Culture & Psychology

Article

Culture & Psychology
18(4) 559–576
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DOI: 10.1177/1354067X12456714
cap.sagepub.com

Negotiating British Muslim identity: Everyday concerns of practicing Muslims in London

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Abstract

In situations of cultural change and dislocation, and driven by both a desire to integrate and to preserve cultural identity, Muslims in Britain draw on several sources of cultural knowledge when making sense of their worlds and negotiating their identities. In this article, we present findings from an ethnographic study that demonstrate negotiations of Islamic identities in Britain as they resort to imams for religious advice to resolve everyday challenges. Drawing on social representations and dialogical-self theories, we observe how first-generation British Muslims attempt to negotiate meanings invested in objectifications implicated in everyday situations by drawing on the different sources of social knowledge that they identify with. We argue that the interobjective negotiation of different sources of cultural knowledge also entails identity negotiations resulting from the different positions taken with regards to the objectifications implicated. These identity negotiations also reflect the interplay between identity processes that maintain collective identifications and others that are individuating. The findings show that the experience of cultural change and the tensions that may arise between aspects of different cultures are also reflected and experienced within the self. These may sometimes be difficult to cope with and resolve.

Keywords

Cultural dislocation, dialogical self, identity negotiation, Islam, social representations

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The term ''identity'' is one of several ''fuzzy'' constructs employed in the social sciences. This term reflects a central and necessary preoccupation of social science disciplines, yet it has come under heavy scrutiny to the point that some have viewed its use as problematic and unnecessary (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Adding to this sense of unease with the term is its coincidence and conflation with the construct of ''self''. The self is at once a thinking, acting, and feeling agent-bound within his/her subjectivity and an assessment or description of that subjectivity from the point of view of that which is other than self (Sammut, Sartawi, Giannin, & Labate, in press). Different conceptions of ''self'' within the social sciences have ranged from a focus on an individual level of analysis in locating and studying selves (Allport, 1961; Festinger; 1954), to locating the self within an individual's relation to a social world (Mead, 1934; Potter & Wetherell,1987). Similarly, identity can be seen as a product of largely individual processes (Erikson, 1968), or a product of prescriptive social structures that shape and construct identities (see Wrong, 1961). Some reasons for these different approaches to identity can be seen as a move away from more problematic and essentializing conceptions that can create a platform for inter-group discrimination and conflict (Butler, 1999; Hall, 1996; Holtz & Wagner, 2009; Verkuyten, 2003), to a view of identity as a fluid and malleable construct that is constantly undergoing negotiation and change (Howarth, 2002; Reicher, 2004).

Rather than prizing apart the terms of ''self'' and ''identity'' and tracing the evolution of their use within the social sciences, it may serve us better to understand a dual functionality in their nature. On the one hand, individuals need to belong to groups with a sense of common history and purpose (Tajfel, 1981). This reflects a function of identity that serves to provide individuals and groups with a sense of stability and continuity. On the other hand, identity needs to provide individuals with the ability to distinguish them from others (Allport, 1961) and allow for groups to constantly reconstruct their identities in order to adapt to ever-changing social realities (Moscovici, 1961/2008). This draws parallels with the dual function of social knowledge systems and social representations.

Knowledge systems particular to a specific group serve to define it and distinguish it from other groups. The forms of common-sense that characterize social groups have a specific historical trajectory within which the group is located; where it is coming from, where it is within a larger societal structure, and where it seems to be going (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999). Additionally, new knowledge is made familiar through sense-making mechanisms that are grounded in and founded upon existing systems of group-specific knowledge. Social representations have a *transformative* potential that enables the placing of knowledge of a *previously unknown* or *absent* phenomenon (e.g. Bauer & Gaskell, 2002; Gervais, 1997; Moscovici, 1961/2008) within knowledge systems specific to different groups. In this way, social representations provide human subjects with meaningful objectifications of various elements in their surroundings, by which objects acquire the meaning they hold for a particular community (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999).

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By contrast, social representations have also a *prescriptive* potential that enables existing, well established knowledge systems to inform daily experiences of the life-world. In this way, human subjects interrelate with and through elements in their surroundings inter-objectively (Sammut, Daanen & Sartawi, 2010) in ways that are deemed sensible and meaningful by other subjects in their social environment (Wagner & Hayes, 2005). What unifies both conceptions is the idea that individuals are involved in social processes of knowledge construction that are motivated by the need to make the unfamiliar familiar (Moscovici, 1984); and that they make sense of the world as a community (*ergo* ''common-sense'', see Bauer & Gaskell, 2008), in order to orient everyday practices within the limits and boundaries of a socially constituted environment. The resultant systems of common-sense allow subjects to communicate and act in concerted modes of being. They familiarize them with their environments and draw the limits that comfortably allow them to just ''be'' unselfconsciously inside daily practices. These are necessarily framed in terms of existing knowledge and beliefs, allowing for historical continuity within different social groups and maintaining a sense of group history and identity.

In the present article, we adopt an approach to social representations that views these as ''transformative'', in terms of the concepts of ''self'' and ''dialogicality'', and apply this to an inquiry of British Muslim communities. In this undertaking, the self can be seen as inextricably linked to social knowledge and representation, or extended into them. In addition, this approach serves to conceptualize identity as both a continuous construct that contains an element of sameness and consistency, as well as something that is constantly undergoing change and transformation through its extension into an ever-changing social environment. In doing this we draw on a tradition of understanding the self as socially constituted and reflexive by exploring recent developments of the theory of the dialogical self (Hermans & Kempen, 1993). Essential to this view of the self and of social relations are the ideas of reflexivity and perspective taking (inter-subjectivity). In essence, dialogical self theory enables us to understand how social representations are reflected in the self, and how the negotiation of various I-positions (or internalized societal knowledge structures) gives rise to the reconstruction of identity. In doing so, attention is paid to the ''prescriptive'' nature of social knowledge that is drawn upon in these moments of identity negotiation and reconstruction. This enables us to shift focus from constructs such as ''self'' and ''identity'' to a focus on social knowledge and its operation in the emergence of new ways of knowing and being.

In the present study, many Muslims call mosques and consult with the imams about everyday matters and seek advice on how they should deal with problematic situations. These are often experienced tensions between an Islamic way of being and living in the UK. Of course, essentializing categories of identity such as ''Islam'' and ''Britishness'' can be problematic. However, these distinctions are made by the participants themselves, as we demonstrate hereunder, and are based on derivations from Islamic dictations of practice in scripture. In such instances of contradiction, participants view Britishness as being what Islam is not. We argue that those participants who elect to adhere to Islamic teachings

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despite difficulties in applying them in everyday life attempt to preserve *ontological* identity functions. Those who elect to violate Islamic teachings in favour of making their lives easier in certain domains of life opt for a *pragmatic* identity function (Camilleri & Mawelska-Peyre, 1997). This further reflects the dual function of both identity and social knowledge in providing stability which requires loyalty to a particular way of being (ontological functions), and a need to adapt and recreate new ways of being (pragmatic function). These identity functions are not in themselves mutually exclusive, and it might be that in other cases, individuals would find strategies for pursuing onto-pragmatic concerns. However, we note that the distinction between the two concerns is marked in respondents' recorded accounts and might be one that precipitates identity conflict for individuals who perceive these two concerns as being at odds. By identifying these two identity functions, we are able to move beyond simply speaking of "identity negotiations" and indicate *precisely what* is being negotiated in these instances of contradiction.

British, Muslim, & culturally dislocated

The issue of whether Muslims experience a threat to their Islamic identities is central to understanding strategies Muslims adopt in developing their Islamic beliefs, their social identities and, ultimately, their world-views. This threat informs their identity processes and everyday practices and behaviour. Representations of Islam and Muslims in the British media reflect constructions of Islam and Muslims that are underscored by negative meanings and associations (Ameli & Islamic Human Rights Commission, 2007). This is particularly true for the devout and the practicing (Spalek, 2008). Taken together with economic disadvantage, and direct and institutional discrimination (see UK ONS, 2004), these factors have created the perception among London's Muslims that they are undervalued and threatened. This threat, along with multifaceted forms of discrimination, is also accentuated by pressure to integrate by conforming to a particular representation of the "good" or "moderate" Muslim (Mamdani, 2004). It serves to further reify and juxtapose the categories of "Muslim" and "British" as separate, distinct, and potentially incommensurable categories. Many political and/or antisocial forms of Islamic understanding emerged as a response to socio-historical conditions within which Muslims experienced a threat towards their Islamic identities. As with most cases of prejudice and processes of stigmatization, the representation of "the dangerous Muslim" in British society has become part and parcel of Muslims' understanding/representation of themselves.

Drawing on data from an ethnographic study carried out in three of London's largest mosques, we reveal the impact of continuously changing contexts in a predominantly non-Muslim environment on British Muslims in London. The focus in the data was on the experience of everyday life of Muslims that regard Islam as central to their identity in some way (hence setting the study in mosques). Multivocality of discourse (Hermans, 1996) emerges in this study, not only as necessary, but as essential. The various discourses and social representations that can be

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identified equip members of a community with various aspects of expression that are appropriate for the various situations and contexts they may encounter. At times when these representations fail in their familiarizing and adaptive functions, new ones emerge and are incorporated into the existing multitude. Even if they never come into play again, they are forever there as part of the general system of knowledge that belongs to that group. These data reflect processes by which Islam and Muslim groups have undergone changes and adapted to diverse local contexts. They capture moments through which Muslim groups domesticate their belief systems and different ways of understanding and expressing their Islam (see Abu-Lughod, 1989; Geertz, 1968), in this case within a British context. In effect this represents a "shift from a focus on developmental end-states [...] towards a process-oriented notion of acculturation that can account for situated, negotiated, and often contested developmental trajectories" (Hermans, 2001; p. 272).

The following section will explore data from an ethnography carried out in three of London's largest mosques for an overall period of 12 months. They are taken directly from the field-notes of the primary researcher who occupied various positions at the mosques as a covert participant observer. The instances presented here are taken from one particular position the researcher occupied for 4 days per week over 9 months of the study. Through his role as an assistant to the imams of one particular mosque, the researcher was a first point of contact for those visiting imams for advice on religious matters. His job was to systematically record what people came to inquire about and relay this information to the imams who would then either pass the advice back through the researcher, or choose to meet with the callers personally, depending on the case. The researcher came to know many of the participants very well, and many of the callers to the mosque were known to the imams and mosque staff. On average, the mosque received approximately 20 requests for advice each day both over the telephone and in person. The original corpus of field note data compiled by the researcher contained over 3000 entries relating to requests for advice from the imams from this particular mosque. Other data presented here is from field notes of follow-up conversations with the imam on the particular cases mentioned or the researcher's reflections that were recorded after the excerpts were obtained. The mosque was regularly attended by Muslims from Middle-Eastern, South Asian, and African backgrounds, and the data presented here is largely taken from first-generation British Muslims. They would often discuss their backgrounds and histories, and where they didn't the researcher would ask them to present more information about themselves in order to give context to the problems they wished to discuss to the imams.

The notes were recorded in real-time by hand and coded using a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. Although the field notes were recorded in chronological order, they were sorted through coding according to the mosques they were taken from. The coding was guided by a data-driven grounded approach. Employing a thematic analysis following the steps outlined by Attride-Stirling (2001), a bottom-up approach to free coding yielded 56 lower order themes that were further organized into 19 middle-order themes, and subsequently

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4 higher-order themes. These were "Community Relations" (between different groups of Muslims and Muslim and non-Muslim groups), "Domains of Belief and Practice" (such as appearance, family, politics, and recreation), "Identity Processes" (ontological and pragmatic), and "Religious Orientation/Expression" (religion as an end in itself vs. religion as a means to achieving individual goals).The excerpts presented in this article are sorted according to themes rather than chronological order. The imams and mosque authorities were fully informed of the research aims and purposes. All measures are taken to ensure that the participants remain anonymous, and that their privacy is guaranteed.

Islam and identity: Religious preferences in the domain of family life

Many of the issues participants raised were explicit negotiations between what is prescribed by Islam (divine will) and what the participants would have elected to do had it not been for religious considerations (human will) (Yasmeen, 2008). In these encounters with participants, considerations of divine will were always the main concern. Similar findings are reported by Camilleri and Mawelska-Peyre (1997) in their study on North African Muslim immigrants to France. People, however, varied as to which domains of practice they chose to problematize. It is important to note that the data only reflect negotiations in a pre-decisional phase, and the outcome of these negotiations with regards to what participants actually decide to do is unknown. Moreover, the authors do not explicitly identify this (i.e. family life) as a central domain where participants revert to an Islamic way of being:

> A man [late 30's] came in seeming very distressed and wanted to speak to me rather than the Imam. He asked how long I've lived here and if I understood "their" customs. He was married to a Portuguese woman who wanted their children to have First Communion. He wanted to know if that was ok, although he already knew what the imams would say. I explained myself from the religious point of view, and he wanted to know my own personal opinion. His Arabic was slightly broken. He seemed to view Islam and Muslims as completely alienated from a Western way of life, and although he thought of himself as integrated he found it difficult to integrate his Islam, specifically regarding this matter. He still made an effort to come to the mosque and fast despite his choice of jewellery andaccessories.[1]

The above participant, despite his attempts to distance himself from the Islamic community, still found it challenging to integrate his Islamic identity with non-Islamic practices, particularly within the domain of family life. In practice, he saw himself as fully integrated and somehow different from other Muslims. Nevertheless, his wife's request to celebrate First Communion of their children disrupted his sense of identity and called for its renegotiation with regards to Islam. His position as a European and a husband in this case were being negotiated with his position as a Muslim father. Here, the respondent's understanding of the

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role of a European husband, one that necessitates equality in partnership and compromise, has become problematic. Something about his being Muslim created tensions when it came to his children participating in a Catholic ritual, whereas previously the various positions being negotiated coalesced. In his attempts to resolve this contradiction, the participant initially intended to seek out an imam for religious advice and certainty. However, he seemed to already know what the position of the Islamic generalized other (Mead, 1934), or the dominant Muslim societal representation, would be. His appeals to the researcher rather than the imam for advice and consultation only came after he assessed the level to which the researcher identified with a non-Islamic British culture. In a sense, he was seeking assurance, from the perspective of a generalized other, that the researcher embodied that First Communion was acceptable. This demonstrates a clear example of a breakdown in this participant's objectification of his role as a father due to the conflicting I-positions of his Muslimness and his Britishness; between what he perceived as his own will as opposed to what God would have wanted. In the end, he left without seeing the imam at all. In the following excerpt, a similar incident is documented where a Muslim young couple who (self-admittedly) did not adhere to Islamic practices in their daily lives, nevertheless turned to the imam to resolve a marital issue.

> A man [telephone] called with a long and complicated story involving him and his wife.... He admitted that they were not practicing Muslims and that they adopted a predominantly Western lifestyle. Two years ago, in a fit of rage, and under the influence of alcohol, he said taliq [you are divorced] three times to his wife. After that they reconciled but [...] did not share a bed. This is an issue in Islam. It raises questions as to whether or not this constitutes rujoo' [return of the wife to the husband]. This happened again recently, and again the same questions were raised. Now the husband and wife have had a long discussion and have decided they wish to remain together, however the wife suggested that they do this Islamically and after consulting with an imam in order to confirm the legitimacy of the marriage.

In this case, despite admitting to not being practicing Muslims, the couple still felt a need to consult the imam as to the legality of their marriage under the circumstances. Under British law, they were still married, despite the prescriptions of Islamic law. However, they chose not to rely on that fact, and felt a need to confirm the legitimacy of their marriage under Islamic law. Divorce in Islam is always initiated by the husband unless the woman has sufficient grounds to initiate it herself and convinces a judge that it is in both parties' benefit to dissolve the marriage. If the man wishes to divorce his wife, this must be done over three stages. Firstly, the husband says "taliq" to his wife, after which they then sleep in separate beds or live in separate homes. If within 4 months they reconcile, then the marriage is re-established and the husband and wife return to sharing a bed (rujoo'). If the designated period of time elapses without contactor reconciliation, both parties are free to marry other people and the marriage is considered null.

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No other parties or legal bodies need be involved in any of this. If this occurs a second time, once again the marriage can be re-established by simple reconciliation. After the third time, however, there is no longer room for reconciliation. The only way the man and woman can remarry is if they both consummate marriages with other people first, and then get divorced from them without prior intention. The rationale behind this is to minimize the occurrence of divorce and to prevent it from occurring as a result of emotional disputes or rage.

In the above excerpt, the couple's objectification of marriage became problematic due to a perceived contradiction between different systems of social representations which construct marriage and its legitimacy differently, such that they could not go on living as though they were married without consultation from a representative of Islamic law. "Marriage" became an object of reflection, and the negotiation between I-as-British and I-as-Muslim reflects the contradiction that arose from the different objectifications of marriage in both social knowledge systems. Negotiating meaning also entails negotiating I-positions and maintaining a coherent identity. Once again, the man admitted that in other domains of everyday life he and his spouse did not adhere to Islamic prescriptions. However, with regards to family matters, ontological concerns overrode pragmatic ones and their Muslimness took priority.

Another middle-aged participant feared retribution for his unwillingness to impose wearing the hijab on his wife. Once again, the family seems to be a life domain where the need to maintain orthodoxy is the most powerful:

> A man [telephone] called to ask whether he had an obligation and duty towards God to make sure his wife wears the hijab. Although she is a virtuous and devoted woman, he fears retribution for her lack of hijab, and is loathe to compel her to do what is against her will. The imam said that the hijab was strictly a matter of choice, and that there is no compulsion for the woman to wear it if she did not wish to. He did, however, think that it was best if women did.

In all these cases the participants considered themselves to be "integrated" into a "Western" way of life. They seemed to live life in a way that facilitated their integration, and beyond the merely experiential or value dimensions of "Britishness" they adopted lifestyles that are more attributable to a non-Islamic way of life. Indeed, one of the participants was a white British convert to Islam. The man in the first excerpt wore rings and a necklace, and the couple in the second excerpt admitted to consuming alcohol and living a largely non-Islamic lifestyle. Their preference for the prioritization of human will never seemed to have posed a problem for them prior to the incidents outlined above. Within the family domain, however, there seem to have been disruptions to their sense of identity, its cohesiveness, and their unself-conscious everyday lived experience. In these instances, taken-for-granted aspects of everyday life become objects of reflection, and the plurality of cultural knowledge, or systems of representation, that is embodied

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gives rise to contradictions. This necessitates negotiation between different I-positions with an authority representing the Islamic generalized other or alter. The ego-alter-object model (Moscovici, 1984) that characterizes transformation in social representations is clearly outlined in all these negotiations. The participants, along with the researcher or the imam are engaged in reconstructing social representations surrounding a particular object in moments of rupture and contradiction. In attempting to renegotiate meaning, participants also renegotiate identity from different and potentially conflicting I-positions.

Islam and identity: Maintaining orthodoxy and the *need* for exceptions

The previous examples demonstrate instances where participants who largely gave preference to pragmatics felt the need to preserve ontological identity functions in certain instances. Their largely ''British'' lifestyles, which included practices that lay beyond the boundaries of their Muslimness, were overridden at certain moments by a need to maintain Islamic aspects of their identity. The following excerpts, on the other hand, demonstrate cases where those who were adamant to adhere to orthodox Islamic practices felt the need to make compromises out of pragmatic concerns:

> A woman[telephone] called because she had been praying for a girl and promising that if God granted her wish she would name her Paradise [Fardous in Arabic]. Because the name was difficult to work with here in the UK. She was constantly having to spell it out, and it was making things complicated as spellings varied in different documents she was trying to acquire. Therefore she was constantly having reapply to have documents reissued with consistent transliterations of the name. She asked if she could change it, or whether God would be displeased with her. She was terrified at the thought. She wanted the imam's assurance that violating her oath would not anger Allah and cause misfortune to befall her.

In this case there were disruptions in the experiential or civic dimension to British life. The woman encountered problems and difficulties within institutional, bureaucratic structures. In this instance, she did not seem to be concerned with any other dimension of Britishness, however. Interestingly, it was her daughter's *name* that had become problematic. It is not every day that one thinks of the functions of a name, however, this woman had become very conscious of the objectifications of a ''name'' in Islamic and British social representations. As is the case in many worldly religions, names in Islam are an identity marker and a symbol of gratitude to God. However, in bureaucratic and secular British institutions, a name's function is to identify and distinguish individuals from each other in order to administer their affairs. The respondent could easily have changed the name without consulting the imam, however, once again, she needed to negotiate her various I-positions as a result of the

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contradiction between different sources of cultural meaning invested in the same social object (a name).

There were further instances where participants called to consult the imam in an attempt to maintain orthodoxy, whether there was a clear risk of violating Islamic law or not. The following extract, as opposed to the previous, indicates a preference for ontological concerns even when these do not restrict or disrupt everyday life:

> A man [telephone] called because he was making good money in retail and began to wonder what the legal percentage of profit was in Islam. He asked whether there was a limit to the margin of profit that can be set by the retailer on a product. The imam explained that as long as the seller and buyer are in agreement over the purchase and its conditions, there would be no violation of Islamic law. He was concerned that because he was having financial success that he was doing something un-Islamic.

This particular case is somewhat curious. Certainly, throughout the history and tradition of the Abrahamic religions, money was always viewed as a temptation and path to sin. However, Islam places clear laws and guidelines in order to regulate business and economy. The Quran states that "Wealth and children are adornments of the worldly life" (Quran 18:46). Nevertheless, this respondent experienced a moment of contradiction due to his growing success that called for a negotiation between the way he conducted his business and ontological concerns regarding his Islamic identity. In this case, the issue was not that there was a conflict within behavioural or experiential dimensions of identity, but more a matter of values. It seemed that making profit at the expense of others posed an issue for him that required reflection and reassessment. In a sense, he needed reassurance that he was not transgressing the boundaries of his Muslimness.

Other examples present further compelling demonstrations of the need to maintain orthodoxy, even if this was impossible in practical terms. In the excerpt that follows the participant, due to a medical condition, was required to administer daily doses of medication by injection. This prevented him from fasting, as any metabolism-altering substance introduced intravenously breaks one's fast. His inability to fast during Ramadan became problematic because he could not express his Muslimness at a time when the community was collectively performing this ritual. I-as-Muslim and I-as-British, in the sense that there was no obligation for him to fast during Ramadan, were too close for comfort for this man at this particular time of the year:

> A man [telephone] called about taking injections for a "mental disorder" that he would not explain. He still wanted to fast however. When I explained his question to the imam he was surprised. If this man truly had a mental disorder and needed those injections in the way that he described then he was not required to fast by Islam. Usually callers wanted exceptions to Islamic prescriptions. In this case the man wanted to be exempted from the exception somehow.

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In the following example, the woman's need for orthodoxy overrode all other aspects of her identity. I-as-Muslim took precedence over all her other I-positions. Even her I-positions as mother and wife were subordinate to her Muslimness:

> A sister [telephone] called about a friend who wants to stay up all night and pray and consequently cannot spend time with her husband, with which he is displeased. He left her bed already[2] as a warning and she still is persistent. She even asked if she could do qiyam[3] after fajr[4]. Also complained that husband asked to remove hijab and consequently they think, as a result, their son was born with difficulties. It seemed that she was trying more and more to be devout and adhere to practices, even non-compulsory additional rituals, and that her husband was a little too moderate for her. She wanted to know if there were grounds for leaving him. According to Islamic principles, if a woman had free time her priority should be to her family rather than excessive worship.

This need (as reported by participants) to practice Islam to such excess, or despite physical limitations, could be seen as a turn to tradition and religion in the face of cultural change and dislocation. When the familiar and taken for granted draws away as a result of disruption, everything in the world becomes strange and is called into question. Turning to religion is one possible solution to the resulting feelings of ambiguity and loss.

Other negotiations seem to emerge as a matter of necessity and a preference for pragmatics regardless of what is prescribed by Islam. This was particularly common with regards to medical and financial issues. Pragmatic concerns were not merely prioritized over religious prescriptions. Rather, desperate situations demanded addressing basic needs despite transgressing religious obligations.

> A woman [late 20s] called [in person] because she had just found out that the foetus she was carrying had chromosomal abnormalities and was not expected to be carried to term. Even if the child was to be born, it was not expected that it would live for very long. This woman was distraught, and in addition to advice, she just needed comforting. She had already carried the child for 5 months, which is past the period designated by some Islamic scholars within which abortion was permissible. She wanted to know whether she would be allowed in Islam to abort at this stage. The genetic tests were only possible after 5 months so she couldn't have known beforehand. She was very depressed and admitted to self-harming. The imam said that if the pregnancy was causing harm to the mother, or that it was almost certain that the child would not be carried to term or die shortly after birth, then it was permissible in Islam to abort even if the 120-day[5] period had passed. She then wanted to know if she had to perform funeral duties for the foetus and whether or not it should be named.

Considering this woman's condition it is understandable, particularly if she was exhibiting signs of clinical depression, to opt for an abortion. The fact that she was

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experiencing such a difficult negotiation indicates her desire to adhere to Islamic prescriptions. She had discussed this case with several imams. They had divergent opinions concerning this matter. One of the imams was of the view that under no conditions is it permissible for the woman to have an abortion. This indicates a strong preference for preserving ontology. Another, however, was of the view that if this situation was causing this woman harm, whether physical or psychological, then Islamically she was allowed to choose a course of action that would alleviate her suffering. Such debates come down to a matter of ontology and pragmatics even at the level of scholars and institutions, and involve everyday practices and situations not merely philosophical or spiritual concerns. Further situations of necessity involved financial issues. Many of the participants encountered during the course of the study were from low socio-economic status minority groups, and issues of money and loans came up frequently:

> A woman [telephone] called because she was in debt. She wanted to take a loan in order to pay her debts. She was in need and asked whether she could do this through an Islamic bank (a loan without interest). If not she wanted to have permission to do it through another bank (non-Islamic). The imams both found this to be ridiculous. Aside from the concept of taking loans to pay back loans, the idea of obtaining a loan with no collateral or investment/business proposal was laughable to them.

In the above case the woman was facing financial difficulties and the only solution available to her was to violate Islamic laws. However, instead of favouring pragmatics, she was concerned to preserve the ontological aspect of her Islamic identity and sought to obtain permission from the imams. Even in her time of need, she preferred to adhere to Islamic law and practice, and obtain a fatwa that would allow her an exception to Shariaa (I-as-Muslim) in her situation, rather than act pragmatically (I-as-British due to a solution afforded by being British but not being Muslim). The social representations of a loan in this case are the site of the contradiction between two objectifications. The man in the following excerpt, similarly, opted for the preservation of ontology by obtaining the imam's permission to make an exception to Islamic law rather than act pragmatically in a way that would benefit him financially:

> Another man [telephone] called about a failing business and asked whether he could sell alcohol perhaps his business would improve. He ran a newsagent/grocery store in an area where there seemed to be many similar establishments. He had not opted for a license to sell alcohol, however, because this was prohibited by Islamic law. He was finding it difficult to keep up with his bills and expenses, and lagged behind his competition because they all sold alcohol. He complained that he had trouble feeding his family and meeting his expenses, and needed a boost to his business somehow.

In this case, I-as-earner (father/husband) in a British market and I-as-Muslim were implicated in a contradiction in the different social representations of his

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occupation. Despite financial pressure, the man was determined to maintain orthodoxy. He was very keen on obtaining an alcohol license and sell alcohol, however, it seemed, only if it was sanctioned by Islamic law.

Discussion: Negotiating identities, coping, and the challenges of British Muslimness

The pragmatic problems of negotiating Muslim identities in a British context are clear in the preceding examples. Those participants who were determined to be orthodox in every aspect of their lives were clearly more vulnerable to threats to Islamic identity. For some, these threats affected their adherence to practice and beliefs and increased pressure to integrate. At times, they even attempted to appear different and distance themselves from practicing Muslims. However, even those with more loose identifications with Islam at certain moments experienced a compulsion to return to Islam. This was particularly the case with regards to marital and family issues. It is in this particular domain that Muslims turned to the certainty of Islamic doctrines rather than face ambiguity or the complexities of situations.

The findings presented indicate that when it comes to family matters, participants demonstrated a predominant need to maintain orthodoxy. This need is still strong for those participants who choose to largely abandon Islamic prescriptions in their daily lives. What is interesting about this phenomenon, is that it reflects a dichotomy between public and private life-spheres. Even if participants chose to forgo Islamic doctrines publically in their practices and appearances, they still maintained orthodoxy in private life matters. This dichotomy between public/private is not characteristic of the Islam of Muslim countries (Bowen, 2007). Whilst many of the conflicts reviewed above seem to have little to do with Britishness *per se* (e.g. taking medication and fasting, or following Islam and borrowing with interest), these conflicts have arisen for these individuals out of the social order of life in Britain, independent from Islamic dictates. For this reason, the voice of these alternative non-Islamic behaviours may be typified as an I-as-British position, an internalization of what participants know to be a British system of representations.

It seems that the dominant representations in British society around religion become shared by British Muslims who choose to embrace British cultural representations and values. This has caused the emergence of a truly "secular Muslim" identity. Although the data presented here cannot speak for all British Muslims, those who turn to the mosques for advice on family matters exhibit strong ties to Islam in private domains despite their preference to distance themselves from it publically. In cases such as the woman who wanted to opt for an abortion, it was the trauma and distress experienced that drives Muslims to the comfort and resolve of religion. Those who sought out religious advice in these cases were in search for answers to resolve tensions through an appeal to a superordinate metastructure that can resolve conflict between parts of the self

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(Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010), or contradictions within objectifications from different systems of social representations. The several internalized ''alter'' positions engaged in negotiations over social objects only found resolution when they engaged the imam. He represents certainty in being a legitimate Islamic societal ''alter'' or generalized other. Other appeals to the imam were made in order to be exempt from Islamic doctrine. In the event of material or physical needs, people were attempting to resolve their problems by finding exceptions to Islamic law. Even when pragmatic concerns were overbearing, people were concerned about transgressing the boundaries of Islamic law and sought reassurances from the imams.

Despite necessity, the maintenance of orthodoxy was still compelling, and without approval from the imam, many Muslims said that they would not follow a course of action that violated Islamic principles. In a context where Islam takes precedence, an identity marker imposed onto Muslims regardless of their ethnic or cultural backgrounds, ambiguity surrounding the propriety of its practice is common. In the field, several callers to the imam were surprised to find that much of what they considered to be Islamic practice or belief was in fact a result of particular ethnic or cultural social representations that had little, if anything, to do with Islam. One particular example is that of name changing, which was a frequent concern for Muslims from a South Asian background. These findings demonstrate that Muslims' relationships to Islam are varied and diverse. Islam becomes a source of identification and a prioritized I-position in different ways for different people. Religion, or faith, has a powerful influence on identity negotiations. This power may manifest itself in various ways. Also, the domains of life where Islamic aspects of the self take precedence indicate that self dialogue are also dependent on context. Dialogical self theory is a useful theoretical approach, linking the self with the social and providing insight into how the cacophony of social knowledge systems that inform identity is also internalized. However, without broader theoretical and methodological outlooks, its applications are limited to the mirroring within the self of broader societal factors at play.

Conclusion: Social representations, British Muslims, and every day practices

British Muslims experience identity pressures due to a perceived threat to their Muslimness. This causes some to avoid identification with the Muslim community in their everyday life and embodied practices, and yet others to emphasize it. It is clear in some cases that certain aspects of Islamic cultures and demands of life in Britain do not come together in a way that can facilitate individual needs. A solution afforded by life in Britain for the man whose business is failing is to sell alcohol and keep up with his competition. The woman in debt only has access to non-Islamic financing. At these moments, Islam as a belief and cultural system and life in Britain are at odds, and necessity and pragmatics bring this mismatch to the fore. There are tensions between the knowledge systems that inform identity

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processes among British Muslims. On the one hand, there is Islam, on the other hand, there is life in a British context. The push and pull between ontological and pragmatic considerations, particularly in contradictory aspects of differing systems of knowledge when they involve the family domain, and the tensions they create, are experienced in various ways. However, what is common across all the examples given is that, regardless of participants' relationship to religion, there are always moments when the tensions between the Muslim and the non-Muslim(what is perceived as British) become problematic. The non-conscious flow of everyday life is disrupted due to a clash between two meaning systems that produce contradictory objectifications of a particular social object. The participants, aware of this contradiction, need to renegotiate meaning for the object implicated, and, in doing so, are positioning themselves towards it and renegotiating their own identities. The various social representations identified above, such as the social representation of "father" or "name", are rooted in either representational sphere of Britishness or Muslimness. We recognize that being Muslim and Islamic practices vary in different cultures, however the act of calling on the imam reflects the fact that participants perceive the conflicts they experience as arising from a British versus Muslim juxtaposition. These conflicts result in negotiations between I-position informed by particular social representations, which are themselves located within a representational sphere. These spheres of Muslimness and Britishness may, in some situations, stand in opposition to one another and mirror processes of identity conflict that materialize into a negotiation between ontological and pragmatic concerns.

The internalized cultural knowledge among these first generation British Muslims is not always adapted for the life world in Britain; in Bourdieu's (1977) terms, there is a mismatch between habitus and field. This brings taken-for-granted aspects of social knowledge into consciousness and creates a need to renegotiate meaning where it is inadequate. The constructive implicit social knowledge which shapes our perceptions of the world, and the functional implicit knowledge that is embodied and enacted in everyday life, are ruptured in such contradictions. A new way of being needs to be negotiated in order to go on with life in the new host culture. In the present study, both the transformative and the prescriptive functions of Islam in the lives of respondents emerged as central concerns. The focus on every day practices demonstrates where contradictions between multiple sources of identification lie. The study presented in this article demonstrates that it is these two concerns that are negotiated in the negotiation of British Muslim identities, and, in essence, the appropriation of Islam in a British context.

Notes

1. Islam prohibits men from wearing jewellery (with the exception of rings not made of gold) because it is considered feminine.
2. An indication of displeasure and, in Islam, a warning from the husband to the wife.
3. Praying throughout the final third of the night before sunrise.
4. Morning prayer (at sunrise).

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5. The verse in the Quran that discusses the development of life in the womb was interpreted by many scholars in the mainstream as indicating that a foetus is considered a living human being after 120 days of conception. After that period abortion is equated with taking the life of a human being without cause (one of the major sins).

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