading through the students' narratives, Avtar Brah's (1996, 2009) work on diaspora is particularly resonant in a late modern intensely racially-divided Britain in which she argues that we are currently located within a *diaspora space*. By this, she means, the socially inhabited conditions, where the entanglement of identities constructed as 'indigenous' and 'immigrant', national and transnational constitute the point at which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of "us" and "them" are contested'. It is important to see that forms of exclusion operate through schooling practices, and for these young men, the prioritizing of a pedagogy of performance over a pedagogy of inclusion.

The young Muslim men challenged the media's ascribed couplet framed in terms of an oppositional dualism that is assumed to be constituted by disillusioned white working class young men (in a post-industrial society, informed by a decade of economic austerity) and a visible cohort of Muslim young men (in a post 11 September period, who are projected as carrying an anti-British ethnicity). More specifically, within a pedagogical context, we see the limitations of both neoliberalism and, as indicated above, what the Muslim students referred to as the policy of 'old multiculturalism' and their claim of its failure to connect with a range of needs of a current generation of students. Furthermore, the process of selection based on a pedagogy of performance, serves to resonate with their socio-economic location within the city. This generation of young men, located within Birmingham, recognise that they are part of a de-industrialising city where masculine identities have traditionally been spatially embodied through traditional manufacturing work. Such work was often intrinsically linked to nationhood that in turn is intricately linked to histories of empire and colonialism that are differently remembered or forgotten by different social groups (Kumar, 2003). This older connection to the global has been reconfigured through the rise of a service sector economy. In short, the wider restructuring of the global economy, networks of power and capital flows, are creating new forms of marginality for these young men as identifications with older 'British' forms of (local) work are no longer available to a contemporary generation.

### **The neoliberal re-masculinisation of the schooling regime of surveillance – displaying alternative forms of gendering**

Currently in UK schools the combined effects of the legacy of the changing labour process of teaching, the emergence of an entrepreneurial curriculum and neo-liberal subject means that the restructuring of teaching and learning may be read as a direct State attempt to re-

masculinise schooling (Drudy 2008). Simultaneously, the cumulative effect of the restructured authority system with accompanying intensified surveillance, disciplinary codes, curriculum and testing stratification technologies, subject allocation and knowledge selection within a performative culture, is serving to demarcate a range of 'new' hierarchically ordered masculinities in relation to femininities. In order to understand more fully the specific spatially and culturally based sexual/gender dynamics and the accompanying performance of femininities and masculinities within the professional work culture of English schools, it is necessary to examine the inter-relationship between broader themes, such as dominant conceptions of power, cultural authority, managerialism and emotional investment/commitment. Hence, we can see that the neo-liberal governance of public institutions continues to shape a post-Welfare era marked by the 'hard market new realism' of global based economics. In turn, the latter is mediated within specific local cultural dynamics that are impacting on a shifting configuration of a late modern performativity culture and a gender performativity across the school manager's office, staff room, classroom and playground. However, as we indicated in the introduction, critical research has tended to underplay the complexity of a late modern institutional performativity culture and a gender performativity within the context of the schooling of young Muslim men. More specifically, there is an absence of understanding of both the gender positioning of the young men and importantly their negotiation of masculine identity formations and subjectivities within the specific context of the re-masculinisation of a schooling regime of institutional surveillance.

The relationship between schooling and the gendering of South Asian/Muslim male students has a complex history that continues in the neoliberal era of performativity (Mac an Ghail, 1994). During the 1970s/1980s, South Asians were seen by the state as ideal citizens, simultaneously within gender discourses circulating across public institutions, they were

assumed to be culturally recidivist, with South Asian young men positioned as highly sexist, emerging out of the assumed regressive gender/sexual practices of the intensely patriarchal South Asian community. At the same time, within the gendered politics of popular culture, South Asian young men were ascribed the lowest ethnic masculinity, with terms of abuse – for example, ‘Paki’ – carrying not simply a racial connotation but at the same moment connoting a gender meaning. Deriving from an imperial legacy of Orientalist discourses, this was part of a wider ascription of institutional processes of feminization that served to position them as ‘non-proper’ men (Said, 1993; Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003). Currently, the dominant representation of (British) Muslim youth is that of individual and collective identity crisis. Within the context of this crisis, young Muslim men are subject to a state-led project of normalising their masculinity with political and media discourses ascribing to them a contradictory masculine identity, in which they are represented as both a major threat to the state (as potential jihadists) and to themselves (as highly vulnerable to terrorist recruitment).

Asif: Talking to my uncles, I get the idea that in the past the school here had more positive stereotypes of Asian boys and now Muslim boys are seen as suspicious. And, talking to them it seems it was freer in the past for students and now with all the tests and schools in competition with each other, schools try to make all pupils act the same like an army. But if you ask about Muslim boys, I think in the past like they seemed to act more in groups, like those who worked hard or those who just dossed. But it’s totally different today, Muslim boys are more individual, you can’t put them into groups.

Yasin: It’s true, there’s lots of different styles (of being a young Muslim) online, and all the social media influencing our generation. And even when you see the kids coming out of primary (schools), you see it getting younger and younger, just been different.

Sahir: For our generation, all young people, whatever schools say you're supposed to be, you take bits of it, I suppose and mix it up with other things, cos we have a lot more choices and influences than in the past and you probably move about the styles more. So, in the past you can say there's these limited ways of being a Muslim man, like really limited for our parents, but it's different for us.

In other words, currently projected as the major threat to society, possessing a home – produced anti-British ethnicity, the young men were aware of the shift from (the local) feminization of South Asian young men to the young Muslim as (the global) masculine cultural warrior. Furthermore, for them the figure of the British Muslim young man is imagined not simply as a social threat to the state (the latest male folk devils) but as an existential threat to the British nation and its future identity. It is argued that whilst schools are operating with structuralist-based notions of ascribed masculinities, the students are displaying alternative forms of gendering as a reflexive generation of younger men. Although, these young men are freed from the structural constraints of traditional labour processes that were often characterised by Fordist organization, they are experiencing under-employment and intermittent education. In short, the traditional resources that have been made available to make their masculinities have been subject to global transformations. As we have seen above, the networks of friends, family and community have become important resources in the formation of masculine subjectivities. At present, these young men not only inhabit a location of social and economic marginalization, the spaces to make traditional hegemonic British identities are also no longer available to those referred to as the *white working class* (Sveinsson, 2009). One consequence of this is that across the wider society and among the young men, there appears to be a reworking of hierarchies of majority and minority ethnic masculinities that are being played out within the school.

Sajid: It's like the media put white working class on one side as racist and as though they are all UKIP and put Muslims as the other extremists on the other side. And it's like there's normal British people in the middle, that's British people, white middle-class people. And maybe some teachers have that view as well, I don't know, because what do they know about us or our mates, our white mates, who live round here?

Irfan: A lot of the white kids, especially the boys in our school seemed to be in the lower classes and getting in more trouble. A lot of the teachers were only interested in the top pupils and so they got left behind more and more each year. There were Asian and black kids, especially boys failing as well, but somehow the white boys seemed to stick out. All kids need support especially the weaker ones but I don't think any schools care about them now.

We can see above that these young men are caught up as the 'oppositional other' in the British/English re-invention of their collective national identity. Hence, the Muslim's social and economic marginalisation is somewhat in contrast with an unreported assertive English nationalism, involving a forging of a renewed British identity and an accompanying re-racialization of Muslims that have emerged. (Sian, 2013). Interestingly, in re-reading the young men's narratives, we can see the limitations of current dominant media representations of young people situated in highly pathologised inner-cities. Equally significant are the empathetic insights into the differential experiences of different groups of young men (and women) that are inflected with a late modern understanding that is often absent from much policy making.

Farhad: Our mates aren't interested in all the politics stuff or the race stuff. But they think that at school it's just not fair the way they were never included in anything. Like for them there was all the talk about BMEs but what about them? I mean they didn't know at the time, it didn't mean much to us either. But they seemed to feel extra bad about it, somehow.

Imtiaz: It's funny, obviously, there's bad stereotypes about us, all the usual racist stuff. But I think for white kids, I think everyone looks down on them.

Imran: My uncle says that in the past when he lived here, a neighbour, a white English family looked after the house while our family were away. They were very good to us. At that time, lots of people mixed more than now. There was bad racism with the BNP but also a lot of ordinary white families just like our family, just living their life, getting on with things.

Mairtin: So, what happened?

Imran: Probably lots of things. A lot of these families moved away, some died, jobs going. But the biggest change was the media with all the negative images of poor white people, all as problem people. It's difficult to say. We talk to our white mates some times and they don't seem to know either. No-one seems to know. It's like the ordinary white working-class people just disappeared and now there's just problem people left. I don't think it's true. It's just the way it's presented.

## **Conclusion**



Reading through the literature on the contemporary schooling of Muslim students, the emphasised focus on the Prevent strategy can be contrasted with the paucity of research on curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. This article addresses the latter, attempting to capture emerging Muslim male students' pedagogical subjectivities and identities within the context of the neo-liberal policy framework, in which achievement and academic success have become reframed through notions of individualized responsibility. Ethnographic research enabled us to create an alternative epistemological space in which we heard the students' disparate narratives, which may act as a resource in developing a future late modern curriculum for all students. For example, they suggest that for their generation there can be no simple return to an 'old multicultural' policy approach. They point to the need for policy makers to address new complex forms of inclusion and exclusion – such as prioritizing a pedagogy of performance over a pedagogy of inclusion- in relation to students' experience of spatially-located marginalization after a decade of austerity that continues to have differential effects on different social groups. The young men's narratives clearly illustrate that this shift to a broader focus on curriculum, pedagogy and assessment serves to challenge the limitations of government discourses, such as Prevent, which are interpreted as an attempted containment of them by fixing them into a reified singular category of religious identity, that serves to underplay their subjectivity and in so doing denies them the social power of self-authorization and their negotiating of reflexive pedagogical identities.

### **Footnote**

1. The Prevent strategy was launched in 2003 and published in 2006 (and reviewed in 2011), as part of a wider counter-terrorism strategy, with a primary aim to stop people from becoming or supporting terrorists, HM Government (2011). See also Saeed (2017).

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