Muslims in the Metropolis: an ethnographic study of Muslim-making in a 21st century British city

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Abstract

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Muslims in the Metropolis is about everyday social and cultural practices through which Muslim identity and 'community' are made. The study takes Birmingham, a city synonymous with Muslims and the area of Sparkbrook, which has decades long associations with racialised communities, as sites of Muslim-making. While there is considerable literature concerned with the Muslim presence in Western European public spheres, much of it treats the city as merely incidental in the lives of Muslims; as places where they have settled and, then, generated formal spaces, infrastructures and narratives relating to their presence. A key argument advanced in this thesis is that impressions of Muslims as a 'community' defined through the lens of settlement patterns resulting from immigration, folk-religious practices carried over from other homelands, socio-economic disadvantage and various other markers of their presence, lend them to being understood in essentialist ways. A number of scholars have noted this and how discourses about 'parallel lives', 'clash of civilisations' and 'religious extremism' have culminated in the *Muslim question*.

In this study I do not so much seek to challenge such representations, but to consider what is left over – the excess - from these framings. A key consequence I argue is that Muslims, when viewed and worked with officially as a 'community' based on sensibilities of race relations management in the city, misses the vitality of Muslim life as it is *made* everyday in relation to discourses and materials linked with their presence in the city. Through the use of ethnography and specifically observations and interviews conducted with people involved in setting up and running an 'alternative Muslim arts centre', a local 'community' radio station and diffuse networks of social action across the city, I trace different contours of Muslim identity and 'community' *in the making.*

Ethnographic methods, I argue, allow valuable insights into how Muslims relate to the city as a place historically marked and presently targeted through racialised narratives and categories of control. There are complex negotiations that go on, where Muslims occasionally resist as well as fold into authoritative discourses and structures around them. Attention is paid to how Muslims live in the interstices of these and how through their social practices generate alternative meanings toward being Muslim; as something not given in the existing nomenclature of multicultural identities in the city, but in process and becoming. These everyday urban rituals of Muslims, therefore, present a challenge to official and academic efforts that attempt to represent or confer recognition on Muslims.

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Chapter 1: Introduction & Methods

Sparkbrook: a fieldwork site already determined?

For anybody travelling down the A34 Stratford road into Sparkbrook from Birmingham city centre, you cannot miss the multiculture of the area. As you cross the Camp Hill roundabout, which joins a number of major route-ways in and out of the city, traffic is suddenly forced into a single lane causing cars and pedestrians to creep along at a sort of spectator's speed. The three-storey Victorian shop fronts on both sides of the street appear well worn as a result of decades of short-term lets and changing uses. This area was home to the working classes who served the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century, and subsequently to various swathes of immigrants - largely from the ex-colonies in South Asia and the Caribbean - who came to resuscitate Britain's economy in the post-war years (Jones 1967). The various trades now going-on here serve the needs of contemporary newcomers from increasingly more places like Libya, Egypt, Somalia, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Somaliland, Sudan, Algeria, Kurdistan, Syria, Iraq, Ethiopia and The Congo.

Half a mile further down the road the imprint of post-war immigration is visible in a more settled form. The shops change hands less frequently and cater to regular needs pointing to the presence of an almost homogenous economy made up of south Asian clothes shops, takeaways and immigration solicitors; constituting what some might call an 'enclave economy' (Portes et al 1989). This part of the area is more representative of the wider demography of Sparkbrook, which is steeped in a chequered history of immigration and race relations. The history reaches back to the 1960's as captured in studies such as the classic '*Race, Community and Conflict'* by Rex and Moore. This and subsequent works such as Dahya (1974) on Pakistani's in the area presented recently arrived immigrant groups to a rapidly declining part of Birmingham through a Weberian class analysis; setting them up as ideal types (Solomos and Back 1995: 23). The study of ethnic communities in this area, once the privilege of race-relations theorists has since become the delight of think tanks,

cultural tourists, film makers and security agencies. The area has generated new voices and representations, a salient example of which is that of Muslims. These histories and their legacies produce on the surface a racialised urban imaginary - on top of, and beneath which Muslims today are to be located. Sparkbrook today is one of Birmingham's most densely populated wards and with the largest number of Muslims of the city's 40 wards (in the 2011 census it was 23,054, 72% of the ward population). The urban backdrop that is the location of Muslims here is significant historically as the place many immigrants made their home upon arriving in the UK. It is also too the place subsequent generations of Muslims have grown up, including myself.

During the course of my fieldwork (March 2010 – September 2012) in Sparkbrook I experienced how the layers of history mentioned above were folded into a representation of Muslim 'community' that would be mobilized in the operations of local government and policing. The beginning of my fieldwork happened to coincide with a police scandal that would become a national event – the Spy Cameras affair[1]. Officially known as Project Champion, the 'Spycams Affair' as it was dubbed locally, was a West Midlands Police initiative under the UK government's Preventing Violent Extremism fund that had targeted the area for surveillance apparently based on it being home to a sizeable Muslim population. The scheme involved the installation of 200 covert and overt automatic number plate recognition cameras (ANPRs) in streets of dense Muslim population, and along the main Stratford Road leading in and out of Sparkbrook. Also implicated was the nearby area of Washwood Heath, the second most populous Muslim ward in the city[2]. Following three months of intense lobbying by significant numbers of the city's Muslim population

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[1] The following news articles appeared in the Guardian at the height of the controversy: 'Surveillance cameras in Birmingham track Muslims' every move.' http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2010/jun/04/surveillance-cameras-birmingham-muslims 'Surveillance cameras spring up in Muslim areas the targets Terrorists.' http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2010/jun/04/birmingham-surveillance-cameras-muslim-community?intcmp=239

[2] See report by Thames Valley Police entitled 'Project Champion Review: An independent review of the commissioning, direction, control and oversight of Project Champion; including the information given to, and the involvement of, the community in this project from the initiation of the scheme up to 4 July 2010.' http://www.statewatch.org/news/2010/oct/uk-project-champion-police-report.pdf

accompanied by civil liberties activists from around the UK, Project Champion crumbled, and the cameras were 'bagged' before being taken down by the authorities[3]. The scopic regime that had been deployed to police Sparkbrook as a place of Muslim 'community' had proven to be unhelpful, to say the least.

This episode was part of a broader pattern of constructions of Muslims as a problem (Alexander 1998, 2004b). The event revealed the limits of thinking 'community' through reliance on crude policy schemata employed in this case by the West Midlands Police in their surveillance ambitions of local Muslims. Yet, this episode revealed little new to me about the way minorities were represented in policy making and policing in the city. Prior to commencing my PhD research I had worked for almost seven years in a number of policy roles within the local authority, some of these working closely with elected members. I was familiar with *community consultations* and *equality impact assessments* among the myriad other instruments for public engagement that existed in the policy makers 'toolkit'. I was, therefore, aware of how Sparkbrook was situated at the intersection of regimes of power, knowledge and representation alongside it being an ordinary place of Muslim settlement. My experience of being in local policy circles and, then, embarking on fieldwork in a racially marked part of the city meant I observed first hand how Muslims were objectified; how an area such as Sparkbrook with its numerous Muslim organisations and populations, predominantly based around ethnic groups and religious institutions of Islam were instrumentalised and engaged with in functionalist ways. The Spycams Affair was an example of the 'narrative web' in which "places are invoked and reinvented through the interface of practice, regulation, and rumour" (Back & Keith 2004: 68).

Scripts such as the one above about superdiverse places like Sparkbrook make visible certain facts that have impact in policy circles but, which are challenged by everyday

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[3] 'Police apologise for Birmingham spy camera outrage'. http://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/local-news/police-apologise-project-champion-birmingham-127653

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life in those areas (Hall 2015, Knowles 2012, Hussain 2014). Following Massey (2005) I want to suggest that representing Sparkbrook in the way that Project Champion did – encircling the local area for surveillance of its Muslim population – resulted in the spatialisation of Muslim 'community' around a perceived threat (violent extremism, terror)[4]. The use of new technology to demarcate and police a contemporary 'suspect community' implied the interweaving of spatiality and temporality, heralding the suspect Muslim 'community' as a new moment; a synchrony. Massey suggests that representation when it works in this way "fixes, and therefore deadens and detracts from, the flow of life" (Massey 2005: 26). Massey is part of an influential strand in spatial thinking that considers space as not existing outside the realm of social practice, where various trajectories[5] that are part of everyday life in an area actually constitute place; suggestive of a move away from representation toward performativity and practice (see also Thrift & Crang et al 2000; Amin and Thrift 2002; Anderson & Harrison 2010).

In this thesis I will try to show that Muslims exist in an iterative relationship with the area, its histories, infrastructures and associated regimes of categorisation and control that are often hegemonic in discussions about them. The context of Sparkbrook is not merely incidental as the location for my ethnography I will argue. But becomes a resource for understanding and situating Muslim identities in a contemporary British city. The context, briefly glimpsed at above, I will argue is one that is produced or made by a number of forces and is, then, 'assembled'[6] by Muslims in their making of Muslim identities and 'community'.

I will draw on fieldwork interactions I have had with a diverse group of Muslims drawn from different ethnicities, ages and genders preliminarily in Sparkbrook, but,

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[4] Sparkbrook is currently considered a key 'hot-spot' for radical Islamic extremist activity.

[5] Relationality, in Massey's words is: "the contemporaneous existence of a plurality of trajectories, a simultaneity of stories so far" (Massey 2005: 12)

[6] I am influenced here by recent work in human geography and urban studies that discusses the relationship between materiality and discursivity in producing social realities; Mcfarlane (2011), Simone (2011a), Saldana (2006), Swanton (2008). The notion of assemblage is also neatly encapsulated by DeLanda as "the condition of possibility of the person, woven out of an on-going interplay of cognitions, affects, emotional capacities, socialities and diverse processes of socialization" (DeLanda 2010: 14).

which also spilled out into other spaces of the city. In particular I draw on ethnographic data collected from multiple times spent at *the Hubb* – an 'alternative Muslim led arts space' – Unity FM – a local Muslim community radio station – as well as a number of sporadic events and gatherings around Birmingham, to reveal how the city is full of surfaces – historical, present, gendered, bodily, sensory and conflicting - on which Muslims can be located. And how through spending time with Muslims, observing and being part of the cultural production they engage in, it is possible to sense how Muslim identity is assembled through a range of affective dispositions - invoked through art, carried over the radiowave, everyday encounters as well as movements and connections across the city and beyond. My discussion moves from a panoptical view of the city and the area - as the site of conspicuous Muslim presence symbolised in the Spycams Affair - gathering various materials in the form of histories, buildings, memories, myths, metaphors, peoples, symbols, and political happenings: to 'rig-up' (Simone 2011a) a conception of Muslim subjectivity and collectivity as it is lived, everyday on the ground.

Before I turn to describe the research and methods used, I would like to unpack the category Muslim so that it can be understood how I relate it to the argument made in this work. I will be arguing that much of what is known about Muslims contemporaneously is gleaned from global, national and spectacular events and discourses, and that everyday Muslim life is lived in the shadow of this. The spycams affair was an example of how a local place of Muslim settlement formed over decades of migratory journeys and local struggles was instantly folded into the global 'war on terror'. Below I will chart a number of other moments and cases that are significant in lending Muslims public visibility.

Identifying Muslims

The Census 2011 revealed there to be 2.71 million people who identified as Muslim in the UK. This represented an increase from 1.55 million in 2001 when the religion

question was first introduced into the Census.[7] The Census 2001 enabled the first capturing of statistics on the nations population in relation to faith. With regard Muslims, the introduction of the religion question in 2001 is revealing of more than just the data it officially delivered about them as a faith group. It marked a juncture at which ethnicity - that was the prevailing classificatory system through which Muslims were known – and politics – in terms of their future recognition - took on renewed meanings for the figure of the Muslim.

In 2001 there was much excitement and anticipation among sections of the Muslim population about the prospect of having available detailed data on Muslims in Britain. The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), probably the most public and visible Muslim organisation there has been in the UK, was at the forefront of lobbying campaigns for the inclusion of the religion question in the Census (Sherif 2011). The MCB, although only formally constituted in 1997 had been in existence for at least a couple of decades prior in various guises doing advocacy on behalf of Muslims in Britain (ibid). As a loose group of individuals it had supported local 'community' struggles during the 1980's for recognition of distinct Muslim needs, in schooling for example (Ally 1983).

The group of mainly middle class south Asian men who comprised the MCB then, found more of an opening into the mainstream public sphere following the Rushdie Affair in 1989 as channels to government emerged for south Asians and mainly Pakistanis in relation to religious issues. Although no formal relationship with the then Conservative government was established, the MCB - now formally constituted - found favour with the New Labour government in 1997 amidst the mood of celebratory multiculturalism and perhaps the embarrassments of the McPherson Inquiry with its proclamations of widespread institutional racism in Britain. The route

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[7] Indeed some press reporting spectacularised this increase with headlines such as: 'Muslim population in England and Wales nearly doubles in 10 years' http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/11/muslim-population-england-wales-nearly-doubles-10-years

The number of 'Muslim' children doubles in a decade':
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/11406700/Number-of-Muslim-children-in-Britain-doubles-in-a-decade.html

of identity politics was, then, one way that Muslims entered the public arena seeking official recognition enabled partly by the ability to quantify their presence in British towns and cities.

In the preface to her monograph 'Muslims on the Map: A National Survey of Social Trends in Britain', which was a quantitative analysis of the Census 2001 data relating to Muslims, Serena Hussain alluded to the urgent need for data that might help identify and address pressing socio-economic needs within the Muslim 'community' (2008: vii-viii). With the availability of this new data, Hussain (2008) and others (Peach 2006) offered new insights into the experiences of previously ethnic groups mainly south Asians according to educational, gendered, family and housing characteristics. Importantly, this knowledge was expected to have a utility among lobbyists and service providers as part of their expanding diversity and equality commitments in a multicultural Britain.

The Census 2001 represented an interesting juncture, then, in the career of the figure of the Muslim. It is when Muslims emerged officially as an analytical category (Beckford et al 2006: 8). This new faith based identity, however, had already been delineated from ethnicity as suggestive of a new territory of experience for Muslims (Runnymede Trust 1997). Even earlier, Muslims have occupied the position of an 'underclass' (Alexander 1998, Modood 1990) when imbricated in discussions about low educational attainment, employment levels, crime and social order. Later, however, religion was more confidently addressed as a factor that was *interactive* with ethnicity producing a distinct Muslim reality (Modood et al 1997: 10). [8]

For Modood (2005), perhaps a first and most famous proponent for the recognition of the distinct experience of Muslims in Britain, multiculturalism remains a desirable framework for the management of diversity in Britain. For him, the same paradigm to be able to accommodate the difference of Muslims requires shifts in institutional and political techniques of the state to confer upon Muslims the necessary

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[8]   Much of this analysis was used in the lobbying campaign for the inclusion of a religion question in 2001 as well as to keep it in future censuses (Hussain & Sherif 2014).

'recognition'. It is institutional adjustments such as blasphemy laws, religious hatred laws and equalities legislation that would deliver what Muslims require in terms of equality in a multicultural society. Meanwhile, increasing Muslim visibility in the public sphere has also coincided with them being blamed for the 'death of multiculturalism'.

I discuss in more detail in the next chapter, the ambiguous relationship between ethnicity, religion and culture as it has been documented in studies on Muslims in the UK. Notably that in earlier studies religion has been subsumed within ethnicity and understood as a cultural position, while in more recent works in light of the hyper-visibility of Muslims in the public sphere, it has taken on a more politicised meaning. Here I would like to note how the official recognition enabled by the religion question in the Census has helped to underwrite a distinct Muslim social position resulting in ethnicity becoming more nuanced while the category Muslim is championed as part of the politics of recognition. This has implications for the way Muslims are, as well as can be, represented within multiculturalism. It is an issue I will try to speak to at a number of points throughout the thesis; Muslim's ambiguous relationship to multiculturalism in its practice as a state discourse for the management of difference. This ambiguity comes to light, I will suggest, in the banal practices of everyday Muslim life – what Stuart Hall referred to as 'multicultural drift (Hall 2000) - amidst the various attempts of organisations and institutions to both lobby for as well as deny Muslims recognition.

Following the 2011 Census the MCB sponsored another exercise to make knowable Muslims according to information gathered from the recent census. This time it appeared to be a much shorter exercise with a report published online in January 2015[9]. Although the analysis was wider in scope including: issues in relation to civil life, inequalities and the labour market - the staple categories of families, educational attainment and housing were still present. The life of this report represented something of the changed world of Muslims in Britain, a world where

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[9] http://www.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/MCBCensusReport_2015.pdf

the MCB were now one of many interlocutors on behalf of Muslims with government, and where Muslims, due to their increased public visibility, were imbricated in a host of additional social and political issues (Hussain et al 2004, Hussain & Sherif 2014). This was now also coupled with concerns to address representations of them in a hostile public sphere at a time of the Muslim question.

The Muslim Question

Alongside the official recognition of a distinct Muslim position, underwritten by Census data, we have seen the emergence of the Muslim question too, which relates to the failure of European public and political spheres to absorb Muslims into narratives of national culture and identity. The Muslim question is couched in cultural and political terms as expressed through moral panics, intolerance and anxieties about the integration of Muslims, calling into question their citizenship in European multicultural societies (Parekh 2008, Kundnani 2014). It has been paralleled with the Jewish question (Norton 2011) and with anti-semitism (Meer 2012) while also contributed to the xenophobic mood that has been sweeping across Europe since the past decade (Fekete 2006).

The urgency with which images, ideals and feelings associated with the figure of the Muslim grip us point to a temporality of the phenomena as one very much of the contemporary moment. Yet as the above commentators on the Muslim question also note, Islam and Muslims have a longer and more complex relation to Europe, being historically inscribed in her sense of self (Asad 2000, Devji 2013). Beginning perhaps with the medieval cartographic exercise of drawing Europe's borders based on Christendom's encounters with Moorish Islam brought to Spain by the Berbers in the eighth century and nurtured in the convivial intellectual circles of Cordoba (Menocal 2002) through to Pope Benedict XVI's pronouncements in 2010 on the rational intellectual tradition of thinking in Islam being outside that of Europe's: the Muslim question has its antecedents in European history too.

In the context of bodies, the figure of the Muslim is again a familiar one. Like the 'dark stranger' representing the image of the hyper-masculinised black immigrant on Britain's post war urban landscape, there are similar historical logics that operate in the production of meanings around Muslims as Others. Most notably closure around what it means to be a nation (Anthias, Yuval Davis & Cain 1992, Sayyid 2014) but also institutional practices around stop and search laws and suspect communities (Hickman et al 2011) recall experiences of earlier racialised others - pointing to a phenomena that might not be so spectacular and mythical, but everyday and knowable rather.

Locating the figure of the Muslim in a reductive sense of space and time is characteristic of discussions about 'Muslim community'. Here the historiography is repeated in the idea of a collective Muslim identity as a recent phenomenon on Britain's racial and ethnic landscape with a genealogy sketched from spectacular events beginning with the Rushdie affair in 1989, when Muslims first entered the public fray. The fanfare around the Muslim question has since served discussions about the 'end of multiculturalism' and the need for a 'muscular liberalism' as espoused by Britain's Prime Minister David Cameron during a speech at the National Security Conference in Munich in February 2011, which further served to separate the Muslim question from established traditions of race thinking in the UK.

Certain logics, then, of space and time are at work in popular constructions of the figure of the Muslim and the framing of the Muslim question in Britain. This is evident in much of the recent work in this area, which I discuss in the next chapter. The spectacular nature of the Muslim question invites analyses and contributions that either abstract or rely on abstractions of the figure at the heart of it from broader historical and geographical legacies of minority ethnic presence in Britain. There is, thus, an ambivalence at the heart of the construction of the figure of the Muslim, when this is represented as something new, while Muslims as we know them in Britain today can also be seen to emerge out of histories of black and Asian presence in the UK. They, therefore, represent the emergence of a new subject on an old landscape. The plotting of religion as a new marker of difference onto a pre-

existing category of ethnicity, largely Asian; or the understanding of contemporary Muslim life as an inherited condition of post-industrial metropolitan life of earlier immigrants; discourses about disengaged/disenchanted others given to non-integration, backward cultural practices, a threat to the unifying notion of the nation state and the liberal values underpinning it – are familiar to us in the context of other 'others'.

A note on Muslim Birmingham

In Birmingham the population of Muslims revealed in the 2011 Census was around a quarter of a million; by far the largest for any UK local authority. In Birmingham the number rose by almost 100,000 (67%) in the decade since the 2001. The Census 2011 revealed a more diverse Birmingham Muslim population too. This means that the trajectories along which Islam comes to the city are also diversifying beyond just the rural migrants from South Asia who brought with them orientations toward Barelvi Sufism; the 1970's Saudi funded proselytising outfits such as the International Propagation Centre for Islam (IPCI) located in Coventry road in an area neighbouring Sparkbrook, as well as more political expressions in the form of Muslim organisations inspired by the Jaamat-e-Islami. Less talked about are the Yemenis who are among the earliest Muslims to settle in the city and as I will discuss in the forthcoming chapters, play an important role in hosting a number of concrete spaces for the expression and making of new Muslim identities and 'community' in the city. Somali and other West African newcomers who have arrived in Sparkbrook over the past decade have settled in places and in some cases such as the Bordesley centre, which I discuss in chapter 4, helped rejuvenate infrastructures established by earlier Musim immigrants.

Alongside the settled variants of Islam in the city there have also been other events that have helped animate Muslims' presence in the city. There have been moments of organising and protest that have had Muslims at their core, such as the anti-red light protests in 1989 (Hubbard 1998), the Spycams and Trojan Horse affairs. Birmingham's sizeable Muslim demographic means the city gets folded into

Islamophobic discourses like 'Eurabia' that are constructed out of fears about European cites becoming overrun by Muslims (see next chapter). In the city there have been regular anti-terror arrests and raids linked to the 'war on terror' in neighbourhoods not far from where I did my fieldwork, often implicating people I worked with.

Accompanying this growth and diversity in numbers of Muslims there has also been a significant development of spaces and infrastructures in the city that answer to the needs of Muslims. The most obvious are mosques and madrasahs (Gale & Naylor 2002)[10]. These developments have enabled Muslims to become more visible, predictable and self-contained but also more extended and dispersed. Although infrastructure serving Muslims in the form of mosques, voluntary organisations, committees and charities have been around in the city since the 1940s (Joly 1987, 1995), the ways that Muslims interact with these has shaped new styles, forms and subjectivities. Alongside this, People's associations with the city as a result of being born here or having consumed the exotica of its multicultural offer have also helped produce a Muslim sociality that has shifted to newer sites like the Hubb, which I discuss in chapter 3. This space and the individuals involved with it sit in contrast and often opposition to images and symbols of Muslimness that have prevailed, embodying a disciplined and caricatured demeanour, representing and at the same time reifying a particular type of Muslimness fit for multiculturalism. In contrast, this thesis will argue, is the figure of the critical questioning Muslim involved in new forms of public engagement, not merely in the bourgeois public sphere of state sanctioned activities like interfaith work or local government databases of consultative groups. Through new religious and social gestures and affective acts young people expand the sense of Muslim sociality that ripples out of the inner city and percolates into other civic spaces. Young Muslims show off their care and attachment to fellows through charitable and communal activities displacing narratives of Muslims as a silo 'community'.

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[10] See http://www.birminghamfaithmap.org.uk

There are thus different intensities of Islam in the city given, which it is implausible to talk about a homogenous Muslim sphere or indeed one that is coherent. Yet these are not discrete segments either. In this thesis I explore how these various fragments appear in everyday Muslim life. I will consider how such essentialist ideas about Sparkbrook - as constructed out of the Black and Asian immigrant experience - are lived with and transformed by local people through their everyday urban rituals. This approach amounts to a 'radical contextualisation' (Keith 2005: 109) of the area, which uncovers or is sensitive to different aesthetics, political articulations and knowledges of what goes on in Muslim Birmingham – across spaces and times of Muslim settlement in the City; offering possibilities for thinking about how the area plays host to different identities and communities *in the making.*

In the next section of this chapter I address how ethnography has enabled engagement with these different traditions and trajectories, including some of the challenges involved in working with Muslims in a time and place so racially marked.

Bringing Muslims Out

The emergence of the figure of the Muslim onto Britain's racial and ethnic landscape has challenged scholars in the field of 'race' and ethnicity (Alexander 2002). It also troubles the secular slant of disciplines such as sociology in which the appearance of religion in public is haphazardly addressed (Warner et al 2010). Although attention has been paid to phenomenological and emotional expressions of religion in Britain (Beckford & Walliss et al 2006, Heelas & Woodhead et al 2000) this interest in viewing religions or 'new religions' as they subsequently become, has bypassed the study of Islam and its adherents in Britain, where Muslims and their faith are still viewed as third worldly or other worldly. Wood (2006) suggests that studies of ethnicity and religion remain unrelated and a consequence of this is:

> that the sociology of religion is unduly 'bleached'. That is to say, dominant European and American models of religion neglect the relevance of factors of ethnicity and 'race', thereby constructing models that maybe deemed applicable to only white majorities. Where these factors are considered, it is

in an essentialised and marginalized manner that further emphasises the dominance and normalcy of 'white' religion and religious development. (2006: 237).

Stuart Hall has commented on the ambiguous role of religion for the left and for sociology in particular given its secular slant. For Hall the failure to understand religion stems from a failure to understand history (Hall & Back 2009:683, Hall 2006). He cautions against impressions about the emergence of religiousised identities that see these as a new *conjuncture* marked by a heightened US imperialism under the banner of the 'war on terror' and as pronounced in discourses about the end of multiculturalism. Hall's reflection on this issue can be interpreted as a call to recalibrate our attention (on the issue of cultures that are unsettling) to frameworks through which we are used to interpreting new expressions of difference:

> ..I think liberalism is stupid about culture and, of course, that includes religion. I think culture has been waiting to take its revenge on secularisation and rationalism and modernity. Even in the most fragmented modern secularised world, some sets of meanings are necessary for us to have a coherent life ourselves and to conduct the dialogue of difference with others. (Hall 2006)

Other scholars have focused attention on sites of Muslim presence in European public spheres where new meanings relating to Muslims are generated. Gole (2013) suggests that the paradigm of immigration through which Muslims are often understood is no longer sufficient to understand emerging trends within Muslim communities. Taking the hyper-visiblity of Muslims as a prompt, she proposes attention be paid to the sites of encounter and exchange as Muslims become an established feature of European public spheres. Her work has featured on how the *veiled* female body asserts different norms of bodily expression that challenge western liberal notions of freedom and equality, which implicitly govern public spheres increasingly occupied by Muslims.

Noting the shifts that have taken place over the past few decades in the study of race and ethnicity, and the rise of competing categories such as faith, Michael Keith suggests that these "characterize changes in the analytical gaze as much as (or

perhaps more than) changes in cultural formation on the ground" (Keith 2013: 1377). As I hinted at above and will note in more detail in my review of the literature on Muslim identity and 'community' in the next chapter, the morphing from race/ethnicity to religion has challenged normative political categorizing particularly within hegemonic understandings of multiculturalism. Keith (2013) argues that this should prompt us to turn our attention to the relationship between the formal and informal public spheres. Citing examples from his own ethnographic work with Bangladeshi's in East London and the shifting expressions of religion in local politics, Keith makes a case for focusing on the "in the making" or "yet to come" nature of moral and social selves. This is all the more urgent since public or formal framings that have worked to structure our understandings of 'race' and difference appear out of sync with expressions of difference to be found in contemporary spaces of established minority ethnic settlement in the UK.

For Keith the 'politics of race' as it shifts also brings into being or constitutes new publics. To illustrate this point he contrasts the politics of first generation migrants marked by an orientation to south Asian homelands, with that of their off-spring for whom the combination of their material circumstances and the changing form of the city help to "multiply the stages of the public" (Keith 2012: 1383). These new publics bring into play new objects, cultures and practices, where old and new sit together on new dramaturgical stages, and importantly where 'race' mutates. Subsequently, Keith advises, scholarship needs to be attentive to the 'rules of claims making' in these different spheres, which are distinct from the solidarity based identity claims making that mobilised a particular demographic (i.e. earlier immigrant generations). In these newer expressions of identity new spaces are opened up in which "minor politics" are played out in contrast to Habermasian understandings of the public sphere in which liberal and disciplined politics is enacted. To build their legitimacy alternative spaces present themselves as marginal, underground, built from the bottom-up, belonging to the people or 'community' and combining race and materiality. The past and future crystalise here between the dual frames of synchronic (is here now) and the diachronic (has been here). Keith's point is that:

Only critical ethnographic engagement allows us to describe the constitution of the sensibilities of community as always changing, inflected by historical legacies and the imperatives of demographic, cultural and economic futures. (Keith 2012: 1387)

In a field marked by such epistemological challenges, then, ethnography enables one to explore how these variables play out in real life. Becker (1996) suggests ethnography enables the researcher to work with facts or variables by focusing on their relations to people. Factors and variables are ultimately produced or brought into being by those same people (as well as those doing analysis). Ultimately what is important is not to prove the existence of certain categories or relationships, but rather to *"describe a system of relationships, to show how things hang together..."*(Becker 1996: 56). My objective has been to present, amidst the facts that I knew about the area, and to witness connections between people, places and different variables "since what the fieldworker sees is not variables or factors that need to be "related" but people doing things together in ways that are manifestly connected" (ibid). I have wanted to investigate how old and new histories of racialised presence in the area crystalise in a contemporary form of relations that could be called Muslim.

In light of these challenges and given my research ambitions to get beneath the hype and look beyond the normative aspects of frameworks and structures I, have therefore, needed to know how to move, to not want to drop-off but stay connected with my field and things going on in it. It was important that I not get over-whelmed and, therefore, consumed by sensationalism when it erupted. Many of the people I worked with were unnerved by the sensational events going on in relation to Muslims in the city. Beyond the Spycam affairs there were regular 'anti-terror' arrests in the neighbourhood and it was almost guaranteed that someone I was working with would have a connection with those arrested or their families, mainly through ethnic kinship ties. I was struck by how cynical people were, how they often saw spectacular events as *drama*. It was the narrative of their neighbourhood some would say that had been folded into global events, and not them. Others suggested that playing into the sensationalism was the job of 'community leaders', local

politicians or 'Prevent entrepreneurs' in order to ensure a space for their continued existence and relations with the authorities. Over the course of my fieldwork I would become accustomed to such blasé attitudes toward the sensationalism and be forced to focus instead on the day-to-day work being done that built up through repetition and, which joined Muslims from across the city in producing Muslim Birmingham. Living in sensational times and between various determining frames (good Muslim/bad Muslim, liberal or traditional, moderate or fanatical) and, yet wanting *only* to live as a Muslim, spurred Muslims I was working with to 'come on out', as Simone suggests:

> Coming on out', far from engendering particular modes of subject-making, becomes a dispersal of sense and action across all kinds of composite, temporary identities. (Simone: 2015: 383)

Researching the vitality of Muslim life

Focusing on a combination of concrete, technological and fluid sites enabled me to adopt a vitalist approach to studying Muslims in the city and to consider a place for the 'force of things' (Braun and Whatmore 2010: x), how technologies and materials fold in with everyday social *and* political life. While there are studies that have been concerned with institutional spaces of Islam or, which consider some of the organisational aspects of Muslim 'community' such as schooling and mosques, the role of these structures is often left implicit (Meer 2010). Most often the meaning deduced from or attached to these is political in relation to contexts of immigration, citizenship, or social cohesion. These, therefore, treat or result in Muslims being seen as a homogenous, already constituted collectivity that can be mobilised in policy discourses. For Simone Infrastructure cannot be anything 'for sure' (Simone 2015:378):

> Normative understandings of infrastructure usually are organized around the ways in which materiality is a platform upon which social differences are created, recognized and sustained. Infrastructure con-joins and divides; it connects and circumvents. (Simone 2015: 377)

Utilising spaces, technologies and associated registers of affect, offered possibilities for interpreting Muslim community (and identity) as being about "constitution or assemblage in which things force thought, association and attachments.." (Braun and Whatmore 2010: xxix). This helped me to challenge the hold of liberal conceptions of the subject at the heart of local policy making in Sparkbrook as already constituted by pre-given categories of ethnicity. Being Muslim, then, is not entirely a conscious thing as professed through self-identification; it is a practice.

The Muslims I worked with can be characterised by their "relations of exteriority" (DeLanda 2006: 10-11) how they overlap with others at different times and places producing different effects each time. I will show this through how I encountered the same actor a number of times and uncovered new things they did as a result of new people they worked with or new scenarios they entered. So in this thesis I attempt to provide a sketch of Muslim life outside the 'wholes' that are the categories of institution, group, ethnicity etc and as they interact across these. In doing so I bring into play or 'field of vision' new sites such as the Hubb, a radio station and networks that simultaneously overlap with established categories and actors, as well as the processes through which these interactions take place.

Through ethnography, then, I have tried to employ a new optic that includes the force of 'things' in human affairs (Saldhana 2006, Swanton 2010, Bennett 2010). The hybridization evident in a vitalist approach takes into account the discursive power of bio-politics along with the 'more than' aspects of life embodied in the figure of the Muslim. It is an approach that helped me look beyond the discourses that hold power in constructions of the figure of the Muslim as we currently now it. For example; in essentialised notions of an ethno-religious group or politicised British-Muslim identity apparent in debates around recognition and multiculturalism. Within the groups or spaces that I worked, one could find a mix of Sufis and Salafis, Shias and Sunnis, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Somalis to name but a few distinctions. This revealed the eclectic nature of Muslim Birmingham and also the (in)significance of boundaries that are used to identify them as an ethno-religious group (Modood 1997:337). Interacting with people at events and moving with them

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over time and across the city's many spaces of Muslim infrastructure, allowed me to get beyond classical impressions that focus on problematic notions of ethnicity such as the tribal features that are mapped onto Muslim identity and 'community' (see next chapter for fuller discussion of this point).

Instead I seek to illuminate things that people did and certain spaces and actions that were important in that doing, which ultimately constituted Muslim *life*. I set out to view individuals beyond simply their identification with the signifier Islam or Muslim. A key research question for me was: how might we better understand the processes that go into forming Muslim identity and 'community'? This involved me: researching in multiple sites rather than established ones that might be symbolic of Muslims; looking at multiple differences and not sameness; investigating interactions across genders rather then studying Muslim males or females as categories that separately generate a distinct Muslim position. I sought to be transversal, crossing a range of discourses such as space/place, authority/tradition and politics/infrastructure.[11]

Sparkbrook being home to sizeable numbers of Muslims, and, therefore, a range of infrastructure that serves and generates Muslim life in the area, invited my attention. I pitched up first at the Hubb – an alternative Muslim arts space located on the Stratford road and within the area covered by the Spycams. Through participant observation and interviews with key individuals involved in setting up and running the Hubb, I became aware of how this space, which occupied the first floor of a run-down terraced shop had been appropriated and re-appropiated by different generations of minorities over the past four decades. In chapter 3 I explore how the Hubb symbolised a more complex relationship to the politics of identity in the city. This concrete space became a site that Muslims and non-Muslims from around the city and beyond would gravitate to. I thus plugged into more than a

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[11] In advancing a new approach to studying life that is "resolutely non-linear', Braidotti argues that: "Re-visiting the same idea, project or location from different angles is therefore not merely a quantitative multiplication of options, but rather a qualitative leap of perspective" (Braidotti 2012: 74).

physical space but also numerous bodies too, whom I would encounter in the regular events that I attended there. The Hubb, then, was an 'eventful space' (Thrift & Crang 2000: 6) that brought old and new people together to rig up a new scene. The Muslim agency I would investigate, therefore, was a processual one defining Muslims through their 'spatiality of existence' (ibid 2000: 8).

A second site I was led to through contacts developed at the Hubb was Unity FM: a local Muslim radio station housed within, but existing independently of an established Yemeni community centre half a mile up the Stratford road from the Hubb. This site was linked more overtly to established Muslim organisations, some national, representing the different waves of Muslim organizing in Britain since the 1960s. Unity FM attracted younger Muslims keen to find expression and forge connections with a larger world through a media technology. As I note in my review of the literature in the next chapter, there has been a keen interest in young people or emerging generations of Muslims across Europe who are taken to be the vessels of contemporary Muslim culture and identity. In the lives of young Muslims, religion is often interpreted as something transmitted form their immigrant parents in a linear way. At Unity FM I encountered people making innovative use of the radiowave to disrupt this linear transmission.

A third site of my research was networks; more fluid constellations of social practices I observed Muslim participating in. Following the connections I had already made through the Hubb and Unity FM, I joined Muslims in social gatherings such as Iftari dinners during the month of Ramadhan (fasting), activist meetings and charity events that occurred at irregular moments in various spaces around the city. In these encounters I experienced firsthand, peoples reactions to the racialization of Muslims. The politicization of the figure of the Muslim was regularly in the air and would emerge from time to time in discussions I had with people about being Muslim contemporaneously in a time and place so racially marked. It was a reminder of the political climate Muslims lived in and were made out of - but not totally determined by. For some Muslims I worked with it was a key point for engaging in discussions about policing, hate crimes and racism. Others carried on their lives and

referred to stories such as the Spycams affair and later the Trojan Horse scandal occasionally or strategically to invoke feelings of victimization or to bolster an alternative Muslim frame.

A key objective of my ethnography has been to interrogate the relationships between ethnicity, religion and space (Chapter 3); between youth, gender and authority (Chapter 4) and between the politics of representation and embodiment in individuals and infrastructures (Chapter 5). Yet this was not without its challenges. Below I describe my entry into the fieldwork and the processes of my ethnography too.

Trajectories

As previously mentioned, I had worked for the City Council in a number of policy related roles prior to embarking on my PhD research in 2009. I was led to Sparkbrook coincidently after attending an event entitled "Arts and Islam" at The Drum, a prominent black arts venue in the north side of the city. The event had been curated by a friend who worked at the Arts Council who pointed me toward an "alternative Muslim led arts space' that would be opening soon in the heart of Sparkbrook. At that event I was introduced to Ali who would be the resident graffiti artist and manager of the space. Over the next year as the Spycams affair came and went, I spent time with Ali and others involved with the space as they planned for its official opening on 29 April 2010. The arts space would have a multi-layered relationship to Sparkbrook, which I discuss in detail in the chapter 3. It resonated with me too in a number of ways. Being located on the portion of Stratford road that runs through Sparkbrook, it was in an area I know very well. I traversed it on my daily route to Ladypool School in the 1980s. I recall accompanying my late father on visits to meet the, then, local MP Roy Hattersley who held his advice surgery in one of the pubs in the heart of Sparkbrook. I recall the distinct odour in the pub and the feeling of bemusement I had back then toward the use of this space in local politics, as I would come to know it. The loud noise and laughter of 'white' men at home in the pub

juxtaposed with the sight of 'little Asians' sat subserviently in wait of one of those loud 'white' men (the MP) was an unsettling induction into the politics of race in this city. Striking today, that very same space in which racialized politics were formed is now revamped and appropriated as a halal restaurant; symbolising a new Muslim vernacular in the area.

Given my familiarity and closeness with the place in which I was to conduct my fieldwork, I tried to remain aware of the danger of presenting a partial or truncated view: one, in which I do not sufficiently account for the wider social universe that Muslims are produced out of. Upon entering the field and being confronted with the Spycams Affair I immediately felt the force of history and politics – post war immigration, racialised politics of representation and governance of Muslims – that shaped the material and symbolic space within which Muslims operated in Sparkbrook. As already mentioned, there are dominant conceptions about the place and as the Spycams affair revealed, which are hegemonic in how policy makers work there. How people located within Sparkbrook as residents or workers narrated and experienced the place was, therefore, also important to me. While acknowledging that local life was embedded in wider historical and political realities, I was concerned with what Feld and Basso describe as 'local theories of dwelling' (1996: 68). This included me talking to locals, observing and participating in their day-to-day rituals to get a sense of "the intersection of representation and experience as mutually, if unequally, implicated in identity formation" (Alexander 2004: 146).

I did this by working with a multiplicity of Muslims across ages, gender, ethnicities, classes and denominations. Pursuing this approach meant I was able to move away from models of studying and administering Muslims that approach them as belonging to a *whole* in terms of ethnic group, gender, clan or denomination. I have sought to investigate the coming together of different actors that overlap during different moments and the affects that are then produced. The idea has been to talk about Muslim life as in process and emergent and not pre-given; determined by either a particular trajectory (say of migration) or political reality as a suspect community, but which unfolds asymmetrically in relation to a range of milieus.

I took as the site of my research enquiry things that people did and spaces that were significant in that doing, rather than an area of the city as bounded site of Muslim presence. I collaborated with people in setting up events, attending them and mixing with the crowds, closing down events, going out to eat with special guests from abroad, praying with people when visiting them, hanging out in communal spaces drinking tea and playing table tennis, opening fasts, attending activist events, conferences, dinners and speeches. I, therefore, pay attention to the 'poetics' of place (Kong 2001) and how religious spaces are produced through people's productions, labours and encounters. Placing an optic on the 'microcultures of space' (Amin 2002) I will emphasise "everyday enactment as the central site of identity and attitude formation" (ibid: 967). For the people I worked with it was not about being Muslim in the abstract sense; adopting the Muslim signifier that exists in the public sphere, nor was it always about *consciously* attaching or aligning oneself under the banner of Muslim that is out there in politics and society (Meer 2012). There were other modes of appraisal and ways of being folded into a Muslim subject position – both communal and individual – that were important too.

These collaborative things and events can be seen as 'place making practices', through which I gained an understanding of the different embodied and social practices that constituted *my* Muslim Birmingham. I qualify this as *my* version in a similar sense that other ethnographers confess to the fictionality of their accounts (Alexander 2000) being a snapshot (Alexander 1996: 197) of the lives under study. My ethnographic reporting is also fictional (Clifford 1986: 6-7) in that I have selected or valorised certain voices and moments over others. It is also only part of the story, for example, of the spaces I worked in – The Hubb, and the Bordesley Centre in which Unity FM was housed – have in the past had different uses and most likely will do in the future. They lent themselves to being part of the trajectory of Muslim life that I was part of *then* and may not be in the future.

My ethnography is, therefore, partial. I make visible certain spaces, social practices and affects, which in turn were made possible by the way I was positioned as a

second generation south Asian Muslim researching Muslim Birmingham, as well as in my ability and authority to move around it. In calling attention to the 'partiality' of the ethnographic voice, Alexander (2004) stresses the importance of reflexivity "as a strategy for the refusal of the attribution of 'authenticity, a refusal to be made to 'speak for your community' (2004: 144). In the next section of this chapter, I discuss issues relating to my position within the research, drawing on my relationships to the people I worked with as well as the significance of my authority in representing Muslim life I observed and participated in during the course of my fieldwork.

Doing ethnography

How does a subject take part in an ethnographic study in which he has very little faith and survive as something more than a subject and less than an author?

(Hakim Hasan in Afterword to *Sidewalk* (Hassan [1999] 2014: 823)

The above words are those of the chief protagonist in Mitchell Duneier's celebrated ethnography *Sidewalk*. These words also echoed among Muslims I worked with during my fieldwork as they simultaneously lamented having become the object of marvel and suspicion of the academy and authorities, while also complained of gaining no benefit from this exposure. I was, therefore, caught up not only in a controversial place and time, but also where there existed much suspicion toward people like myself wanting to know what was going on day-to-day among Muslims in the area.

Through the course of my fieldwork I befriended and encountered a diverse group of Muslims in Birmingham. I mentioned earlier how I was introduced to Ali, the resident graffiti artist and manager of the Hubb. Through Ali I got to meet numerous cultural producers from around the city as well as other parts of the country and world who visited the Hub. Between June 2009 and March 2011 I spent considerable time with Ali behind the scenes of events, out socializing in the city with guests

visiting the Hubb from out of town and also attending other events with Ali. I conducted an in-depth interview with Ali at the Hubb around a year after initially meeting him. In between, I also met Abdus Samad who was the leaseholder of the building that housed the Hubb. I interviewed Abdus some months after meeting him and during the early days of the Hubb's existence during the fall of 2009. Through my conversations with Abdus I was able to gain a valuable insight into the ethos behind the Hubb and an appreciation of how it rested on informal connections and agreements with people such as a Yemeni elder in his 90's who had been in the city since the 1940's. A connection with the deeper histories of the space was complimented with connections I made with local residents and activists such as Jalal who had been at the forefront of the recent campaign to get the Spycameras taken down. I conducted an in depth interview with Jalal as well as with Aaliya and Jamila who were two young female volunteers at the Hubb with connections to other Muslim organisations and networks around the city. Jamila later led me to Unity FM and inducted me as a volunteer there.

At Unity FM I encountered a number of challenges building trust with people to interview. This was largely due to the formal and structured nature of how things happened there. There were obligations to the license agreement, which meant volunteers and people working at Unity were required to follow rules and regulations, commitment to which was regularly observed by the management. Working to a timetable of programmes that were expected to air at allotted times meant people were coming and going in more fixed patterns. I, therefore, spent time familiarizing myself with the rhythm of the organization. During this phase I was able to sense an important dynamic that of authority, which became a framing feature of my findings from this phase of research. Having said this, however, I was able to draw on valuable exchanges with a number of volunteer presenters, one of whom had been dismissed from running a popular drive time music show that was deemed to have become controversial by the management.

Aaliya whom I had met at the Hubb also organized a range of social events such as the Iftari dinner that brought new people together in different venues around the

city. I was invited to attend these and here I met Q who was working as a youth worker before taking on a Midlands coordinator role with a national organization concerned with promoting Muslims' engagement in politics as well as awareness of anti-Muslim hate crime. Q organized regular events throughout 2011-2012 that I attended and helped out at. Here I met a range of people whom I later interviewed in addition to Q. There were others too whom I met incidentally during the course of my fieldwork, still in spaces or networks linked to the protagonists discussed above, for example Zoya, Aysha and Nabil. I recorded notes from my encounters with these individuals.

I conducted in-depth interviews with all the people who appear in the forthcoming data chapters. These were carried out in a conversational style and sometime after I had developed a rapport with people having met them at events on my fieldwork circuit. Most were not concerned with anonymity but I have chosen not to use their real names when referring to them in the forthcoming chapters. The exceptions are Ali, Mahtab and Alima who all enjoyed a public persona and were, therefore, happy for me refer to them using their real names. Interviews are a useful tool in ethnography through which I was able to share experiences and lifestyles with people I was researching (Hammersley and Atkinson 1993). Where I found people interesting but was unable to follow up with interviews I have abstained from including them. So, while I encountered a group of sisters who set up confectionary stalls in the Hubb and at random events in the Bordesley Centre, I was unable to interview them and have, therefore, not included them in my discussion of Muslim Birmingham.

Race was not overtly an issue for me as it has been for some ethnographers researching racialised subjects (Back & Duneier 2006). With my subjects predominantly being Pakistani (largely Mir Puri) or Bangladeshi, there was an ethnic equivalence between us that meant I was not always alert to it having a structuring effect on my research encounters with them (Song 2004). There were other dimensions, however, such as religious standpoints that certainly structured my relationships and access. Sometimes my gender and often my outward appearance

of religiosity marked the parameters of my involvement with people. Some women were active within sisters' circles and even at mixed events but were hesitant to meet with me one-to-one for an interview. With some participants my trimmed beard was 'too short'. My adoption of respectful language of 'brother' and 'sister' to converse with people was not always enough to signal my faithfulness. Sometimes people would try to assess my Islamic leanings or affiliation with a particular *tariqa*, denomination or school of thought. Because I generally borrowed from across traditions I was viewed as 'modern'. This often marked the point where people would want to discuss more dogmatic issues and seek to hear about *my* history and opinions, which made for rich encounters where people learned about me as I did them.

My affinities with people I worked with through shared ethnicity and religion as well as the field being my home city afforded me a level of insider status. Yet, I was also reminded that being an 'insider' can have the dual effect of enhancing and limiting a researcher's critical assessment of what is observed and listened to during the course of their fieldwork (Song 2004, Clifford 1986). There were numerous times when differences would become pronounced between my subjects and me. My commitment to voluntary work was not as strong as many of the young people I worked with for whom being part of the infrastructure of Muslim Birmingham was an important ambition and day-to-day vocation, whether formally or otherwise, recognized or invisible. This marked a generational difference between us. I had less familiarity with what I discovered presently to be a conventional aspect of young Muslim's lives in the city. Having comparatively less social and cultural capital meant I was, therefore, more of a *semi-insider* (Duneier et al 2014: 7).

Boundaries were overcome by my praying with people if a prayer time happened to coincide with my research presence. It was not just my confessional commitments and ritual participation that helped push me toward insider status, however. My enthusiasm and professional commitment also enabled a quick route-in for me at Unity FM, for example. I made myself available at short notice to step in during Ramadhan at the radio station and I helped the management to address one of its

long standing dilemmas about presenting factual and hard hitting information in up to date topical shows through projecting my research skills. Still at the radio station, my networks and skills in negotiating were utilised to lever in different speakers. But when my personal show started to become 'academic', it was axed. I was reminded about how the boundaries of who belonged were always shifting.

I was, therefore, exposed to much more than just people and organisations in Sparkbrook, but also to the ways that people connected to others and the strategies they used. The 'Iftari network' which I discuss in chapter 5 was an example of a disparate group of mainly young male and female Muslims who each had their particular agendas and actively pursued connections with various others to help further their own and each other's activities. Although many were critical of the authorities, some still chose to connect with politicians and policy makers being careful, however, not to align their agendas.

The different sentiments I encountered among Muslims I worked with toward the authorities in the area were matched by the selective engagement of influential individuals (such as Ali discussed in chapter 3 and Q in chapter 5) within Muslim organisations and the local authority toward the 'community'. For example, in Birmingham City Council's drive to engage Muslims following the breakdown of trust resulting from the Spycams Affair, Muslims active in voluntary organisations were often invited to 'community' briefings. Because of contacts I had with officers in the City Council working in this area, I regularly received invitations and often attended events. There was a view among people I worked with that, only individuals who were deemed 'safe' and uncontroversial were selected for engaging with in these events. Others who did things outside the box were excluded. Despite that through my fieldwork I was linked to many individuals who were critical of the city council and actively chose not to engage in official events, I was accepted at official city council meetings. My being a researcher, I was judged to be objective and informed, and, therefore, accepted where ordinary Muslims were not.

Being in the corridors of power at a crucial time for Muslims in the city gave me a

sense of high. I was spurred on by the opportunity being a researcher afforded me to engage in organizational politics. My ethnography of a racialised minority could extend beyond poetics and into politics (Kalra 2006). The excitement about politics was, however, tempered by challenges I would experience back in the field. I had to be careful disclosing my close relations with council officials some of whom were senior members of the Prevent team, in case I was taken to be *in with the state*. I was often asked if my research was part of Prevent. In such cases, I relied on my strong connections with locally respected personalities such as Ali, Jamila and Q, for example, to help allay concerns among skeptics.

To build my authority as an ethnographer, I employed reflexivity to enable dialogue. I projected the value to others of my having insider knowledge of the workings of Prevent (although this never included classified information; I was never invited to attend 'Gold' meetings where sensitive information pertaining to imminent threats or arrests was discussed). It made me a good interlocutor with certain activists who while fiercely interested in local policy toward Muslims, especially relating to campaigns against Islamophobia, did not enjoy access to key policy and decision makers. This revealed the limits of local democracy, as I will discuss in chapter 5, as ordinary Muslims affected by the governments heightened interest in them sought other ways of being political. People were keen to engage and be consulted on what seemed to be regular incursions into their lives, in the form of updated legislation in response to the perceived threat of radical Islam, but felt excluded as a result of the racialised politics in the city in which newer voices were restricted. I hoped that my position between oscillated interests (the state and Muslims) both challenged and aided my authority as an ethnographer in Muslim Birmingham and may have enabled a "disruption" (Alexander 2004) in the construction of further racialised knowledge of Muslims in Birmingham.

Ethics

Throughout my fieldwork I was conscious about misinterpreting people's

experiences and meanings about things they said and did. I have tried to overcome this by using directly what people said to me, as I transcribed it. I have also been interested in people's movements, encounters and affective dimensions of Muslimhood; things that are not captured using a dictaphone. Through my observations, therefore, I have tried to be cautious not to replace speculation for observation and, therefore, relied on observations that required "less inference and fewer assumptions" (Becker 1996: 65). I have therefore tried to strike a balance between "subjective insight, empathy and scientific rigour" (Duneier et al 2014: 3). I have also opted more for accuracy rather than thick description. As part of this strategy I aimed for 'breadth', hence, my interest in conducting fieldwork in concrete spaces, among technologies and infrastructures of people.

I had to be aware of the ethical implications of working with a vulnerable community and people who felt unduly under the gaze of the media, government and security agencies. I encountered many people who did not want to participate in my research, because they were skeptical or unsure where it might end up. I navigated this by selecting sites that were public and where people moved in and out relatively freely. I also offered anonymity and have tried to guarantee confidentiality trough use of pseudonyms for people I interviewed. The names of spaces such as the Hubb, Bordesley Centre and Unity FM have not been changed.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter 2 is a review of relevant literature that addresses Muslim identity and 'community' in Britain and in some cases in a European context. In this chapter I map a range of literatures from across disciplines such as anthropology, sociology and religious studies. I try to discern trends and themes from this literature and engage these in the forthcoming discussion of my fieldwork.

Chapter 3 entitled 'the Hubb' is concerned with urban space and the role this plays in hosting and shaping Muslim identities and 'community' in Birmingham. I begin by

working through the well-worn discussion about representation and space resulting in spatialisation (Massey 2005) applying this to my fieldwork area - Sparkbrook. I work through representations of the area as a racially marked place. I consider the early race relations work on Sparkbrook as based on Chicago school logics of social and cultural ecology (Tonkiss 2005: 9) that led to historically significant ways of imagining the place as of stabilised black/Asian/Muslim 'community'.

This is evident in how Muslim life and 'community' have been represented in the city through fixed and stable forms of ethnicity and space largely flowing from the experiences of post-war immigration in the area. I argue that the idea of Muslimness as confined to spaces associated with a limited range of practices enacted in private or in religiously marked spaces, is part of the rationalisation of religious identities that fit with liberal multiculturalism. I take my cue from theorising about religion as less a universally definable phenomena, and more a discursive tradition as elaborated in the theoretical works of Talal Asad (1993) and developed by others who attend to local conditions that are also important aspects of religion-making in societies around the world (Meyer (2008), Meyer & Moors (2006), Hirshkind (2006), Mahmood (2005), Mandair & Dressler (2011), Gole (2013)).

Drawing on my fieldwork data I consider how the rich history of migration and settlement in Sparkbrook represented in people, buildings and associations (like groups of Yemeni and Asian elders who first settled in the area; a Muslim charity established in the 1970's and a run down building used by all of these) create a unique patterned ground upon which contemporary constructions of Muslimness appear and disappear. These simultaneously contest what it means to inhabit a religiousised identity (Muslim) in Birmingham, while also present possibilities for an alternative hosting of Muslimness.

I draw on interviews and participant observation carried out at the Hubb to challenge the idea of 'community' as something to be found still and concentrated in a marked spatial area. The way Muslims gravitate to the Hubb - every now and then - and the intensity of the encounters the space affords people produces a

community not clumped together but characterised by togetherness (Massey 2005). Community, I argue exists and is made here through felt sensations, negotiations between people, the area as well as Muslim's agonistic engagement (Mouffe 2005) with the racialised politics of 'community' in Sparkbrook and Birmingham more widely. I chart the narrative elements of community (Back 1996, Alexander 1996, 2000, Keith 2005) alongside languages of the vernacular urban, and how they sit side by side evoking feelings that challenge dominant representations of Muslims as a faith community in the popular liberal democratic sense. These are dubbed as parochial in reference to a state multiculturalism that fails to capture a more fugitive sense of identity and belonging practiced by Muslims I worked with.

A key argument in this chapter is that this alternative site of Muslim association – the Hubb - embodies a challenge to public Muslim identities either lobbied for in contemporary liberal multiculturalism (Modood 2005) or which are part of the narrative of the area as reflected in the form of community organisations or leaders. In this sense the space acts as a counterpublic, which organises Muslimness according to numerous affects, sensations and dispositions rather than liberal argument and debate about inclusion, belonging and citizenship in multicultural Britain. The arguments in this chapter are intended to contribute to debates about the inclusion of Muslims in state multiculturalism through presentation of an alternative sense of what constitutes Muslimness, and the difficulties of representing this in liberal democratic terms alone. Other things help organise a sense experience that isn't easily captured in 'community' based on ethnicity and place (Sparkbrook).

Chapter 4 entitled 'Radio Muslims' takes a further look at some of the trends identified in the previous chapter. I present a practical example of the ambiguous relationship to ethnicity narrated by many of the Muslims I worked with in their critical attitudes toward the politics of identity and representation. I describe an ordinary manifestation of this expressed through interactions between an older group of second generation South Asian Muslim men who set-up and run Unity FM –

a Muslim 'community' radio station, and a range of volunteers and listeners linked to the station.

The way the radio station is organised and run (exclusively by these south Asian men who founded it) and its institutional connections to a larger and decades old movement - the Islamic Society of Britain – invited concerns about the way Islam is 'done' here. People criticised it for being parochial, narrow and wrapped up in sensibilities characteristic of an earlier era of Muslim organising in Britain. I draw on an interview and meetings with one of the radio station's founders to uncover the geneology of the station and the logics of 'community' that underlay it, then and now.

A key observation I make is that the radio station imagines itself in the mould of a 'community' organisation resonant with the way many ethnic groupings, particularly Pakistanis, have in the city to solidify its authority and appeal as a viable actor in the civic sphere. I draw on interviews and time spent behind the scenes and on-air at Unity to describe some of the organisational, institutional and technological processes at play in the exercise of authority by the management, and challenges to this by presenters and listeners, which result in a remaking of religious authority over the airwaves. I explore literature on the theme of shifting religious authority among Muslims in the west (Sagoo et al 2008, Geaves 2006, Mandaville 2007), particularly as it relates to transnational movements and global influences and how these unsettle and challenge the hold of established religious identities among Muslim minorities in Britain. Popular debates in this area have tended to rehearse the 'between two cultures' deduction where Muslims in Britain (and the West more broadly) are considered as caught between modernity and religion as tradition. Media technologies have been implicated in such debates. The embrace of media technologies by Muslims has received mixed attention. Either overwhelmingly celebrated for their liberatory potential (Arab Spring) or dismissed for their abuse when used in the spread of extremism mostly in the form of jihadist recruitment and ideology. Globally, there has also been a growing interest in the proliferation of Islamic knowledge into everyday formats such as pamphlets, cassettes, CDs, DVD

and youtube (Anderson 2003, Hirschkind 2006, Meyer & Moors 2006) that open up possibilities for fashioning a Muslim self.

I will suggest that radio becomes a medium that offers possibilities for the projection of authority/traditions but also for negotiation and remaking of these. Radio has certain ambient qualities, which the volunteer presenters I worked with employ to their own ends. The authority of Unity FM as Britain's longest standing permanent Muslim radio station is recalibrated, reduced and multiplied all at the same time by different volunteer presenters. I describe different accommodations that are made, which in turn result in re-casting the radio station's authority, to fashion an alternative sense of 'community' than one in the mould of a recognisable 'community' organisation. Each of the volunteers employed different strategies to accommodate the station's ethos. Each of them put to work their own skills with music or gender to generate affective energies that cultivate a broader listenership for Unity FM. In doing so Unity's 'community' is not subverted but transformed.

Chapter 5 entitled 'Muslims being political' moves from the concrete and technological based spaces in which Muslimness is fashioned, to the empty zone between religious infrastructure and cultural or ethnic organisations that mark off ethnicised 'community' in the city to consider more fluid spaces where Muslim-making happens. The chapter begins by considering how Musliness becomes invested and embodied in visible symbols, in this case Tariq Jahan, the father of one of the three young men who were killed during the disturbances that swept a number of British towns and cities including Birmingham during the summer of 2011.

I consider some of the significance of this in terms of projections of a domesticated Muslim identity that became embodied in the figure of Tariq Jahan as an injured Muslim whose appeal was extended into sections of the British Muslim community. Muslims I was working with at the time of this event were critical of how this resembled the politics of representation that had resulted in their disenfranchisement within the formal political sphere. People shared strong opinions

about how the visible religious institutions and infrastructure in the city offered little service to them, because they appeared too aligned to the way things were done decades ago. Muslims I worked with also registered the political climate of hostility toward them and their religion and pointed to things they do such as involvement within the burgeoning Muslim charity sector as well as being part of different networks to help reach into a broader world where they can practice civic care and involvement. Enabling them to both 'live out' their faith while also claim a right to the city.

The chapter will look at links Muslims have with various organisations around the city and beyond. For example: Muslim charities, anti-race networks, large community organisations as well as with popular spaces of consumption such as new halal restaurants that bring a different offer to the 'balti triangle', including dessert parlours and shisha lounges as new trends in the city. I will draw on interviews with people who were active in the organisations mentioned above as well as social gatherings I attended. The interviewees are distinguishable for doing things that other Muslims are not necessarily doing and few are paying attention to.

The analysis is this chapter is concerned with how religion is utilised to facilitate collaborations and networks. I focus on the affective intensities that are generated, traded and absorbed through a range of social practices that take place around the city – for example: iftari dinners, post Eid celebrations, charity events, activist meetings. These events are ad hoc but a regular part of the social landscape for Muslims I worked with. They bring together a core group of people as well as new people who drop in and out all the time. Distinct forms of sociality are developed and networks based not on competition and suspicion as charactertics perceived to be of the existing voluntary sector, but on creating prospects for things to emerge and prosper. The chapter draws on recent theorising about people and their movements in cities constituting alternative forms of infrastructure that become part of the social life of cities (Simone 2004, Tonkiss 2013).

The process of community-making in this chapter reveals tensions that characterise this very local expression of Muslim community and identity, but which may also resonate across other British cities with similar Muslim demographics. For example, I cite competing moral and ethical standpoints on how to work with the state or not. This registers the political environment and atmosphere around 'Preventing violent extremism' that folds Muslims into deeply contested notions of citizenship and belonging.

Chapter 6 concludes with a discussion in which I consider the broader implications of my research.

Conclusion

The thesis argues that understanding contemporary Muslim subjectivities should involve more than a focus on present modes of subjectification, i.e. new rationalities and technologies for the government of conduct deployed as part of state ambitions to 'manage' Muslims, and which have marked Birmingham and its Muslim population in newly racialised terms. Instead I consider how Muslim identity and 'community' is worked on through a range of relational complexes. In this vein, I approach the city as not just a site of Muslim presence but also as generative of Muslim life in Birmingham.

The emphasis in the research has been on processes and practices that are transformative and novel; situated in the mythology and the concrete of a familiar racially marked area but, moving and in process - symptomatic of the modern condition. The focus on observing religion as it is lived, in process or as "religion abounds" (de Vries 2008: 7), enables a different sense of what Muslim identity and community might entail. The assemblages that I envision involve elements and forms of religion in twenty first century Birmingham that are more prominent and less identifiable than the elementary forms of religious life that have been the preoccupation of studies and polices on Muslims in Birmingham to date. It is to a discussion of these that I turn to in the next chapter.

Chapter 2 – Review of Literature on Muslim identity and 'community'

Introduction

In this literature review I consider works that have addressed Muslim identity and 'community' in Britain. I begin by noting how spectacular events, examples of which were mentioned in the previous chapter, help to generate hype around the presence of the figure of the Muslim. The sensationalism that results both derives from and (re)enforces essentialist understandings of Muslims linking them to troubled notions of ethnicity, masculinity and regressive tradition, and in the process positioning them as a new moment that troubles the secular liberal underpinnings of the nation (Parekh 2008).

I explore associations with ethnicity as a particular site tied to the ontology of the figure of the Muslim. Scholars (Modood 1997, Meer 2010) have alluded to how ethnicity maps onto religion through racialised connotations of south Asians as an earlier incarnation of Muslims, as well as more benign ways in which it is transcended through adoption of faith in cultural terms with is own dynamics and tendencies to be bounded. These works point to how religion becomes subsumed into notions such as 'community' to represent a new category of difference. This has prompted a number of fascinations, scares as well as mobilisations giving way to Muslims becoming a hyper-visible formation that can be mobilised in identity claims making; simultaneously prompting and seeking to respond to 'the Muslim question'.

In the field of race and ethnic relations the figure of the Muslim also emerges at a time of fragmentation of the category black, which earlier represented a unifying category of experience for racialised groups in the UK; marking a shift in how one thinks about power and multiplicity vis-à-vis ethnic and cultural identities (Alexander 2002). The turn to splintered experiences of difference marked the era of 'new ethnicities' in which scholars engaged anew through ethnographic studies and postcolonial analysis to explore shifting contours of cultural production and political

engagement among ethnic minorities in the UK, noting the fluid and *becoming* nature of identities while also acknowledging that these are fraught through regulation of different kinds of experience. With a renewed focus on previously neglected subject positions such as gender and youth as well as new sites of engagement such as neighbourhoods and expressive cultures, understandings of minority ethnic identity and 'community' were expanded and shown to be complex, messy and undetermined.

Muslims, however, have remained mired in discussions that characterised the adoption of religion as regressive and backward. This has been supported by images and stories of youth estranged from family and nation. I note how there has been a particular interest in young people's adoption of faith and concomitant discussions that move between this presented as generational difference and clash while also read anew as challenges to authority. I explore this in more detail, as the idea of shifting authority has been a feature of recent research that illuminates how Muslims are positioned at the intersection of a number of local and global forces that work to shape contemporary Muslim subjectivities.

I note how more recent works since the 'war on terror' and hyper-interest in Muslims around the world have brought attention to various lived dimensions of Muslim life, illuminating places, practices, symbols and materials that comprise the 'stuff' of Muslim life in European cities. I suggest that these offer new surfaces for engagement into Muslim lives that are particularly accessible through ethnography.

Muslim hype

On 11 January 2015 Steve Emerson a US National Security commentator appeared on Fox News claiming that: "there are actual cities like Birmingham that are totally Muslim, where non-Muslims just simply don't go in"[12]. He was speaking at a time of

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[12]   'Steven Emerson: the Fox news expert who thinks Birmingham is 'totally Muslim'', The Guardian 12 January 2015. http://www.theguardian.com/media/shortcuts/2015/jan/12/steven-emerson-muslims-birmingham-error-fox-news

considerable hype surrounding the public presence of Muslims in metropolitan centres of the 'west' that had been generated by the Trojan Horse scandal in Birmingham. National media attention and evidently international too, became focused on an alleged takeover of a number of state funded primary and secondary schools by 'hardline Muslim extremists' in the city. The latter consisted mostly of South Asian male Muslim teachers and governors with the exception of one Muslim female who was alleged to have been placed as a head teacher in one of the 'Trojan Horse schools' by the former as 'ringleaders of the plot'. The Trojan Horse scandal swung between allegations of it being an elaborate scheme to undermine the state and secular values in public schools, and counter allegations of it being a hoax. That this local event could grab the attention of a newsroom in another part of the world spoke of the sensationalism that stories conflating Muslims with extremism have come to generate over the past few decades (Poole 2002, 2011, Poole & Richardson 2006, Meer 2010: 179-197, Alexander 2004).

In this relatively short-lived debacle[13] a number of pathologies were projected about Muslims, including: Muslim men as religious zealots seeking to undermine 'British values' and who enjoyed control over Muslim women and young people. These tropes have been prevalent in narratives about Muslims as a fifth column that have gained traction over the past few decades, and as I will discuss below, prompting regular concerns around questions of national identity and security (Verdigans 2010, Alexander et al 2013b). They follow on from earlier episodes of Muslim visibility in the public sphere such as The Rushdie Affair in 1989, which is largely taken as the moment when the figure of the Muslim first emerged in the popular limelight as a problem category. Interwoven with the Rushdie Affair are recollections of young Muslims – the British born offspring of post-war immigrants mainly from Pakistan – protesting against the first Iraq War and crisis in Bosnia, which occurred against the backdrop of Islam being projected as the rising 'Green Menace' following the end of the Cold War (Esposito 1994). Subsequently, there has been a steady narrative with emerging generations of Muslim youth at its core, about a clash of values reflected

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[13] Investigations by Birmingham City Council commenced on 7 March 2014 and were concluded on 15 July 2015. See timeline here http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-28370552

in 'between two cultures' to produce troubled images of young south Asian Muslims in urban UK locales (Samad 1992; Alexander 1998). More recently these have gained traction in discussions about 'community cohesion' and parallel lives (Malek 2006, Alexander 2004, Samad 2010) as well as talk about Muslims as inimical to liberal multiculturalism (McGhee 2008).

Commentators observing trends in the broader political landscape have uncovered how Muslims have been made scapegoats at another time of national unease toward migrants and refugees (McGhee 2009), and a return to assimilation (Back et al 2002) where Muslim belonging and loyalty to the nation is placed under renewed scrutiny. Since the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York on 11 September 2001 and the London bombings in July 2005, popular interest in Muslims has folded them into the global 'war on terror'. Concerns about 'home grown terrorism' have resulted in Muslims becoming the subject of fierce governmental scrutiny and biopolitical control (Kundnani 2009, Hickman et al 2011, Kapoor et al 2013) and has arrested the senses of the nation, leaving 'patriotism in fragments' (Back 2007: 117-149).

The spectacular events mentioned above have been presented as Muslims' collective failure to 'integrate' within European public spheres. The emergent racialization of Muslims relies on and results in their homogenisation where assertions of difference - whether as extremists, a 'fifth column' or downtrodden - focus on boundaries being drawn between 'them'- as a religious group based on a shared and unchanging tradition – and western nations also bounded by liberal secular values.

An issue that I seek to address in this chapter, as well as through the course of the thesis relates to the extent to which being Muslim can be considered a distinct and spectacular experience as suggested by this hype or might it be something more ordinary? For, prior to the sensational events and discourses that propelled them into the limelight, Muslims have not been invisible in Britain. This is apparent from literature relating to the migration and arrival of Muslims to the UK from countries

of the old as well as new commonwealth and not only following the end of empire. A small number of studies have attended to the historiography of the figure of the Muslim in Britain. In his book *The infidel Within,* Ansari (2003) presents a detailed account of various migratory journeys undertaken by Muslims from different ethnic groups well before post-war immigration as the point of their mass arrival in Britain. This study illuminates the emergence and evolvement of various ethnic groups of Muslims who came to Britain since 1800. It also presents detailed information about structures both religious and societal upon and around which Britain's Muslim populations have come to rest. Ansari offers a rich and textured account of the trajectory of Muslim life in Britain sustained through organisations established by Muslims to address their religious needs as well as to interface with majority society including governments, as well as links they have retained with global organisations. Similarly, Halliday (2010 [1992]) has offered a detailed portrait of Yeminis as Britain's earliest Muslim migrants. He presents Muslims in Britain with webs of association connecting them with their homelands and a global community of believers known as the Umma in different ways and with different intensities over time. For example, the Sepoys who arrived in Britain during the late nineteenth century maintained links of kinship with their home regions while religious affiliations lay dormant, as they did with south Asians until the early 1990's when events such as the Honeyford and Rushdie Affairs and the first Gulf war heralded the figure of the Muslim into public being.

In contrast to the synchronic nature of popular and academic interest in Muslims, then, these studies allude to a longer trajectory of Muslim presence in Britain, and noticeably how religious identity has been subsumed within ethnic identity. In doing so they offer resources or surfaces on which to further explore the contours of contemporary Muslim identity in Britain. Below I unpack some of these.

Essentially speaking

Surveying the early literature one can discern the figure of the Muslim emerging out of minority ethnic groups (mainly south Asian immigrants) whose faith intersects

with their ethnicity to produce a new social category of experience in Britain. Ethnicity is, thus, a crucial device through which Muslims in Britain are to be understood. Modood (1997) who is among the most prolific exponents of the recognition of Muslim difference has suggested that religion was "central to British Asian ethnicity" (1997: 158). Anthias and Yuval-Davis noted early-on how "[T]he racist stereotype of the 'Paki' has become the racist stereotype of the 'Muslim fundamentalist'" (Anthias & Yuval-Davis 1992: 39). Similarly, Alexander (1998, 2000) observed how the underclass narrative about Pakistani's and Bangladeshi's accompanied pathological interest in them as Muslims, claiming that: "[S]uch panics are rooted in the pathologisation of backward or traditional cultures, but are implicitly legitimised in the ethnic bubble approach to British Asian communities.." (1998: 442).

Reductive associations with ethnicity have been mapped onto Muslims in the limited literatures that discussed the religion of newcomers from Muslim countries such as Pakistan. Although few of the early sociological works on Pakistanis in the UK covered their religion, there were some exceptions (Dahya 1974, Anwar 1985, Modood 1987, 1990), which suggested that as immigrants in the postcolonial metropolis they continued to practice a faith brought with them from rural South Asia. In anthropology, however, religion has been explored in more detail in works carried out in the mould of community studies concerned with structures of family and gender relations that comprised Pakistani communities in areas such as Bradford where sizeable ethnic minorities has settled (Saifullah-Khan 1977, Shaw 2000). A feature of these works has been that religion in the lives of south Asian immigrants was inflected with culture and traditions from back home. Subsequently, religion in the lives of the Pakistani diaspora has resembled an ethnicised view of culture, similar to what Benson (1996) suggested about West Indians having problems while Asians had culture.

An example of the impulse to present ethnicity and religion as entangled cultural phenomena is visible in Pnina Werbner's anthropological studies of Pakistani Muslims in post-industrial UK cities. Werbner has championed a conceptualisation of

the Pakistani diaspora in Britain as being a continuous formation of South Asian folk or Sufi Islam from the former colonies. For Werbner, Pakistani immigrant's religious associations traveled over and took root in new localities they have made home in the UK:

> The men march through the streets of Birmingham, through Asian commercial areas, shabby, run-down but teeming with life. Grocery stores advertising ritually slaughtered halal meat, their vegetables and fruit piled high outside on the pavements, sari and clothes stores stocked with shining silks and colorful synthetics, Asian traditional jewelry stores with their delicately designed gold earrings and necklaces, Asian sweet shops with their sweets piled high in perfect conical towers, Muslim banks, travel agents, restaurants and takeaways. Aromas of cumin, cloves, and cinnamon follow us as the men turn the corner and march into a residential area, tall three-story terrace houses overlooking narrow streets. Curious bystanders stare at us as we pass. (1996:169-170)

Werbner conflates her Pakistani subject's religion with their ethnicity as a cultural form. One gets the impression of two co-existing essences that reside in the postcolonial subject and, then, live out in a given context unchanged. In this case it was the post-industrial inner-city that had become synonymous with south Asian migrants whose religion existed within and alongside their ethnicity with little or no inflection.

Later studies within sociology and religious studies have looked back to anthropological works in much the same way (Lewis 1994, Joly 1987, 1995). There have been fascinations particularly with specific strands of Islam such as Sufism and its uninterrupted practice by early migrants from rural Pakistan (Geaves 1996). Here the transplanting of ritualistic practices and figureheads such as Pirs as identifiable symbols of the way Islam was practiced back home, fitted well with prevailing impressions of ethnic minorities and their essential difference.[14] Subsequently religion is seen as a static form of difference where it even supplants ethnicity. Neilsen (1992) Lewis (1994, 2007) Gillat-Ray (2010) are among the established works on Muslims and Islam in Britain. These works display a positivist view of religion by emphasising structures upon and out of which Islam and a subsequent Muslim

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[14] Samad (1998) offers a brief but useful rebuttal of this tendency to think Muslims.

'community' in Britain rest as established out of migratory flows from Muslim majority countries (of the old commonwealth) and denominational orders of religion that were features of Islam in those societies. Although recognising diversity in the form of sects and denominations, these studies have been influential in furthering impressions of how Muslim 'community' is organised and operates in an organic or functional sense[15].

That religion trumps ethnicity as a signifier of identity for south Asians and the view that religion is more 'authentic' a signifier in ethnic lives implies that religion is an essentialised and packaged formation; something fixed and unchanging almost like an artefact that is appropriated. This is mostly apparent in the way take-up of religion among descendants of south Asian immigrants has been discussed where the emergence or popularity of a faith-based self is explained as a result of disillusionment with ethnicity or the culturally inflected religious practices of post war south Asian immigrants and the religious institutions they established in British cities. Jacobsen (1997), Lewis (1994, 2007) and Gillat-Ray (1998) are salient examples of the faith/culture dyad where young Muslims are thought to prize religion apart from the ethnicity of their parents in a new variant of the 'between two cultures' (Watson 1977) paradigm.

Studies that seek to unsettle essentialisms represented in narratives about cultural clash and backward tradition, do so through exploring the identity of Muslims as a minority group through a focus on different societal institutions such as schooling, family and youth cultures as sites where Muslims by virtue of their 'here to stay' status negotiate belonging (Vertovec & Pearce 1997, Vertovec and Rogers 1998, AlSayyed & Castells 2002, Kabir 2010). The focus is on how mainly young Muslims, given the growing and visible presence of second generation ethnic minorities in European countries, relate to already established spaces and discourses of Islam such as Muslim organisations and conventions established by earlier generations of

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[15] See the Ethnic and Racial Studies special issue (2011, 34: 7) entitled 'Methods in the study of 'non-organised 'Muslim minorities' for an example of studies that explicitly seek to build on these 'older' ways of discussing Muslims in European societies.

immigrants, as well as mainstream society to make a place for themselves in pluralist societies (Open Society Institute 2005). Although some of these works try to challenge essentialisms and to project new faces of Muslims, the result is often one-dimensional, offered up as isolated examples, or geographies with little or no contiguity between different places, spaces, genders, generations, classes and times. Instead, these works continue the well-worn discussions of 'integration', 'segregation' and majority vs minority when they discuss Muslims as merely making accommodations in relation to discourses that frame their presence. Religion functions in such analysis as a totem (as in classical sociological works on religion) to symbolise and mark-off difference, which can be mobilised in identity claims making. Religion here is appropriated in the form of 'old ethnicity' (Alexander 2000) that gave us 'community' as bound by specific marks of ethnicity. Religion as read through 'old' ethnicity is also a rationalised one in line with the logics of 'community' and race relations management.

Such framings become problematic because they lend Muslims to being represented in a politics of identity approach in which there is an assumed essential position. This is a time, however, which Stuart Hall famously characterised as marking 'an end to the innocent notion of an essential black subject' (Hall 1989). Hall pointed to changed social, cultural and political conditions that were altering the cultural politics of race, heralding a shift from the 'relations of representation' to the 'politics of representation' (Hall 1989). Emergent identities, therefore, need to be situated in newer conditions as part of a broader racialised landscape marked by the fragmentation of blackness and ethnicity (Alexander 2002).

There have since been renewed engagements with minority ethnic cultures through ethnographic studies (Alexander 1996, 2000, Back 1996, Brah 1996) that have forced new appraisals of the way these are socially *produced*, and in the process unsettling hegemonic representations that have bound them to reductive notions of ethnicity, culture, religion and space. This era witnessed the celebration of 'Asian cool' (Banerjea 1996; Sharma et. al 1996) as part of a wider commercial appreciation of

black cultures (Gilroy 1993) along with a realisation of different regimes of power that shape identity[16] (Hall 1996b).

In a climate marked also by growth in the Muslim population (discussed in the previous chapter) and concomitant debates about the terms of their inclusion in liberal democratic pluralist societies, a case for Muslim difference has been advanced as a distinct social and cultural position as part of the new politics of representation (Modood 1997, 2007, Meer 2010). Numerous literatures concerned with the presence and inclusion of Muslims in public spheres across the western world allude to the politicised nature of *being* Muslim, through an espousal of recognition based on a number of social and cultural experiences deemed as unique to Muslims (Shadid & Van Koningsveld 1996, Nielsen 1999, Al-Azmeh & Fokas 2007, Cesari & McLoughlin 2005, Al-Sayyad & Castells 2002). Below I will consider some of the issues thrown up by studies concerned with the distinct experience of being Muslim.

'New ethnicities' but not so 'new Muslims'

The prominence given over to religion, as a new site of difference, has had at least two effects on impressions of emerging Muslim identities in Britain. Firstly, it suggests a discourse of generational clash alluded to above, where new lexicons and vernaculars of Islam imbricated in expressions of Muslim identity also represent tensions as well as expressions of difference[17]. Here scholars follow in an orientalist fashion[18] expecting to see a transmission of Islam unfettered from one generation to the next evident in their view points about the "frustration with Inherited forms of Islam" (Jones 2012: 137) and 'religion and culture mixed up' (Samad and Eade 2002:

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[16] In advancing the idea of "the end of the essential black subject' Hall says it "also entails a recognition that the central issues of race always appear historically in articulation, in a formation, with other categories and divisions and are constantly crossed and recrossed by the categories of class, of gender and ethnicity" (Hall 1989)

[17] Lewis (2007) although an updated version of his earlier study from the mid-90's includes a new view point that emerging generations are engaging and deliberating with their religion in more constructive ways although still limited by the immigrant imaginary.

[18] Here I am influenced by the critique advanced by Sharma et al (1996) that academic interest in studying migration and diaspora in the western academy derives from orientalist fascinations with the exotic 'other'.

86) fuelling pathological discourses about young south Asians as troubled heirs to the Islam of the early largely peaceful immigrant Muslims (Amin 2002, Ousley 2001, Alexander 2004, Kundnani 2001). For some this has justified the 'conveyor belt theory' where young disengaged and disillusioned South Asian Muslims appropriate religion as a marker of identity *in place of* ethnicity and enter a global world of jihadi Islam. Radicalism or extremism is seen as the result of disconnect between generations leaving youngsters to interpret and appropriate Islam in a vacuum (Roy 2004: 257-65, Lewis 2007: 119-48, Abbas 2007, Mirza 2007).

Secondly, and relatedly, it has implied a regressive movement backwards toward tradition in contradistinction to modernity. It is this strand that has been exploited in more recent discourses of extremism and threat (Geaves et al 2004) whereby Muslims identify with irrationality that threatens the secular public sphere and liberal notions of multiculturalism. Narratives of second generation Muslims hijacking mosques and supplanting ethnicised denominational Islamic practice with pure absolutist versions of Islam (Bhatt 1997).

From both these perspectives ethnicity is transcended by a new appropriation of faith where new positions emerge toward identifying as Muslim. Sometimes these give off a sense of this as being *real* or untainted by ethnic or cultural inflections, because this new identity emerges here (in Britain), having not been involved in a diasporic or migratory journey from elsewhere. For example, when expressed in the critical attitudes of emerging generations of Muslims toward customs that are seen as more cultural rather than religious (Hussain 2004) or when claiming that Muslim identity should be incorporated into national identity and that there is religious precedent for this in Muslim tradition (Seddon et al 2004). [19]

Diversity

A challenge to essentialist views is also offered in studies that place a spotlight on the diversity inherent within Muslims as a sort of 'community of communities',

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[19] For Ramadan (1999, 2009) Muslims should be critical in their adoption of dogma, thus opening debates about agency.

where recognition of pluralism in the composition of Muslim minorities in Western Europe has been a feature of more recent discussions. These works could be said to normalise Muslims as 'here' and socially produced just like any other social group, mostly in response to essentialisms that have dogged public discussions in the wake of the 'war on terror' and the 'clash of civilisations' thesis. Cesari (2007) for example, highlights the plurality inherent within Islam in efforts to displace ideas about the faith and its followers as a monolithic entity. She seeks to challenge what she refers to as the 'snare of exceptionalism' that characterises much research on Muslims in Europe. Instead she proposes we see Muslim identity in Europe as not embedded in history and culture but fluid and, by virtue of their presence in a secular Europe, Muslims are like other religious groups in multi-faith spheres.

Locality

Other studies also point to the local situatedness and attribute the emergence of Muslim consciousness as coinciding with the figure of the Muslim being heralded into being as a result of political events. It, therefore, amounts to identity claims making - as opposed to an unreflexive continuation of traditions or clashing with them - in terms of seeking equality of opportunity and recognition; suggestive of a minority group 'at home' in European societies (Meer 2010, Kabir 2010, Mandaville 2009).

Authority

In their own ways these works are alluding to shifts in authority. Jones (2012, 2013) for example, discloses what he calls 'new theological voices' as emerging in this moment. He sees the emergence of Muslim organisations over the past decade such as the Radical Middle Way and others that have come into being since the governments introduction of the Prevent programme, as indicative of shifts of authority *outwards* from institutions or traditional seats of authority within Muslim communities. These organisations also operate across a number of scales through inviting foreign speakers or conducting national campaigns and roadshows; shifting the focus from local dynamics alone. They are concerned with topical issues that

Muslims find themselves imbricated within as a result of national and international events; for example; democracy, discrimination, citizenship, gender roles. The new Islam being fashioned, thus, is circumscribed by new types of Muslim organizing that involve a range of new actors and discourses.[20]

While uncovering an interesting trend, Jones' examples are restricted to visible organisations, which although he describes as distinct from traditional institutions associated with Muslims and Islam in Britain, also enjoy an element of formality as a result of being recognised as mainstream in the sense that they receive public funding and regular media coverage. In this way they rival established Muslim institutions for the hold they have within the Muslim civil society sphere. Furthermore, many of these organisations have emerged in a post 9/11 and 7/7 context of government patronage of Muslim organisations and specifically 'de-radicalisation' programmes (Rashid 2014). The result is that an impression of competing or distinct Muslim activity is alleged. Although Jones tries to work through the reductive explanation of clash between generations, he plays into it by enforcing divides between new organisations and established institutions, converts and settled south Asian Muslims. For example when he suggests that:

> new theological voices belonging to second generation British educated
> 'ulama who have made a dedicated effort to step outside the 'subculture' of
> seminary and mosque (Jones 2012: 141).

This is also a simplistic view that valorises the 'British' element of an hyphenated Muslim/British identity. By suggesting that second generation Muslims born in the UK are better placed to rid religion from the shackles of culture and tradition Jones is enforcing the orientalist view of modernity versus tradition and 'west is best' (Sayyid 2009). Furthermore, in such prophesies there is little consideration of *transformations* in practices and interpretations of the faith of Muslims other than

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[20] Muslims I worked with often communicated to me their distrust about these organisations that only surfaced in their areas or lives when Muslims were popular politically and in the media. Dismissing these as flash in the pan events. Such organisations were crticised for not being around in Muslim neighbourhoods but in the corridors of power. Therefore, they were not part of the everyday Islam that was made and lived locally.

speculation about changing and often conflicting understandings of ideology and ritual practices between different generations (Lewis 2007); shifting family structures (Mir 2008); the introduction of Muslims into new public realms such as prison and hospital chaplaincy or the proliferation of Muslim umbrella groups (Gilliat-Ray 2012, Phillips et al 2009). Instead authority should be viewed as negotiated and re-cast for new times. It may not solidify and become set in stone so as to then be considered a legitimate part of the faith or 'church'. Instead it points to the 'impulse' inherent within Muslims to adapt themselves for new contexts (Sayyid 2014) or the 'everyday ijtihad' (Ramadan 2009).

Extra-territoriality

A further understanding of the dialectic between Muslims and tradition can be explored through the diasporic side related to their earlier incarnation as south Asian immigrants *and* affiliations with the global community of Ummah. Through this we can re-callibrate Muslim's relations to forces and things that influence subjectivities across different scales as an experience that brings about an 'extraterritoriality' (Saint-Blancat 2002) to being Muslim. In a related move, Mandaville (2001) builds on earlier works on Muslims as sojourners in the west to suggest that the condition of diaspora presents new opportunities for Muslims to engage with their religion. Rather than the straightforward transmission of practices and traditions from home to here he tries to demonstrate that encounters take place *within* Islam as it journeys across time and space giving birth to different and competing interpretations. He characterises the debate and negotiation that goes on in terms of antagonism - or at least there is the possibility of it – expressed in the disjuncture between earlier immigrant Muslims and their western born offspring. He also attributes importance to textual and literal sources of religion and their power to take a hold over Muslim subjectivity. An example he cites is that of the ulema or older generations controlling interpretations and, therefore, possibilities for ijtihad or (re)interpretation) enabling certain meanings to become hegemonic[21].

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[21] "By 'Muslim hegemony' I am referring to those sources of social authority in Islam which seek to represent themselves as the privileged readers of tradition or the bearers of 'true' Islam". (Mandaville 2001: 94)

> The younger generation of diasporic South Asian Muslims, for example, often questions the Islam of its parents, regarding the latter as tainted with the 'local culture' of the subcontinent and therefore not 'true' Islam. This has in many cases prompted a return by the younger generation to another point of origin, Muhammad's Medina, which it regards as a source of 'pure' Islam. In this we see that theories travel not only in space, but also in time. (Mandaville 2001:90)

Subsequently, he goes on to address what he sees as technologies and mechanisms that "prompt meanings to shift in translocal Islam" (2001: 89). These are: intergenerational conflict, minority status and the intellectual challenges of the west" (ibid).

For Mandaville (2001) Muslim minority subjectivity emerges in "translocality: a cultural politics of becoming" (2001:84). The translocal, he confesses, is also a liminal, interstitial, third space in the Homi Bhabha sense (2001: 93). Given Islam's global entanglements (being a world religion, implicated in geopolitical events) this work plays into endeavors to conceptualise the contemporary cosmopolitan character of Islam and Muslims:

> ..the translocal spaces of diasporic Islam seem to provide fertile venues for the rethinking and reformulation of tradition and the construction of an Islam for generations to come. (2001: 115)

Mandaville's concern is with ideas, discourses, opinions, interpretations - the episteme of Islam - and rational deliberations and negotiations that take place within Islam or within symbolic spaces of already existing Islam. Mandaville, therefore privileges a rationalist, liberal subjectivity premised on deliberation rather than spiritual or affective practices or indeed materials, moods and everyday encounters between Muslims that operate beneath or independent of formal practices or organisations to bring alternative notions and spaces of Muslimness into being. I demonstrate an example of this from my fieldwork encounters in the next chapter.

While Mandaville has been concerned with how Islam journeys, others have been concerned with more embodied practices and taken the movement of Muslim bodies as their object of analysis. McLoughlin (2009) addresses an integral aspect of Muslim life – *pilgrimage* – urging us to think of it as Muslim travel not in a commodifed sense but as part of religious journeys being undertaken. Muslim movement in and through different spaces even when they are marked as religious, have other significances too. Simone (2004) writing in an African context, charts the complex movements of Africans as they journey through different Muslim places and spaces and the numerous cultural and economic networks that result. Muslim pilgrimages and mobilities are as much about experiment and survival, as they are oriented in the way of Islam (Simone 2004: 118-135).

The symbolic notion of Ummah, then, captures part of the predicament of contemporary Muslims who might seek to transcend the ethnic homelands of their immigrant forefathers or the over-policed neighbourhoods in the UK, in favour of alternative moral and political orders (McLoughlin 2013). The notion of Ummah also enables Muslims to establish "a relationship of coherence between power and subjectivity" (Sayyid 2014: 109) in a way diaspora does not. The idea that contexts such as 'diaspora space' (Brah 1996) allow for the negotiation of new situations, resistances to racism or orthodoxies of ethnicity and gender is useful, however, as it offers a valuable departure point from which to reimagine Muslimness as in motion and becoming, rather than simply tied to structures and symbols associated with the 'immigrant imaginary' that has been instrumental in organizing Muslim identity thus far.

Materially speaking

So far I have considered some of the challenges thrown up in studies on Muslim identity when this is tied to ethnicity and generational dynamics, and linked to ideas about citizenship and belonging. In this section I will consider a range of different engagements and reflections on Muslim culture in Britain gained through attention to more material, embodied and symbolic aspects of their presence here. These help

animate the material reality or life-blood of Muslims in Britain, in contrast to the abstract and politicised attention in the works just considered. I suggest that these are useful because they present additional surfaces, other than difference that has become politicised, upon which to re-imagine and assemble Muslimness.

The power of symbols and their role in affecting social action and social forms has been a key feature of classical theorising of religion. The works of Durkheim, Weber and Marx each alluded in their own ways to religion's representation in ideologies and/or rituals and the translation of these into different social realms of class relations or communal structures (Bocock and Thomson 1985). Classical anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz and Evans-Pritchard whose work focused on the elementary forms of life in non-western Muslim societies built on these theories[22]. The earlier community studies of south Asians in Britain were also influenced by this tradition where religion is understood as a functional bond between men and the supernatural. The anthropological tradition of studying Islam in Britain is replete with examples where religion revolves around certain symbols, figures or customs, and transmitted through space and time. As suggested above, the normativity of this opinion has meant that divergences are interpreted in reductive ways such as in the 'between two cultures' approach or tendencies toward extremism.

There have been critiques of such a conception of religion influenced in large part by the work of Talal Asad who pointed to the discursive role played by actors in the processes of being faithful (Asad 1993, Mandair & Dressler 2011). Not only this but also in the marking out of categories such as public and secular with a specifically European and western trajectory, thereby othering Islam and banishing its difference as a civilization or tradition to a conceptual space outside modernity (Asad 2003, Salvatore 2009). Subsequently a more linear impression of ethnic minorities is advocated where the difference embodied by ethnic minorities is interrogated as traditions rather than 'culture' or other social categories, which

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[22] For a good summary of these works see Bocock and Thompson (1985) and for a critique see Asad (1993).

might be easily represented by the state as bounded and identifiable entities. In this section I consider works that address Muslims in a more expanded sense, therefore, beyond the normative frames that have been a feature of some of the works addressed above.

Space/Location

As already mentioned, Muslims have become synonymous with places such as post-industrial UK cities. Associations with place, particularly neighbourhood and nation, have been an important feature in discussions of Muslims since Trevor Phillips' famous declaration following the 2001 Oldham riots that Britain was 'sleepwalking to segregation' (Amin 2002, Phillips 2006). The overly racialized associations between Muslims and the inner-city were earlier expressed in The Ousley report into the same event, which claimed that Muslims were segregating themselves by creating ghettos. Even earlier but in a French context, Kepel (1987) alluded to the way troubled versions of Islam helped to pathologise Muslims as produced from ghettoised conditions of the banlieus. Indeed, as the opening segment of this chapter highlighted, the city of Birmingham where I conducted my research is a place marked by its association with Muslims. Having settled in parts of the city as migrants and become an established part of the cityscape (Nasser 2005) they are also part of the social life *in* them. Through attention to spaces of their settlement it is possible to talk of different layers of Muslim history and multiple symbols and structures that signify and produce meanings about Muslims in Britain (Hopkins and Gale 2009).

Another city that is often a site for research and reference in relation to Muslims is Bradford; not least because it is taken to be the site where Muslim consciousness first emerged in the Rushdie Affair. Even prior to this event, however, there existed local grassroots organisations spawned from mosques that championed campaigns for Muslim schools and recognition of certain ritual rights such as availability of halal meat. These can be contrasted with the national outfits that emerged after 1989 and, which contributed to the politicisation of the figure of the Muslim on a broader

scale (McLoughlin 2002). Similarly in Birmingham during the 1980's religion was visible on certain streets of the city when Muslims were recognised for leading protests to rid parts of an area neighbouring Sparkbrook of red light activity (Hubbard 1998: 273). Earlier in 1981 Birmingham City Council had passed a motion for the call to prayer to be allowed from loud speakers in mosques (Nielsen 2004:53).

Cities and neighbourhoods of Muslim settlement are, therefore, saturated with meanings of Muslimness beyond the mere sacralized and 'Islamized' spaces in which rituals are performed (Werbner 1996). There are additional 'things' that play a role in how Muslims inhabit and embody their faith. These things have been mobilised in different ways to speak about Muslims. Sometimes Muslims are deduced from them as in earlier classical studies, at other times Muslims are read off them, as in discourses of 'otherness' revolving around the niqab, minaret, or terrorist cell. Through their material form; their bodies, the clothes they wear and the cars they drive (Alam 2013); Muslims are 'sorted' by the affect their presence generates (Swanton 2010).

Places associated with Muslims are, therefore, ordinary sites where Muslim cultural identity is fashioned day-to-day amidst the politicisation of the figure of the Muslim, but also historically where anti-racist struggles took part alongside established Muslim organisations. Muslims have found a place between these instances appropriating symbols and slogans from different and often competing social, cultural, economic and political realms. Vertovec (1998b) and Samad (2007) writing with regard to Bradford youth suggest these identity positions evolve in the face of exclusionary pressures from the state *and* from established 'community' as defiant young Muslim subjectivities. Others, also taking the case of Bradfordian youth pinpoint their experimenting with music as ways of expressing new identity positions in a climate of otherness prompted by the 'war on terror' (Hodgson 2013, Swedenburg 2010).

There are few studies (Desplat 2012, Meyer 2008) that show Muslims using spaces

or materials for other acts of worship or creating new spaces to practice additional forms of sociality that resembles faith or valorises additional tenets or conceptions of faith; where things are not just thought, but *felt* too (Hirschkind 2001, 2006). This entails paying closer attention to the interactions, associations and tensions inherent in everyday life of the city and how these might challenge the schematised plot lines of urban evolution popularized by the Chicago school way of studying communities in place (Tonkiss 2005, Amin 2012).

Beyond the focus on roots and routes, then, an attention to experience and subjectivity would allow for a reappraisal of the lifecycle or trajectory of Islam in new settings, where the experiences of next generations may be more than a linear evolution but also loop back and across time and space in "highly contextualised articulations of community available now and in the old neighbourhoods" (Garnet and Harris 2013: 8). In this vein, works that might add to the body of literature on Muslims in Britain could consider what happens when religion pours out of spaces, structures, peoples and symbols that Muslims are used to being represented though. That is why Muslims are visible after all; when religion spills out into the public sphere. Not only into spaces where it is sanctioned or in protests that take the form of book burnings, but also in the more banal moments of everyday urban life (Toguslu 2015).

Although some works appearing in the wake of the emergence of the figure of the Muslim can be read to represent agency in the form of resistance or response to disenchantment, this obscures the relations between these crucial moments and everyday life. There could be a new emphasis on how the conceptual boundaries of community, identity, citizenship are opened up or renegotiated or reproduced in the everyday moments of Muslim life. The contemporary settings in which 'old orders' (representational regimes) come into conflict with newly emerging orders, can be seen as moments in which a new 'contract' emerges as an "intersubjective space between two characters in a narrative" (Das 1989: 313).

Organisations/Institutions

Other studies point to the significance of Muslim settledness in Britain through uncovering associations and ways of organising established by them as a result of decades old settlement patterns. Cities with large concentrations of Muslims are containers of historical memory, which, then, facilitate a certain type of relationship to religion. For example, mosques established by migrants and at particular times have helped assert a political Muslim identity at the local level (Gale 2009) as well as lent themselves to state patronage.[23] For Eade, a veteran of studies on Bangladeshis in Tower Hamlets, mosques represent the emergence of new forms of identity (from secular, 'race', ethnicity to religion) and the institutionalisation of these (Eade 1996, 1997). While mosques and Muslim organisations could be considered as normative signifiers of Islam as a religion (Metcalf 1996) they also represent the struggles, divisions and diversities within specific ethnic communities; enabling us to understand who Muslims are and the kind of politics they get involved in (Keith 2013b). The superdiverse or the (g)local spaces of Muslim settlement also give way to new negotiations of gender and ethnic roles (Mohammad 2013, Gole 2013). Bhimji (2009), for example, describes prayer rooms in public spaces as sites and spaces of shared cultural exchange where differences largely ethnic and cultural 'fade'. These studies reveal new sites and, therefore, new dimensions to Muslim presence in public spheres. In the forthcoming chapters I seek to contribute in this vein.

Muslims lay claim to their neighbourhoods (Hopkins 2007, 2008), belong to these and enact their lives through them in a number of ways (Hopkins & Gale et al 2009). Hopkins' work is a simplistic strand that takes the local and, therefore, 'integrated' or embedded nature of young Muslim male lives in a Scottish city. Here, being Muslim inflects gendered and youth identities helping their protagonists to mark themselves and their neighbourhoods in contemporary cultural terms; similar to

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[23] It is widely cited that among the earliest mosques in Britain was the Shah Jalal mosque in Woking built by returning colonial administrators in the late 19th Century. The small structure built in the Mughal architectural style was meant to reflect the administrator's emotional attachment with India as well to as serve as a welcoming space for visiting Indian Muslims to gather.

what Back (1996) describes as 'neighbourhood nationalisms'. Hopkins registers global political events and national debates about Muslims as key elements these young men negotiate in their daily lives through assertions of belonging to their neighbourhoods. As Muslims his participants see no contradiction with living local lives that are also attuned to events in the broader Ummah as a global community of Muslims. These studies help to challenge the determinism of 'segregated communities' and 'between two cultures approach' by focusing differently on the nature and meaning of local connections and practices (McLoughlin 2013).

Gender/visibility

Where there have been deeper engagements with structures and symbols it is largely in relation to women and attempts to present alternative motivations for wearing the hijab – a poignant symbol of gendered Islam - and the cosmopolitan outlooks these denote of the wearers (Dwyer 1999, 2000, Tarlo & Moors 2013). For example, women uphold Islam as a marker of difference - moving beyond traditionally embedded social life worlds, yet not leaving behind their particularisms (Tarlo 2007, 2010, Gole 2006, Herding 2014). Gole (2006) thus argues that Muslim identity is in the process of "banalization" where Muslim expression and practices of the self as discovered in micro Islamic public spaces are distinct from western liberal notions of the self. These new readings of Islam also suggest new readings of modernity and the public sphere (Mahmood 2010, 2005, Gole 2013, 2010). The veil for Gole represents a dramatization of difference (Gole 2006:26) – in its styles and moments of wearing, the hijab enables one to blend into cosmopolitan urban landscapes, engage in public debate, consume, embrace values of individuation, secularism and reflect critically on the role and position of women in Islam – all in contrast to the image of the alienated or radicalised Muslim.

Reimagining the cultural politics of Muslims

A key feature of the literature surveyed above is that there is an over-emphasis on linguistic and political constructions of Muslim identity and 'community'. Subsequently the reality of life for Muslims has been in the shade of politics with less

historical awareness or attention to lived experiences. The reality of Muslims, which the census shows to be growing and increasingly diverse in terms of age, ethnicity and class is, however, more complex. At the same time there has emerged a growing body of work on new ethnicities and cultural hybridity that has helped re-cast ethnic minorities in less determined moulds of ethnicity and culture. Much of this was made possible by ethnographic studies that revealed the complexity, hybridity, mixture and interconnectivity that exist in real life situations and spaces of minority settlement in Britain (Alexander 1996, 2000, Back 1996). I have thus been drawn to ethnography as a method to map the vitality inherent in Muslim Birmingham.

As discussed in the previous chapter, conducting ethnographic research in parts of Birmingham that are marked by the presence of racialised outsiders including Muslims more recently, I have been attuned to the politics around and emerging from this presence as well as the pathologies generated and how they play into the Muslim question. We could also surmise that the *intensities* generated by the numbers, press reports and visibilities also combine to produce an atmosphere in which Muslims and the Muslim question is sensed. Asad (1993, 2000) noted how the emergence of a religious based self into the public sphere embodied in the Rushdie affair and similarly the French Hijab Affair in 1996 disrupted the clean divide between secular and religious and therefore public and private spheres. Moving forwards, then, disruptions to Britishness or multiculturalism presented by the Muslim question should be understood through more than discourses alone, but also through the affective, because the almost visceral nature of unease felt toward Muslims suggests a debarment from the public sphere that requires more than calls to liberal democratic principles of recognition, tolerance and pluralism alone (Brown 2009).

To gather more in relation to the affective dimensions of Muslim life in Britain would require attention to the repertoires present in less structured, everyday, cultural and social actions. Issues of theological significance, for example, remain unexplored in many of the works considered above – how piety infuses social, political and cultural actions. While Dwyer, Hopkins and Phillips uncover Muslims as a social category

their studies do not necessarily interrogate what is Muslim about actions of these social actors. Thus, the meanings they give to actions remain under explored.

Studies that do, often flirt with essentialism. For example, in attending to the religious dispositions of women wearing the hijab an appreciation of the racialised reality of Muslim life gets lost in celebrations of style (Tarlo 2007, 2010, Herding 2013). The hyper-visibility and assertiveness of Muslims in Britain, particularly the young and women, helps challenge certain stereotypes (Akhtar 2012) but it also suggests that all might be well beneath the colourful and variously fashionable vernaculars such as hijab or media technologies. While these Islamic artefacts (Herding 2013) may be liberatory and plug women into international fashion houses and solidarity with different ethnic fabrics, patterns and styles for wearing, they also become hyper-sexualised contemporary symbols of Muslimness. The figure of the Muslim thus oscillates between the exoticised and the pathologised. Very few literatures address this, for example Gole (2003) gets beneath the veil and discusses the notion of stigma and other sentiments of wearers. Similarly, there could be more said about Muslim men's appropriation of religion that helps disrupt the common idea of this leading to extremism as in the discourse of 'young, angry and Muslim'[24].

In addition to the key dimensions of Muslims mapped from the literature - that they are inside and outside, here and there, then and now – aspects of Muslim cultural production or the social and cultural significance of things symbolic of Muslims are also suggestive of new readings. If we take the settledness that exists in the form of the banality resulting from the unexceptional presence[25] of Muslims in urban European settings, expressed in the ways some young Muslims disassociate with mainstream identity politics (O'Toole & Gale 2010, Akhtar 2012), this suggests a desire to produce alternative social conventions around which solidarity can be built

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[24] A short film entitled: 'Young, angry and Muslim' was shown on Chanel 4 24 October 2005 popularising the narrative that Muslims living in deprived British cities were predisposed to fundamentalism.

[25] What struck me during the course of my fieldwork was the unremarkable feelings I encountered in Muslims, such as: "Why do you want to study this/us?", "there's nothing remarkable about what we do. We just trying to do what we think is the right thing...what everyone else is doing."

(Simone 2010). These in turn are expressed through different vernaculars[26]. They also point to the presence and popularity of less formal, discursive and social practices that carry the imprint of historical and geographical legacies of being a minority in the city (largely in their spatial enactment) while also being informed by newer sensibilities derived from a range of references; textual, embodied and performative.

Boubekeur (2007) talks about new types of 'Islamhood', which she characterises as the 'Islamic society of spectacle' (ISS) where militancy is replaced by novelty. In response to an Islamic identity that has been 'confiscated' by journalists, politicians and opinion leaders (2007: 77), she suggests it brings new Muslim voices into the public sphere not only concerned with things Islamic but also the common good. And this is pursued not necessarily through technology and new means associated with globalisation and technological development, but art and culture:

> The idea of meeting one's friends around the creation of a DVD or a painting or even a poem inspired by the Islamic cause becomes more seductive than that of mobilization through street demonstrations. (2007: 78)

Boubekeur suggests Muslim agency to be in total charge of this process of proclaiming an alternative Islamic identity in the face of misrepresentation and maligning of Muslims since 9/11. ISS develops and employs:

> …an Islamic culture of prestige whose codes need to be mastered—codes largely secularized and based on the aesthetic norms of the West, on its liberalism, and on its efficiency and competitive- ness (ibid: 79)

ISS is about appealing to the mainstream and mimicking the liberal and secular in order to gain a footing into it. Importantly it also involves questioning the logics of

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[26] Indeed in my fieldwork, I have discovered this as I spent time with Muslims doing social action outside mainstream politics or within publicly sanctioned institutions of faith. How Muslims validated alternative or unmarked spaces as spaces of Muslimness. How Muslim networks and infrastructures in the city that spawned into secular spheres that became saturated with Muslim ethics and aesthetics.

earlier attempts to achieve representation and recognition. It is about holding multiple identities and not just belonging to an Islamic community.

Similarly, Herding (2013) suggests the emergence of a 'cool' Muslim subculture, which she describes as 'conservative avant-garde'. It is conservative in the sense that it is informed by Islamic moral codes while being innovative through play with traditions. The result being a distinct new realm of religio-cultural artefacts, events and media outputs that speak the condition and aspirations of Muslim youth in contemporary European cities.

What these examples show is that while the material fact of Muslim life represented in symbols like mosques and infrastructures of 'community' and kinship capture the ritualistic and mechanical elements of Muslim life; it unfolds outside of these structures too, in conjunction with modes of technology, politics and media, creating possibilities for new social experiences of Muslimness.

Yet, much of the recent interest in Muslims relates them to macro level happennings and debates such as the 'war on terror' and the 'end of multiculturalism'. Subsequently, much of the literature deduces Muslim identity and 'community' out of relations between them as a homogenous group and majority society or discourses such as 'clash of civilisations', and even determines them out of their negotiations with the state for recognition of distinct needs. There are gaps in the literature that could bring into play different sites and resulting dialogues of encounter and exchange from less glamorous or obvious, sensational or spectacular moments and spaces.

Conclusion

In relation to the literatures mapped above, this study is positioned with those concerned with local and inter-Muslim commentaries in which attention is paid to inter-Muslim dealings as well as collectivities that are shaped by things Muslims do *within* as well as identify with *externally* (when Islam is taken as something *other*).

Recognising that practices, which bring people together also exclude others, it will pay attention to *how* encounters that construct Muslimness are structured. So, ordinary moments will have antecedents in time and space just as local happennings will be linked to global ones.

In a recent essay entitled 'Discovering Faith?' Michael Keith (2013b) alludes to this dynamic when discussing the evolution of faith-based politics among Bangladeshis of Tower Hamlets:

> ..faith based participatory politics in East London cannot be explained without reference to other times and other places. (229).

Here Keith is invoking an understanding of the complexities of contemporary urban political vernaculars in places of established minority ethnic settlement. He suggests we view these as criss-crossed by global and historical people and events that intersect with the local evolvement of minority communities to produce locally specific articulations of politics (in this case involving Bangladeshi Muslims in Tower Hamlets). These are the contours of faith based associational life in places with sizeable groups of believers. Rather than being caricatured in debates about multiculturalism, social cohesion and integration, Keith suggests that political aspirations are formed in everyday and informal spaces as well as within the racialised hierarchies of local politics.

In the case of Muslims in Britain, identity and collectivity are challenged by the normativity of liberal multiculturalism that seeks to work with hermetically sealed notions of culture and ethnicity. Muslimness is also frustrated by the biopolitical ambitions of the state to mark and manage bodies. In this study I will talk about Muslims' re-making of identity and 'community' in diasporic spaces that have been overlaid with meanings and uses of religion or inhabited and marked by Muslimness in different ways (i.e the burgeoning Muslim civil society sphere characterised my charities, 'community' radio and TV stations in Birmingham). These do not necessarily symbolise new structures or a new phenomena to be feared as in the

case of the Trojan Horse scandal this chapter opened with. Closer inspection reveals that newer groups of Muslims working with older ones can live and be in these spaces without one being folded into the other, resulting in generational clash or fundamentalism. In their emergence they add new layers that symbolise a distinct 'Muslim consciousness' (Meer 2010). They also produce new meanings that lay on top of rather than replace older versions. In the process Muslims address the impossibility of being British and Muslim (Sayyid 2009) arising from a political atmosphere that excludes them and offers no official recognition of being Muslim.

Assertions of Muslim identity, therefore, raise questions about national identity and belonging (Sayyid 2009) in ways similar to how ethnic minorities have historically unsettled what it has meant to be British (Anthias & Yuval-Davis 1996). Closure around what it means to belong to the nation is now similarly policed hard and through the use of extra-legal means targeting Muslims (Gilroy 2006, Kapoor 2013 et al). Silence on the Muslim question, then, is also about the denial of Muslim political agency and autonomy (Sayyid 2014). Discussing Muslims (Mahmood 2009) or indeed other single identity groups (Honig 2007) in the frames of their racialization or otherness *alone* limits possibilities for future political action and becoming; underscoring the importance of relationality.

Leaving aside the big questions of social and political context expressed in narratives of extremism, the move toward religiousised identity also implicates "the 'hearts and minds' of individuals, families and communities' (Alexander 2013: 5). With the existence of Muslims as the defining problem category of our times comes a transformation of many of the old agendas too (ibid). In the forthcoming chapters, then, I will try to place a stress on the transformative power of the figure of the Muslim and the Muslim question in European societies where Muslims have made the postcolonial metropolis their home. Against this background, Alsayyad (2002) calls for grounding analysis of Muslim life in common practices through a focus on 'borderlands', not as a fixed topographical site between two other fixed and opposing sites (such as nation, society) or a third place on the margins, but normal

spaces of Muslim life that have moved to the centre of the core (Alsayyad 2002: 27-28). In the next chapter I discuss one such place.

Chapter 3 – The Hubb

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the first phase of my fieldwork carried out within The Hubb - an 'alternative Muslim led arts space' – situated in Sparkbrook. As I mentioned in Chapter one, the area has at least a five decades long association with migration, which give it a distinct ethnic look and feel in many parts. I discuss below how this history shapes narratives about the area that play into a framework of multiculturalism that views ethnicity, culture and subsequently religion in reductive ways. Subsequently, collective life in the area, whether commercial such as represented in the 'Balti Triangle' as place of Asian cuisine, or ethnic and religious organisations are viewed in formal terms as spaces of 'community'.

This chapter brings an example of the Hubb as a space of informal Muslim 'community'. It its materiality – location and building – it echoes the racialised urban imaginary of the area, yet a close-up consideration of the events, art genres hosted there and people who move through to it, help make the Hubb an 'eventful space'. I discuss below how 'community' is generated at the Hubb as a result of the coming-together of various materials, histories, peoples and social practices, generating affects that contribute to create a space of critique of the existing multicultural order in the city, which views 'community' as something given or bounded by ethnic association.

I will draw on interviews with a range of people involved with setting up the Hubb as well as curating events there and also visitors to the space. I will also zone in on some of the art to comment on its affective qualities that reveal an iterative relationship to the area including traditions of migration to it as well as new trajectories toward an elsewhere linked to Muslim life outside the city.

While the Hubb represents a unique site of Muslim 'community' in the making, this is also mired by its relationships to forces outside that ultimately work to foreclose it

within its own terms. One of which was to control relations with funding bodies associated with the state or interests deemed inimical to the ethos of the Hubb's founders. I close this chapter with a discussion of the precarious nature of 'community' generated at the Hubb because of this.

Placing Muslims

The Hubb is an intimate gathering space for people interested in Muslim arts. It is based on the first floor of a run down terraced building that sits on a busy junction connecting a mix of streets with commercial, residential and industrial interests in the heart of Sparkbrook. This area is familiar to me as I was born and grew up here. I moved south to the suburbs with my family soon after finishing school. My daily journeys into the city centre for college and later work took me down the main A34 Stratford road, one of the main streets leading to the Hubb.

Figure 1 Ariel view of the Hubb

As mentioned in chapter one a key tradition attached to this locality is that of a geographical place defined by the settlement of immigrants who are predominantly South Asian. This tradition is cemented by the 'facts' of 'Asian community' symbolised in the character of the shopping streets, eastern themed street furniture

and places of Hindu, Sikh and Muslim worship (Dudrah 2002; Nasser 2005). The block of run down terraced properties in which the Hubb is housed sits on an interchange of roads that also mark one end of Birmingham's 'balti triangle'; something this area has been famous for since the 1980's when first generation immigrants, largely from Pakistan and Bangladesh, began what would grow into a celebrated restaurant trade as one consequence of being dispersed from the crumbling industrial economy in Birmingham (Ram et al 2002). The decades since have witnessed the 'balti' (which means 'bucket' in Urdu) become a significant feature of the city's multicultural offer, as restauranters (re)framed local white people's relationship to Indian cuisine through terms of their own (Sardar 2008). Symptomatic too of how race relations have evolved over this time, the area also has a 'Balti Association' that 'officially' represents the commercial and cultural interests in the area. Indeed the way the area is popularly addressed could be said to resemble a cultural quarter imagined in classical sociology as "part of an urban mosaic of ethnicised fragments.."(Keith 2005: 127).

In this chapter I will try to address how Muslims involved in cultural production at the Hubb handle the "burden of representation" (ibid) that arises from being located in Sparkbrook where the interface between minority ethnic communities and the rest of the city is managed by such 'community' organisations, politics that run along clan lines and the commodification of Asian cuisine and clothing; creating a local Asian identity that is compatible with UK multiculturalism that views culture and community in an ethnically bounded way. Sparkbrook, thus, offers a metaphor of 'community' as it has been conceptualized in race and ethnic studies in Britain, where groups have been homogenised on the basis of colour, ethnicity as well as social and cultural practices. Ethnic communities when viewed as culturally bounded entities with values, norms, appearances and behaviors have been positioned outside those of the nation or 'common good' in policy discourses of 'self-segregation' and 'parallel lives', for example (Alexander 1998, 2004, Amin 2002, McGhee 2003, Sayyid 2009). Further, infrastructures such as formal organisations associated with ethnic minorities have come to symbolise 'community' instituting their presence in neighbourhoods such that spaces of minority ethnic settlement

become represented as containers of difference (Alexander 1996, Alexander & Knowles 2005).

For Alleyne (2002) community when imagined in this way as 'self-evident' "lulls one into the trap of easy empiricism, or unreflective naturalism" (Alleyne 2002:622). It is not surprising, then, that Sparkbrook, being a racially marked part of the city, lends itself to generalisations about Muslims living there too. Popular wisdom holds that Muslims in the city, who were previously recognised as immigrants or Asians in Britain, are to be situated according to Chicago School logics where as a minority group they occupy specific spatial and class positions on the margins of cities and outside its public life (Abbas 2006, Jayaweera & Choudhury 2008). Such wisdom privileges the symbolic in which the "stuff" of Muslim life is linked to a conception of religion ordered around institutions, beliefs and rules rather than other modes of experience that could be associated with the broader life of cities. Examples of this are found in the limited work on Muslims in Birmingham that have been centred on institutions such as the mosque, religious figures and the enactment of rituals among Pakistanis and Mir-Puris as the dominant ethno-religious group in the city, referred to within the existing nomenclature of multiculturalism (Rex & Samad 1996, Joly 1987).

I was reminded of the limits of such categorising shortly after beginning my fieldwork when in May 2010 the 'Spycams affair' broke. This event revealed how a racialised urban imaginary would implicate residents of the area in national security policy concerned with the policing and governance of Muslims: Britain's contemporary folk devils. The event enfolded Sparkbrook into the so-called 'war on terror' through utilising technologies and regimes of surveillance and representation that fixed the area and its inhabitants as one of Muslim 'community'. It symbolised the persistence of fixed ideas of space and ethnicity in framing how we think about Muslim identities and Muslim 'community' in a contemporary 'superdiverse' British city (Hussain 2014)[27].

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[27] http://birmingham.cityofsanctuary.org

In this chapter I look beyond regular facts about Muslim presence in cities like Birmingham, recognising that cities across Europe are important sites of settlement and habitation for sizeable numbers of Muslims. In Britain, the overwhelming majority of Muslims reside in cities (Jivraj 2013). Yet in much of the policy and academic discourse the city is invariably taken as incidental in their lives. We know from literature on the new urbanism that life in contemporary cities is about much more than built forms and spatial organisations of people and structures. Rather, it involves global connections and interactions of people and things across cultures, times and spaces (Amin & Thrift 2002, Keith 2005). This would imply, then, that Muslim life in cities like Birmingham is projected through much more than bodies and symbols like mosques, minarets, immigrants and preachers alone. The social facts of Muslim presence in cities like Birmingham across times and modes of presence – from immigrants to second/third generations –present different surfaces of Muslim life, that are not entirely composed of materials symbolic of Muslims and Islam, but also of feelings, moods and affective dispositions generated through the day-to-day rituals of Muslim life.

Muslim Space

Yet this approach to thinking 'community' is lost in normative discussions about Muslims as simply a category of ethno-religious difference. Again, the limited temporal and spatial frames of urban ecology approaches suggest a linear trajectory of Muslim becoming; from a third world people arriving in the postcolonial metropolis with a folk religion that is, then, housed in spaces and institutions of religion viewed in functionalist terms. As I discussed in the previous chapter in my review of the literature on Muslims, works in anthropology have tended to focus on ritual practices that tend to express such a relationship, where as an adjunct to the presence of a faith group in the area, Muslim spaces have been seen as closed containers in which Islam 'lives', not as spaces where religion might be produced (Desplat 2012). Subsequently, conventional spaces of Islam, such as mosques point to an identity (Muslim) or become representative of a tradition (diaspora). They are

seen as expressing and representing another category of difference (Gale 2009).[28]

Mosques as the most emblematic form of Muslim space have also been key in helping enlist Muslims into a monolithic group identity. For example, the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), Britain's first officially recognized Muslim umbrella group has asserted its claims to representativeness as being built on the network of mosques that are its members. Mosques or other officially recognized spaces symbolizing Islam have become normative signifiers of the faith and representative of it in the public sphere too (Eade 2011).

This functionalist sense of Muslim space means it can be politicized through its adoption in the politics of identity surrounding Muslims, whether instinctively as the first place hate crime is directed at Muslims (i.e. mosque attacks) or as a first point of reference to think things relating to Muslims. The politics surrounding Muslim spaces and places of settlement has been of disproportionate focus in discussions of Muslims in Britain, where agency is only ascribed to Muslim spaces when it is problematic, for example, the role of mosques in fostering extremism. A prominent example is that of the Finsbury Park mosque, dubbed 'the suicide factory' (O'Neill & McGregory 2010), which was a suburban London mosque that came to the centre of discourse about extremism in Britain because of its associations with a 'radical cleric' Abu Hamza. Similarly in Birmingham, the Channel 4 Dispatches programme 'Undercover Mosque' penetrated a number of mosques in areas neighbouring Sparkbrook to reveal them as places in which 'extremism' was fermenting.

Such a focus bound to functionalist impressions of religion and space leaves out social practices not recognized as denoting religious commitment but, which their practitioners would claim to be generative of ethical dispositions that also lie at the heart of what it means to be Muslim. The urban rituals of Muslims are also not easily

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[28] In Birmingham many mosques are recognized for their allegiance to councilors or MP's who utilize congregations as bloc votes. The central mosque, the first purpose built mosque in the city was often dismissed by people I worked with, because key members of its committee were also senior councilors within the local Labour party. On the other end of the spectrum were mosques such as Green Lane that were Saudi inspired and apolitical.

recognized in the framework of liberal multiculturalism, which privileges reductive notions of faith and belief as markers of faith based difference. For Salvatore (2009), "in this perspective, religion is nothing more than the iteration of the ritual constitution of communities" (2009: 5). He proposes a more expanded notion that sees religion in the form of traditions as "bundled templates of social practice, transmitted, transformed and reflected upon by arguments and discourses across cultures and generations" (2009: 6).

As Cesari notes in the context of France: "The mosque not only expresses the presence of a local Muslim community, it also represents the evolution of Islam from the private to the public sphere" (Cesari 2005: 1018). However, Knowles (2013) in her study of Nigerian London suggests that hypervisible registrations of religious group's presence in cities, conceals more than it reveals. Through her investigation of the "microfabrics of urban superdiversity" she reveals how "visibility is important in alerting researchers and urban citizens that there is more to their city than at first appears" (Knowles 2013: 656).

In this chapter I explore the Hubb as an 'unofficial' religious space (Kong 2001). For people using it the Hubb enabled *different* enactments of their faith in terms of an expanded sense of religious tradition and breaking down barriers between ethnicities and denominations that have been hegemonic in understandings of Muslim Birmingham. As I will try to show through examples of time spent at the Hubb, for the people I worked with, what it meant to be Muslim and the kind of associational Muslim life or community they aspired to be part of, was not given in the already existing symbolry of Islam in the city. Rather than fixed or institutional spaces overtly recognizable as Muslim, or expressed in public sensibilities that determined how Muslims were represented and governed in the public sphere, this was something that was being worked at or worked out. I illustrate this below with ethnographic examples that show how the Hubb, while not resembling a conventional 'Muslim space' in the city, retains links with the history of Muslims in the city becoming a space that enabled its users to connect with more facets of their religion; beyond dogma and ethnic inference. Through a range of events and art genres it enabled people to connect with a broader conception of culture (than

coded in ethnicity), as well as enabling critique (through comedy, slam poetry and art-mashups) that did not result in the type of conflict depicted in popular accounts of intergenerational clash or fundamentalism.

Following Alexander et al (2007) who assert that: "rather than being an abstract category, 'community' is lived through embedded networks of individual, family and group histories, trajectories and experiences that belie dominant representations and discourses" (Alexander et al 2007: 788), I seek to pay attention to "the labour involved in creating and maintaining 'communities'" (Ahmed & Fortier 2003: 257). This implies thinking community as 'figured in bodies, but also in relations' (ibid: 254) and paying attention to the "physical and emotional labour, without which 'communities' would cease to exist" (ibid: 257).

The combination of the building, the area, bodies within it and the art that adorn it combine to create a sphere of critique to challenge the existing multicultural settlement and its accommodation of Muslims. Primarily this is achieved through art, which is seen by the producers and users of this space as a medium less controversial, tainted, and more accessible than community and identity politics. Similar to the role played by media in acting as an intermediary that helps fashion links between people, ideas and expressive forms (Meyers & Moors 2004), art at the Hubb, the artists and the events they create enabled a new *practice* of Muslim identity and community.

The Hubb: ontology of an alternative Muslim space

The Hubb's main entrance is a single doorway facing the Stratford road. The shutter is not always up but only when a public event is on or when the resident artist or volunteers are working inside. As one ascends the narrow and steep stairway leading into the space, there is an immediate feeling of separation from the clamour of the busy street behind. The cosmic colour and chemical smell of spray paint on the walls leading all the way up combine with the steepness and cheap carpet on the steps to make entering the space a tricky effort.

Figure 2 Stairway leading to the Hubb

At the top the space is entered through a door that requires little effort to open. The momentum one gathers walking up the steps, resisting yet taken in by the monotone colour and smell of spray can paint, leaves the visitor with a rush that the space quickly absorbs. Inside the Hubb things are more neat and orderly. It is a minimal space with just three walls dedicated to exhibiting art that rotates on no regular basis. There is an open space where around 60 fold-away IKEA chairs are put out when a speaker is being hosted. Ordinarily this area is left free for people to gather and mingle.

Inside the space one feels a sense of having transcended the local boundaries of belonging, which I discussed above and that are starkly visible in how the Stratford road is delineated according to ethnicity and length of settlement of the numerous ethnic groups in the area. The south Asians (largely Pakistani and few Bangladeshi) who started out at one end of the Stratford road near the city centre are now firmly established in larger and more permanent buildings further south along the road. While newcomers from various parts of Africa and the Middle East now occupy the shabby and more temporary buildings almost all owned by earlier waves of migrants including Irish and in the case of the Hubb, Yemeni.

The lease for the building in which the Hubb was located was taken over by the

Islamic Relief Agency (ISRA) in early 2009 following a move from nearby Balsall Heath into Sparkbrook to be nearer other infrastructures serving Muslims located along the busy Stratford road. Abdus Samad, a white convert to Islam was one of two middle-aged men who ran ISRA. The first two words in the charity's name prompted me to ask him about its link with Britain's best known Muslim charity, Islamic Relief, whose head was also chair of the government's Disasters Relief Committee based in London. Abdus Samad told me that I was not mistaken in assuming a connection between the two charities and quickly moved the conversation on after explaining their common origins back in the 1970's and the different visions that, then, separated them. While Islamic Relief had developed into a global organisation, Abdus Samad had decided to stay locally focused and to maintain a connection between the people who supported his charity and the projects they delivered overseas mainly in northern Pakistan and the Yemen.

Through his many and long established personal connections with early Muslim settlers in the city, Abdus Samad was able to obtain the building in which the Hubb was located at a below market level rent. He had moved to the area in the 1970s following a number of years doing relief work in northern areas of Pakistan where he also became a Muslim. Upon moving back to the UK in the early 1970s Abdus Samad moved to Norwich where he joined a community of 'white' Muslims with whom he assumed an affinity primarily on the basis of ethnicity. The Norwich Muslim Centre is renowned for its connections with white converts from around the world including the popular American Sufi Hamza Yusuf (Grewal 2014: 160), however, Abdus Samad found the Norwich Muslim community to be somewhat exclusionary:

> In Norwich the Muslims were so English that non-English people didn't fit in, you could say bourgeois, because they got all the past luggage with them. My past didn't exist it got wiped away from being in all these other places. Abdul Qadir *(the Shaykh)* had a policy of 'no ethnics' he called it. In his group he's got an inner circle and outer, in the inner you're one of the initiated if you're not you're no one.

Later in the 1970's Abdus Samad moved to Birmingham with a fellow convert to Islam and had stayed here since. He recounted one of his early connections in

Birmingham then:

> I used to come down here from Norwich to Edward Rd for zikr[29]. There was a
> Yemeni Zawayyi[30], but the Yemenis had stopped using it as a zawayyi, just for
> eating khaat and for watching telly. But Abdu Nour revived it. He sat here for
> a year or two and we used to come from Norwich to visit him for nights of
> zikr.

Figure 3 The Zawiyya on Edward Road established in 1942

Abdus Samad placed his presence in the city alongside Yemenis who were one of the

early groups of Muslim immigrants to Birmingham. He was also able to tell me how

these old connections remained with him in the present:

> When this (the Hubb) came up I knew the owners of the place and I said to
> Ali we could do an art gallery here. People wanted to pay seven thousand
> pounds a year just for the shop, a lot of the shops around here would cost
> you ten thousand, and they gave me the shop for two thousand a year. I
> know the owner you see and his older son. They are from the Yemen. I've
> known him from the 1970s. I started helping poor people from Yemen after
> the Gulf war when thousands of them were made homeless. The relatives

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[29] Translated into Arabic (and Urdu) this term means *to invoke* or *remember*. It is also used, as it is here, to
describe a collective session where individuals gather and spend time often-repeating utterances that invoke
God. The purpose sometimes is to enter into a trance-like state
[30] This term refers to a form of brotherhood among Sufis and is commonly associated with North Africa and Iran.
Zawiyya is also used to describe a physical space where such brotherhoods meet.

that they had here would come to me to help support them back in the
Yemen. So in return they let me rent this place cheaply.

The very physical fact of the Hubb – how it came about and who enabled it – speaks a different story to the narrative about community in this area. There is already a complex web of associations that involves a different history to that painted by immigrant housing settlement patterns. Instances of sociability among early Yemeni settlers and curious white Muslim converts come together in the contemporary moment to shape the ground on which new formations of Muslim identity and community would play out.

In its conception, then, the space revealed a fraught relationship to ethnicity, which opened up new questions and dialogues. It was not a space obviously occupied by a particular ethnic group or for commercial ethnic interests as was usual in this area. Abdus had acquired it for the purposes of his charity work and discovered that part of it could also be adopted by Ali - a local graffiti artist of international renown - who had been looking for somewhere to set up an arts space in the area. Ali had been offered the basement in the nearby Bordesley Centre, an imposing Victorian building that was formerly a school and now a large community centre acquired by local Yemenis but was looking for a space that was not linked with a 'community' organisation. The Hubb opened on 29 April 2010 with a line-up of speakers/artists from different ethnic backgrounds, genres and nationalities, projecting a polyvalent vision for its future.

Figure 4 Flyer publicising the opening of the Hubb

The Hubb – a *love* of place and possibility

It's not something you would normally see in Sparkbrook but it was good, it was an interesting experience I mean Ali, he brings quite a lot of diverse people there and it's very close to my house. I do tend to go there quite a lot, it's not the kind of Muslims that you would normally see in that end either…nowadays the majority of people that live around there are workers, factory workers so it's good, it's something different it's something that I wouldn't normally see. (Jalal, Sparkbrook resident & local activist)

Figure 5 Entrance to the Hubb

Ali the resident graffiti artist, whose image is silhouetted onto the wall next to the main entrance of the Hubb makes play of the etymology of the word Hubb. Its resonance in Arabic as denoting 'love' was juxtaposed with the vision of it as 'a centre from which things radiate'. The name of the space, therefore, was simultaneously rooted in a linguistic and cultural tradition that was foreign as well as a future trajectory that was familiar and to be shared by Muslims locally.

'Love' was expressed in nostalgia for the area. Ali, whose parents were immigrants from Bangladesh, had grown up in neighbouring Small Heath during the 1980's:

> I was born here and I know this area, this is home really. This is where my dad first kind of laid his foundations if you like and it was just exciting to have an opportunity to be in this area, before we came here we were looking at the Bordesley Centre; there's a space there that we could have rented but then I heard about ISRA and Abdus Samad and they were taking over this building and we thought wow location wise it's perfect, it's the heart of Sparkbrook as I said the place where I was born, it's the place that you know people know in the city as the place where Muslims live. It's in the city, it's close to the centre as well, Muslims live here, there's problems here, why not Sparkbrook? (Ali)

While growing up in the inner city, Ali's affinity toward street trends such as New York subway graffiti and graphic computer art that were bursting into popular

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culture fused with an affinity to Islam and the public. The hyper-visibility of Muslim or Asian youth in the public imaginary during the 1990's, which I charted in the previous chapter, rarely mentions the ordinary, everyday activities that were defining moments for Ali growing up during those years:

> I did a degree in multimedia graphics, which got me a job in the games industry. Very, very commercial you know…and in some ways it was exactly what I wanted to do but I got disillusioned with that. I was still kind of doing the graffiti on the side and I was still experimenting slowly at university when the transition came, when my graffiti started going towards… like I said 18, 19, 20 around that time I was dabbling in these values of… you know I wanted to communicate something more than just my name or my tag on a wall. (Ali)

Grafitti, as Keith (2005) notes is a "profoundly iterative form of urban expression" (ibid 2005: 151), which expresses a range of relationships between people and places beyond that of intrusive symbols sprayed onto urban surfaces as a form of 'visual pollution'. Rather, graffiti is implicated in assertions of a politics of difference, identity as well as racism. For Ali, it was a vehicle he imagined to enable ethicality, in both helping him transition from employing his artistic capabilities for corporate ends toward more public oriented ones:

> I started to dabble in things that were more meaningful and it was when I was working at the games company; I got disillusioned with that because I thought I'm using my artistic ability to make big bucks for these American companies, right, turning kids into zombies in front of their PS3s or PS2s or Dreamcast… do you remember Dreamcast? I worked in the age of the Dreamcast; that was the era just to give you an idea of when it was. And I actually left the games industry and I started to focus on being an artist and using the skill that I might have as an artist, as a designer, instead of designing games I started to think how can I use my art to call to something a bit higher, that has a bit of a purpose. (Ali)

Echoing Ali and Abdus's attachments with the area along with their ethical concerns, the Hubb was also conceived as a new centre of and for the 'community'. Although many visitors would ponder about the etymology of the word Hubb in Arabic, Ali was

always quick to follow up that it was also a play on the word 'hub' in the English language. In an area of long standing minority ethnic presence where the hold of established 'community' centres was perceived as becoming weaker, the Hubb through its resident artist and volunteers sought to establish Islam and Muslims as the new vernacular around which community could be built:

> The Hubb as a concept is not just about Muslims and being in the ghetto but it's about bringing alternative thought to a different audience. (Ali)

As I aim to show below, the *difference* Ali and people involved with the Hubb sought to bring was to the prevailing impression about Muslim 'community' in the area, and not for the Hubb to be an assumption or statement about Muslim presence in Sparkbrook. Ali, therefore, dismissed pressures to be folded into synchronic representations about Muslims:

> ..I wasn't doing the art after 9/11, it wasn't a reaction to that, I was doing it anyway, it just seemed that perhaps the interest was there so the media picked it up and suddenly I was doing like tons and tons of media... I've been approached to do certain things but I don't want to go down that road. I was asked recently on the radio can you speak about the police relationships with the Muslim community following the fact that it's ten years anniversary since the first terror arrests and they asked me and I said you know what, no. So many people will jump at it... that's the problem unfortunately in our community. Sometimes you might be dazzled by this and unfortunately our people are. They put themselves in positions and places where they end up doing a disservice to us ordinary Muslims.(Ali)

📷 Graffitti outside the Hubb Arts Centre in Sparkbrook, an area covered by Project Champion. Photograph: David Sillitoe David Sillitoe/David Sillitoe

Figure 6 Picture of the Hubb in the Guardian newspaper on 18/10/10

The above photo appeared in the Guardian newspaper around the time of the Spycams Affair. It captured spray painted CCTV cameras on the shutters of the Hubb, Ali had painted these in keeping with events in the area at the time. Following months of intense lobbying and protest the spycams debacle had ended with the cameras being taken down and a new atmosphere of mutual suspicion between the authorities and Birmingham's Muslims taking hold. As my fieldwork progressed I noticed the build up of resistance to state ambitions to govern and police the city's Muslims - long after 'Project Champion' (the official name for the camera scheme funded under the Prevent programme) had subsided. Subsequently, any government funding for local projects was viewed as clandestine and with suspicion.

Ali, therefore, was careful not to attach the Hubb with external funding that might lead to alienating potential followers and reducing the appeal of the place as 'authentic'. This authenticity was built on it being organic, underground and 'outside' norms of difference that were easily coopted by the state. The various events that brought different people into the Hubb connected different trajectories across time and space; the area, Islamic tradition and a future Muslim disposition. In

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doing so the Hubb challenged prevailing conceptions of Muslim community by bringing newness into the area and into a space that appropriated the past with nostalgic ideas of 'community' to give it authenticity through grit and glamour (art). I borrow the notion of authenticity from Sharon Zukin (2010) who writing about the emergence of a new wave of cultural producers and entrepreneurs in Harlem since the 1990's, suggested that it was crucial "to have a personal narrative that connects them with the origins of Harlem's black community, even if the story blurs some facts. This is how the new retail entrepreneurs confirm Harlem's authenticity, while using it to establish their own" (Zukin 2010: 85).[31]

Ali connected the Hubb's offerings with the cultural history of Sparkbrook to claim a role as an insider in that 'community' and, therefore, to become an authentic part of the area. Affect, Thrift (2004) suggests: "is the property of the active outcome of an encounter" (Thrift 2004: 62). At the Hubb affective capacity was also generated through a sense of *authenticity*. Affinity was affected through associations with place that were selectively appropriated to generate authenticity for the Hubb.

Ali utilized this tactic in his entree ahead of each public event. In a short impassioned speech before he introduced guests Ali would go into a romance for the local area evident in his high degree of situated knowledge about people who have lived there, their struggles, and the bonds formed over time as a result of him and other key members growing up or living in the area, spraying graffiti on local walls and interacting with the different layers of authority that bound these memories into a making of Sparkbrook. The following was a typical introduction performed by Ali ahead of a public event:

> Welcome everybody to the Hubb. Here we are on Stratford road in a corner of Sparkbrook of all places where you wouldn't expect to see art, because we believe in bringing art to all people, to the places that you don't expect to see art. We've had poets and artists from all over the world here; we'll continue to bring something a little different to this community. We want to be able to

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[31] "The idea of authenticity is important because it connects our individual yearning to root ourselves in a singular time and place to a cosmic grasp of larger social forces that remake our world from many small and often invisible actions. To speak of authenticity means that we are aware of a changing technology of power that erodes one landscape of meaning and feeling and replaces it with another." (Zukin 2008: 220)

reach out to people. The Hubb is you people. There's always been community centres, youth centres and other spaces like mosques, but surely it's time that we find alternative spaces. And where else could we have this space than in the heart of Sparkbrook, where most of us grew up, and where our parents laid their foundations, it's close to the city centre, people know that Muslims live here. (Ali)

In this Ali could also be considered to be claiming a right to the city[32], as Zukin suggests:

> To claim that a neighbourhood is authentic suggests that the group that makes the claim knows what to do with, how best to represent, its "authentic" character...their ability to represent the streets gives them a right to claim power over them". (Zukin 2008: 244)

As I will go on to suggest, the activism engaged in by people involved with the Hubb was non-normative in the sense that it eschewed involvement with political parties, working with the city council or getting involved in making identitarian claims. Bringing people together around art was to be the vehicle that provided a means to show up local 'community' leaders and organisations including the municipality for letting down the diversity and dynamism of the local area. By bringing together Muslims from across the city, from different ethnic groups and classes as well as small numbers of sympathetic non-Muslims, the space promised to be a 'real community' venue. It would be inclusive and multicultural in a real sense, because it refused to work on a narrow notion of Muslimhood based on denomination and ethnicity that characterized most Muslim spaces in the area. It also resisted sensationalized and over-hyped ideas about Muslims as victims or as a threat that was the refrain of many third sector Muslim organisations and the local authority respectively. The space thus promised a new form of solidarity

The Hubb – materially speaking

I live just outside Birmingham but have family quite close to the Hubb. I don't

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[32] "Claiming authenticity can suggest a right to the city, a human right, that is cultivated by longtime residence, use and habit". (2008: 244)

usually come to this area much though, but I received an email about this event from a friend. I'm interested in learning about Islamic history particularly in Europe and had heard positive things about previous events at The Hubb and that's what prompted me to come for the first time. The interior of the building itself is very impressive and the event went really well with an excellent oral and visual presentation by the speaker. I left my email address and hope I will receive updates on future events as I'm definitely interested in attending these. (Shahanara, visitor)

Figure 7 Inside the Hubb

The building, its location, how it was configured and the materials inside it gave off a particular atmospheric. Despite the colourful, fresh and new nature of art, the space was of little economic or material value. In fact the row of buildings in which the Hubb was housed were due to be demolished by the end of 2013 as part of a local government road-widening scheme. The value of the space was realised when it became inhabited; when various bodies, art and things came together and the ambience that was, then, generated. The resultant 'throwntogetherness' (Massey 2005) of bodies resulted in a 'situated multiplicity' that Amin (2008) aptly describes as the orchestrated coming together of various components – human and non-human - to generate a collective urban space and culture with its own social ethos.

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Religion operated here, but not in the universal sense that we are accustomed to knowing it vis-à-vis Muslims and Islam. There was none of the furniture, the stricture, and the embodied personalities one would associate with a religious space. There were no codes or ordinances that might prompt one to think they were in a ceremony. 'Rude boys' walked straight off the street, up the dimly lit stairway, onto the floor and immediately assumed a new manner, exchanging *salaams* – greetings – with others in a display of politeness that promised acceptance into the scene. An alternative conception of religion was in operation, therefore, informing how people rubbed-up against each other cautiously observing unwritten and unspoken etiquettes. Here, religion played out in a popular way. There was a distinct absence of organisation, no rules on the walls, or health and safety notices, no fire exit signs, no 'please don't lean against the glass' or 'please do not touch' signs. The space functioned according to a sort of *Nomos*.

The Hubb hinged on the iconography of a particular art form - graffiti. The distinct semantic and linguistic system associated with graffiti, particularly New York subway graffiti, was blended with Arabic script and contemporary political slogans to make it less obscure and accessible to anyone looking. This may be a response to criticisms about the place of graffiti art in Islam or just a transgressive act that seeks to alter the surrounding space (Tonkiss 2005). Either way, the juxtaposing of linguistic styles suggested it was not coming from faith alone, but was a hybrid formation.

Ali, the resident graffiti artist, recounted his journey from having a fragmented relationship to the city - painting walls around Sparkbrook and neighbouring Small Heath - to becoming established in the Hubb, which now housed his graffiti art:

> …the way I used to work is not the way I work now and I might have been one of those who would cut and paste a wall into its location. With little regard to how the environment fits to the mural. Now when I paint something I think the location is crucial; the colours around it, the environment it sits in to merge with that piece. Graffiti is not designed to complement that space. Graffiti was an act of rebellion so graffiti murals in any city were always an act of rebellion so were never designed to sit in harmony with their environment, it's actually saying the opposite. It's

designed to scream and say look at me now, it's supposed to shout, the aggression is part of graffiti. So therefore a lot of these murals they scream out at you and I started to become disillusioned even with my own work and how these murals were just in complete conflict with the space that they're sat in. So now what I try and do is… I want the murals that I paint to complement the space. (Ali)

For Ali a move from the street to a venue helped him to challenge impressions of graffiti as a problem or as a deviant act. It also challenged the idea that graffiti involved no communication or dialogue with its audiences. Laura Marks (2010) offers an ontology of the affective dispositions in Islamic art that is useful for understanding the affective qualities of art at the Hubb. Drawing on the Deleuzian model of enfoldment, Marks suggests that Islamic artworks are computed with three levels of understanding: infinity, information and image. Each of these representing a different layer that in turn relates to a virtual, code and actual world respectively. The art imagery carries within it a code that is enfolded infinity (in this case religion as the message of God). Or to put it the other way, infinity (representing God, religion) unfolds into code, which unfolds into image (or the vernacular of the art form) (Marks 2010: 14). Drawing on Marks' distinction between that which is *zahir* (surface) and *batin* (hidden, enfolded) in Arabic we can interpret the affect generated by art in the Hubb as it went beyond being a gallery type space to one that drew people into its making, and the making of their selves too.

This dialogue between the material and the social can also be expressed through how people chose to 'adopt' (Sennett 2010: 262) the space and use it to express something. Sennett's distinction between the different publics of politics encapsulated in the work of Arendt and Habermas and those more social, of which he is advocate is useful here for understanding the appeal of the Hubb. The space was located in a highly racialised part of the city. Its small scale and local nature made it easy for Abdus Samad and Ali to adopt it and for volunteers with no prior experience to have a go at doing something in there. Further, the style of sociability the Hubb cultivated was different to other Muslim public organisations. For example, the Hubb was off limits to people who minded free mixing of the sexes or who were aggressive or too dogmatic in their political stance. The Hubb not being a familiar

Muslim space, then, made it a counter image to the public impression of Muslims and Islam in the city**.**

Ali pointed to this when talking up the discursive qualities of his art. He discussed the Hubb in relation to what it was *not* and was positioned ambiguously in relation to. This symbolized the aspiration to be evolving and relevant while also encompassing of existing spheres of Muslim 'community':

> we're not really linked to any mosques. Maybe that's a good thing I don't know. We're not bothered, as long as Muslims come that's the main thing but mosques you could probably say in some ways work in isolation really which is fine you know they have a job to do which is to teach the religion to the people and our job is to inspire people through the arts and inspire them… inspired by our faith of Islam but it's different to the mosque. We don't really work with the mosque but we've got no problem you know if they bring over kids it'd be fine. Ultimately really this space could and should exist in a mosque, and it should be part of the mosque, it could be. Ultimately, that's the direction we should be going in that mosques can have art galleries, art workshops. Because that's what mosques are supposed to be; the hub. (Ali)

Here Ali stressed the Hubb's distinctiveness from institutional spaces of Islam in the city. But then he folded the cultural production synonymous with the Hubb into those same institutional spaces when suggesting how they could be transformed through the activities and meanings generated through social and cultural practices that were not *officially* Muslim. Such new Muslim acts were perceived as transformative rather than static as Muslim religious practices are often depicted. Ali pointed to the urban and cultural rituals generated by the Hubb as potential new ways of *making* Muslim spaces. So mosques could become more than just places people attended to perform religious rituals. People could frequent them through different temporal patterns and enact social and cultural practices that alter their feel. Bringing new materials and sounds into institutional Muslim spaces would alter the sensory environment experienced within them.

The Hubb, then, was to be known as an arts space in the broadest sense. Ali would encourage different genres and styles. During my time spent there I experienced a

Chinese calligraphy class, a second-generation South Asian Muslim stand-up comedian from New York, dub and spoken word poetry performed by well known artists such as Benjamin Zephaniah and Mark Gonzales alongside the current Birmingham Poem Laureate. There were regular exhibitions of unknown Muslim artists from around the UK as well as topical events such as a performance by London based Grime artist LowKey following the summer 2011 unrest as part of a tour to promote his album *'Soundtrack to the Struggle'*. There were also women only events. The objective was to broaden the idea of what Islam and Muslims were through an expanded range of expressive forms. The social and cultural rituals this range of activities generated at the Hubb would be revealing of a more complex notion of religion. The different layers of significance - God, the script, wider city and society, local community, concerns about the global Muslim ummah, satire - pointed to a conception of religion much broader than faith as represented in policy, politics and community studies.

'Community', therefore, emerged out of unlikely presumptions, for example, between art and Islam (given the contested place of art in Islam). It thus brought together people with no obvious connections (traditionalists and moderns, men and women, different denominations). The Hubb did not appear, therefore, as the obvious foundation for a 'community' in Sparkbrook based on a singular dimension of difference. It defied linear narratives that governed the way Muslim community was identified in the area, through coming together differently. It involved diverse sets of activities, sometimes experimental and also tactics to incorporate new trends of consumption out there sitting alongside established ethnic entrepreneurship that gave the area its distinct ethnic enclave feel. For example, the trend in cup cakes was co-opted and a stall set up at each event. Muslims at the Hubb never really claimed to espouse a more moral and religious position. They merely sought to be more inclusive and open minded about what could constitute Muslimness. Ali reflected on the common debates this issue prompted:

> I'm not bothered really to be honest. Don't really delve into the debates as such but we are mindful of having things that might isolate some Muslim audiences so we won't have like a nightclub gig in here, we'll have a certain

DJ in here and people will be like hang on that's a bit… not really you know… it's not our ethos, it's spiritual, it's about social change, so based on that if they hit our targets in terms of something we feel will not isolate our communities, all communities whether it's Muslim or non-Muslim, we don't have Islamic lectures in here simply because I don't want to isolate. We've been asked about using this space for Islamic lectures and circles and we don't want that so it's not a one sided thing, I don't want to isolate non-Muslims. If it flies around this town saying that The Hubb hasn't got weekly Islamic circles… that's fine, there's plenty of places for that that's the point. It's not about us shying away from that we're just like there's so many places for that that just doesn't fit our ethos. (Ali)

Ali's claims to authenticity were also a rhetorical address to 'community' that was reflexive (Warner 2002). Aaliya, a key behind the scenes person at the Hubb, conveyed similar sentiments in relation to the women's Slam poetry session she had organized:

We decided to do an 'I Slam' for women and we didn't want it to be an Islamic event, it was going to be creating a safe space for women just generally in the art field. And we got a really good vibe and the majority of our artists who performed were non-Muslims and the audience was very diverse so it reflected that, it wasn't just about being a Muslim event, it was open to all and there was a lot of demand for it from women from all backgrounds. (Aaliyah)

Although Aaliyah denied her *event* was Islamic in character she had no hesitation in describing the *space* as Muslim, attributing this to feelings and the affective qualities of the space:

Ajmal: So would you say it's a Muslim space?

Aaliya: I would say at the moment yeah it feels like it because I'm really comfortable there and the artwork is very Muslim but I don't think you should be apologetic about that because if a non-Muslim came they would still be like wow, this place is amazing and the art work, if something's written in Arabic there will be a transcript in English so people can relate to it. And also he's got like Martin Luther King and Gandhi in his artwork and that's relatable.

In contrast to existing discourses about racialised communities in Sparkbrook that gave way to frameworks of identity based around culture and difference, cultural

producers at the Hubb worked to assemble an alternative sense of belonging that invested Muslims with less powerlessness. Thus through Ali's graffiti art, sprayed in public places set against live performances of spoken word poetry, they sought to present religion as a social phenomena, in contrast to the normative idea of it being private. Much of the content of this cultural production – relating to Islamic tradition as well as contemporary social issues – further prompted an interaction that folded people into a pubic that they were trying to create at the Hubb. The vivid colours, archaic text and poetic prose were deliberately intended to address onlookers as well as Muslims who could recognise and, therefore, feel party to the tradition. Being a fusion the art also sought to address different generations and interpretations into a dialogue too. By spraying words from the Quran on one wall and political slogans on another, Ali addressed different traditions that separately focused on literalist and populist dimensions of the faith. This 'cross-referencing discourse' is an example of discourse being appropriated reflexively as opposed to being a single component that constructs a public; "since a public is understood to be an ongoing space of encounter for discourse" (Warner 2002: 62).

A different politics of difference

In the wake of the Spycams affair, the Hubb's management felt empowered and emboldened to pursue its vision. The state's racism exposed by the Spycams affair meant there was suspicion toward working with statutory agencies. In such a climate, discordant views found a home in the Hubb. It was okay to be overtly critical of the state as they were on the back-foot after Project Champion and this was a new space that offered a reprieve from the politics of terror and also the religion of dogma and ideology that was the object of policing locally. This also made for tense encounters and conversations *within* the Hubb. I experienced this first hand when a few weeks after the opening of the Hubb I was invited to an 'away day' to discuss the Hubb in relation to things going on around it including: what the space stood for, what it could do and how it should be funded. The meeting was attended by six others including Abdus Samad and Ali as co-convenors, Sajid and Kam who had experience working in the Arts across the south Asian scene, Karim who had worked

with a number of 'community' ventures across the city since leaving university in the mid 90's and another Muslim brother who worked with voluntary organisations bringing his professional experience as an architect, contacts with international NGO's and much more else including links with the city's shia Muslims.

A key question we deliberated over was "what is the Hubb?" Kam was quick to invite parallels with a large Sikh 'community' centre in the north of the city that had come to symbolise the prominence of that faith group in the area: *"Given the example of the Sikhs who run a large centre using Sikh values the Hubb needs to define if it will be run on Muslim values"*[33] he proclaimed. This drew immediate responses from the others present.

Karim who would become a key 'behind the scenes' person at the Hubb suggested that while the word 'community' often appeared in some of the preamble to the space, it would be misleading to imagine the Hubb as a 'community centre' in the sense of a space set aside for a particular group or set of people, most likely from the local area and ethnic group:

> The Hubb isn't like the Muhammad Ali centre in Lozells or the Bangladeshi Youth Forum in Small Heath, where all the predictable stuff, you know involving funding and political battles goes on. We're above that, that stuff has kept us tied to the way minority groups have done things and existed in Birmingham. (Karim)

There was a subconscious refusal to accept the 'arbitrary closure' that associations with the area could have on the space's identity. Like the 'necessary fiction' that Hall (2009) alludes to when talking about identity politics: Karim and the others were happy to invoke Sparkbrook but to not let it determine the project. They wanted to ensure the local area appeared in the Hubb's narrative but also wanted space left within this for other references too. Other ideas put forward were that it was a 'cultural meeting place', 'community meeting place', 'interfaith centre' underpinned by 'Islamic values' and was 'Muslim led'. These simultaneously distanced the Hubb

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[33] Quote taken from minutes of the away day sent to me on 11/08/10

from ethnic associations that were perceived as reductive and projected the space's relational attributes or aspirations that were derived from a faith based signifier.

The way these dynamics meshed together (often not always) revealed a sort of pragmatism that was political and emotional at the same time. A position toward being Muslim that displayed a critical awareness of how the politics of identity operated in the city, and an emotional awareness of its effects too through the imprint left on BME areas and people by the doings of government and identity politics.

These sentiments were part of a wider disenchantment with formal politics and the limited racial lens through which the area was viewed among people I encountered at the Hubb. The current predicament of Muslims and their neighbourhoods was viewed as the product of decades of institutional racism, political patronage and normalised by certain sections of Birmingham's black communities. Thus, political leaders, professional community groups and occasionally Muslim charities were criticised for helping to mainstream negative ideas about Muslims in the area through aligning themselves with funding regimes and political ambitions that ran counter to the concerns of ordinary people in the area. This representational quagmire was constantly in the background and occasionally even in the Hubb:

> It's usually when we've got a big event on and the place is packed that you're gonna see the odd councillor or community representative pop round to see what's going on. But you know they don't like it here, because they don't get their fame here. And then they see some ordinary brother or sister doing stuff and making things happen. They don't usually like that cus they're used to controlling the limelight. (Karim)

Muslims involved in organising events at the Hubb expressed such criticisms sometimes in lengthy political arguments and not just as opposing positions. Arguments almost always involved funding and challenges to politicians or 'social entrepreneurs' in relation to pathologies they pushed about the local area to maximise funding. In contrast cultural producers at the Hubb appropriated the local area, celebrating and claiming it in their quest for belonging.

In addition to Abdus Samad and Ali as patrons of the space, there was a regular flow of people who volunteered at the Hubb. These people were noticeable for their concern about the marginalised position of Muslims, the discrimination and racialization that meant they were excluded from the mainstream arts scene, from political representation or from opportunities in the mainstream economy.

For Aaliya, in her late twenties, the Hubb promised to be an alternative public sphere in which she could enact ethical concerns that she had developed growing up in a 'traditional' Muslim household and being active in campaigns to promote a voice for Muslim women like herself who often felt excluded from official Muslim circles and spaces. It presented a different vernacular to the threatening or dull and restrictive impression of Muslim community, as well as being a platform for networking and showcasing across difference. Both of these things – an alternative representation and diverse/alternative visions – were suggestive of an alternative Muslim disposition:

> The Hubb is a fusion of modern and historical Islam, not cultural, historical. Islam was all about arts, expression was through poetry, through architecture, through beautiful patterns and designs and symmetries and this is what The Hubb represents, what Islam used to be, so it's a revival of art. And it's a safe space, it's an open and inviting space. People can come and they know what to expect and they always take away some food for thought. I always feel that whatever events Ali does, he gives people something to take away with them, to be inspired by (Aaliya, event organiser)

Aaliya and others such as Jamila were locally active Muslim women who got involved to organise events. They were examples of Muslims I worked alongside who were socially active in single issue campaigns such as a young women's collective 'Hear My Voice', a government task group set up to engage young Muslims (YMAG) as well as with established Muslim organisations such as the Islamic Society of Britain (ISB) and Muslim charities.

Aaliyah was an outspoken member of the Young Muslims Advisory Group (YMAG) a national government taskforce set up after the London bombings in July 2005. She had evolved to become its chairperson. Aaliya lived in a part of Birmingham that was

less multicultural than Sparkbrook and was only used to visiting the area for shopping and eating out. Since the Hubb was set up she visited the area more regularly arranging to meet friends and making new friends there too. During my ethnography we met regularly, not always planned. Jamila was an active recruiter of volunteers for the Birmingham chapter of the Islamic Society of Britain (ISB). Both had extensive experience of activism in a range of different spheres, but were spurred on to help form the Hubb because they felt spaces of influence in formal politics or institutions of Islam were becoming restrictive, particularly if one espoused a critical attitude toward prevailing ways of doing things.

Muslims I worked with claimed they only felt like strangers when they were addressed as such, in discourses of a 'fifth column'. They resented this and resisted being singled out. This suggested that they did not want to be a public that came into being as a result of discourses such as Prevent that addressed them in negative terms. They wanted to set their own terms, which involved being public and not a privatised phenomena or a disciplined one. For Amin (2002) this type of "disruption of the racialised coding of British civic and public culture" (Amin 2002: 965) is an assertion of a counterpublic. Aaliya pointed to this in a comment about the alternative aspirations the Hubb helped her realize:

> I realised that we need to move beyond our circles and communicate and make an effort and do it more than we would like to. Because Islamophobia is on the rise..and I want to challenge it not see a rise in it. And unfortunately we don't have the power to do it in the media, I'm not media savvy so the other thing I can do is one-to-one. If I can make that impact within one person's life then maybe they'll remember the interaction they've had with me and say they're not all like that. What else can we do? A lot of Islam is spread through good character and manners. (Aaliyah)

While being critical of the politicking of so-called 'community leaders' and their neglect of a wider social justice agenda, some Hubb members also maintained a calculated engagement with such leaders. This is far removed from narratives we are used to hearing about Muslims at odds with the values of earlier generations or as disengaged from mainstream politics discussed in the previous chapter. Instead it

was about articulating and popularising what was *unsaid* by existing politicians and community leaders. Jalal, a local activist who had been at the forefront of efforts to get the Spy Cameras taken down, while critical of his local councillors still chose to work with them selectively on issues where he might enhance, impact or where he might be able to embarrass them for their inactivity.

> So here's an issue that you could roll with. You know what I mean? Now you could say look, our communities are being targeted, we are Muslims, we're being targeted this is a classic right wing hysteria you know racism feeding in, targeting Muslims all of the buzz words, key words and they flopped, they didn't do it. We had to go out there and expose it, and that's what I did: expose their incompetence as well as the injustice behind the scheme. (Jalal)

Thus, the Hubb generated new and alternative forms of belonging beyond what official multiculturalism or identity politics in the city promised. Alternative notions of what it meant to be public as well as possibilities for forming community were made possible. Salvatore & Eikelman (2004) advance a notion of the Muslim public sphere that is accommodating of people beyond those deemed articulate in the formal arts of politics, to include different interests including newer and gendered voices. They uncover Muslim publics in a range of guises as sites that foster debate and discussion as well as challenges to received wisdoms and religious authority. Below I will trace some of this through my fieldwork encounters.

Countering representations

The Hubb staged a number of confrontations between different traditions of BME life in the area; it was not straightforwardly a space for *younger* people, as spaces of innovation and transformation are often perceived as, in contrast to those of older generations who in the case of Muslims would be users of conventional spaces of religion[34] (Bayat 2007). The ontology of the space charted above shows otherwise. The forces that ordered this space were various. This was apparent in the structure

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[34] Such a view of contemporary Muslim life was popularized in the TV serial Citizen Khan; also based on Muslims in Sparkbrook.

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of feelings in people's statements and in the art produced and consumed at the Hubb. These included commitments to diversity, respect and resonance with the heritage of immigration and the struggles faced by earlier generations who came to the UK as immigrants, rather than rebuttals or dismissals of out-dated 'ethnic culture'. These feelings and emotions were expressed in banal ways, and in how different bodies – young and old - became affectively intertwined at the Hubb. The space produced social effects; it facilitated encounters that invoked different feelings. It enabled a certain kind of practice of mediation, through organising relations between exploring subjects via particular sensational forms that invoked feelings, thinking, reflection and believing. They involved creative interactions with the history and legacy of the area. Situated in the crumbling factories and large period houses of multi occupancy characteristic of Sparkbrook and of BME histories folded into these.

Figure 8 A mural painted by Ali around the corner from the Hubb

This was visible in the public art, an example being the mural above painted by Ali around the corner from the Hubb, which sought to present the trajectory of Muslim-becoming in the area and city. Adorning the perimeter fences of a crumbling metal works site, the right hand side captures immigration and the life of Muslims as workers in the city's metal industries of which a famous outlet was the Birmingham Small Arms (BSA) foundry about a mile southeast from here. Further right the mural signals the importance of 'Balti', which is supposed to signify an element of the

commodification of south Asian 'culture' in the area. The mural is sited in the heart of Birmingham's Balti Triangle, which now hosts a more mixed economy including new businesses catering for Muslim lifestyles and halal produce. The mural also features a sign displaying 'halal' next to 'cakes and 'juices', which represents the new aesthetic amidst the established ethnic entrepreneurship of the area. The left hand side of the mural registers more boldly the salience of Muslims in this area and city more widely, represented in the image of a mosque juxtaposed against the cityscape.

Through such art Ali sought to offer moments and tools for reflection on Muslims' presence across time and space. The reflection connected them and others from across the city and across generations and histories. These reflections registered feelings, words, thoughts and noises that transmit the tradition of black and Asian presence in the city. The aesthetics also give off a 'sense experience'. For Meyer (2008) sensational forms can also be applied to material religious objects that address and involve people. Following Amin (2008, 2015) too, for whom public or collective culture is about more than social interaction, this mural creates a cartography using images that make people's minds travel. It induces a sense experience that encapsulates the past in terms of arrival and struggle, and mixes it with innovation, now. The idea was to provoke thinking and a sense of who Muslims are. In doing so, the creators of this mural were espousing a new ethic, that sought to decouple the figure of the Muslim from structures that have determined it - politics of representation - to turn back to itself. Therefore, a new orientation for Muslims and for 'community' was envisioned.

The Hubb and art such as the above mural that were associated with it, represented Muslims negotiating this history and the area, remaking it in a way that drew elements of the past into an ethical imperative - ensuring connections with the old while creating space for the new. This playing into earlier histories of BME presence in the city helped create a 'patterned ground' (Amin 2008:12) that enabled people to situate themselves within contemporaneously:

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I think Asian communities have been too insular looking, but the war on terror has thrust us into the limelight, it's given us the opportunity to talk about things like Jihad and women in Islam. The fact that we've got places like the Hubb and in Sparkbrook, makes it safer for us to engage with these issues. (Aaliya)

The Hubb at once encapsulated and went beyond representations of Muslims. The area and the building certainly echoed the racialised urban imaginary of the area, but these were also the limit of this too. What went on inside took you beyond. The art played in and with these representations in order to resonate. It was firmly located in the experiences of different ethnic groups in the area and the history of diaspora, but it also pushed outward. The space mediated a relationship to being Muslim in the city; it made available a distinct experience that was long and rooted.

Authentic feelings

In anticipating a broadened domain of what might be considered political, Amin and Thrift (2013) highlight the importance of affective politics, where "politics is shot through with emotions" (2013: 157). Therefore, social action is not always about reason or deliberation alone but also feeling and caring; emotions that appeal to common instincts often seen as outside reasoned and considered political action and thought. The urban rituals precipitated by the Hubb pointed to an expanded sense of Muslimness that was inter-subjective playing out across gendered, generational, ethnicised and to some extent denominational sensibilities. The various trajectories of difference combined in this space to make it an 'eventful space' (Anderson 2006), where an alternative Muslim political position could be articulated about a hopeful future.

An example was the occasional attention given over to dramatic events involving Muslims around the world like humanitarian crises and war in Muslim countries. The wars in Gaza and Syria were key talking points during the time I was conducting my research. I was present at a meeting in August 2012 when volunteers at the Hubb met to discuss how they could express care and solidarity with Muslims in Gaza and Syria, but differently to the way most of the Muslim charity sector were doing this.

There was a unanimous feeling that awareness toward these issues should be pursued through aesthetics and not dogmatic arguments alone. Many volunteers felt that the charity sector was too ideological in its appeals making heavy use of Quranic and Prophetic traditions that either compelled people or put them off engaging with the issues in a broader way. All agreed that an element of seriousness and compulsion needed to be conveyed but that also a lighter touch should be employed. One event went ahead with carefully selected images and messages using multimedia technology to take off some of the edge. This way the sensorium and feelings were worked on (Hirshkind 2001) by the organisers in displays of suffering, alongside catchy and political spoken word performances and cup-cake sales to signal optimism. Alternative maps of being and affliction were thus generated of relational worlds across the Ummah. Religion is, after all, an affective formation (Amin & Thrift 2013: 173).

I became further interested in the affects that were generated by the combination of material and human interactions that went on inside the hub, and, therefore, how the space mediated a sense of Muslimness and Muslim 'community'. The minimal décor in the form of wooden floors and white-washed walls along with the layout emphasised modern tastes and aspirations. Fresh smells and bright lights distinguished the place from the numerous run down community organisation's buildings or the numerous mosques squeezed into terraced houses on streets throughout the area. These contributed to a sense of those places as unwelcoming and symbolising stasis. In contrast, sweet smells, bright lights and funkadelic music emphasised aspirations to be a different place and a concern to be universally welcoming:

> Aaliyah: I find it really refreshing when the audience is mixed because then it gives you a different conversation. And it also makes you feel proud of your heritage because so much work has been done and you're within that and it's reflecting good on you as well and it's breaking down barriers."

> Ajmal: So it feels empowering?

> Aaliyah: It is empowering because it's an example of success and of good work whereas normally we're smack bang in the middle of Prevent or there's police issues or genetic, hereditary diseases which is a common thing so it's always something negative…the thing is as a community I don't think we make enough strides and effort to communicate with the other community.

People espoused different considerations in how they decided to identify as Muslim. They did not intentionally opt-in to the politics of identity and representation, and were often indifferent to identifying with the hegemonic understanding of Muslim or the political rationality of Muslim 'community'. There was an indirect, un-communicated disavowal that was not expressed through intentions. At the same time Muslimness was cultivated not through appeals to dogma or allegiance to a set of ideas. Faith was addressed through different mediums. Aaliya revealed some of this when talking to me about the women's Slam Poetry event she had organised in early 2011:

> They were talking about women, relationships, loss… one woman did an excellent performance talking about hair. She has afro hair and she talked about how she styles it and how nobody liked it and she ignored everyone's opinion until her dad said… and you know it was really, there was a lot of humour and emotion. Some women talked about the spiritual side of their life so there was this one woman who talked about her love so you assume it's a man but then it turns out to be faith. (Aaliya)

The Hubb, thus, gave rise to new forms of religious experience that was inclusive to believers or people just curious about Islam. Although the space often changed in its configuration and in the art installations and events going on inside; the state of flux was not an open one. It was oriented and circumscribed by a Muslim ethos, which in itself was an expanded one, unlike the identitarian frames that predominated under the guise of faith identity, seen as restrictive, paternalistic and limiting.

An event in December 2011 brought the significance of this issue alive. The exhibition that night featured the work of a young architect who blended technology and metaphysics to create obscure paintings that were exhibited on the walls inside the Hubb. The exhibition was set against spoken word poetry performed by David Jay, a spoken word artist and friend of Ali's from London, who moved in and out of

the standing crowds, while a 'white hippy' sat playing a hang drum in the middle of the crowd.

Speaking to the poet afterward he remarked about how he had tried to draw from the people and atmosphere in the space that night and rattle off verses that reflected the scene there. He uttered words about different coloured bodies and belief in different destinies, cohabiting the same space and time. According to him, the mood of this shared moment of everyday multiculturalism did not exist *outside*; it was particular to here.

Speaking to others present that night it appeared the evening symbolised a state that signalled what kind of world they would like to live in and for some, which they were actually trying to make. A number of points stood out to me. First, the fluidity the space was felt to enable between different bodies and sensorium enabled people to transgress the bounded and complete sense of self that identity politics encased them in. Secondly, all the constituent elements and the feeling and sense of collective (transgressive) identity these prompted, revealed the importance of this space and the people behind it to bring it into being. The space engendered 'civic compassion' (Sennett 1996:370) by its hosting of intense civic bonds in a city where opportunities to come together outside state sanctioned practices of multiculturalism were felt as being repressed.

Figure 9 David Jay performing spoken word poetry alongside playing of the hang drum

The organisers of events brought together different strands and attitudes into an eventful space that captured people's attention. The space, then, triggered an alternative sense of Muslimhood; one that was outwardly oriented, optimistic and projected into the future. Not only was this embodied in the art and type of things that went on, but also the different way relations between genders, ages and ethnicities were organized and experienced. Through the circulation of feelings and emotions a new *object* came into being (Ahmed 2004). This was a combination of histories, peoples and styles and it oriented people who collectively composed and represented it. It felt different each time but was anchored in this place and there was a combination of existing and new people always in it. The churn or swirl of people and events kept the Hubb moving and becoming; giving a sense of identity and 'community' as a condition and not a static position.

In his drive to expand the popularity of the Hubb and horizons of Muslim art in the neighbourhood Ali often invited unknown artists from around the UK and world. On one occasion he hosted a London based artist to set up an installation of dystopian art that contrasted with the colourful and punchy messages of graffiti that were usually on display. That evening there was a large audience indicating that the place

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was taking off and becoming popular with new crowds. However, this installation failed to register or move much of the audience.

Speaking to people afterwards, I was told that:

> It didn't seem to sit right in the Hubb. Maybe it could in a post-modern art gallery somewhere in the Netherlands. (Anonymous guest)

> You now, there you would be expecting to see that kind of stuff and you get a brochure about where its come from that helps you understand and connect with it. Not in the Hubb, we don't expect that. Here we like stuff that resonates with who we are etc. after all that's why we come here to be with like-minded people right? Art galleries are where you meet strangers this is a place where you come to connect with yourself, with others and our heritage right? You know, I could appreciate that art, it was nice and some clever work gone into it, but it didn't give me the pleasure or the feeling (emotion) that I come to this place for. (Anonymous guest)

These sentiments were examples of how cultural producers from out of town were often received with mixed feelings, signalling the very local registers that were key to the Hubb. The 'tightness' of the space in terms of the network of organisers and volunteers who although seeking to expand notions of Muslim space and, therefore, basis for associational Muslim life in the area, also seemed to negate connections with unfamiliar vocabularies too. This would be a source of precariousness for the 'project' of the Hubb.

Figure 10 A sculpture of whirling dervish being created by a 23 year old female in the Hubb workshop

Closure

During the spring of 2014 the buildings adjoining the Hubb were demolished as part of the road widening scheme that hung over the space since its inception. The single building housing the Hubb was vacated awaiting its notice. Among the people I had been working with there, it was felt that the vision for the Hubb was never really fulfilled. The desire, however, remained as Ali began discussions with the Bordesley centre to take over its basement so that the Hubb could continue. This epitomised another dimension of what community was, as something desired (Ahmed & Fortier 2003: 257).

The relationship to things *outside* - particularly regimes of funding and governance - shaped the Hubb's existence in many ways it appeared. Not only had the 'alternative' position of the art and the space's ethos provided it with an edgy feel and reputation; it had also become its vulnerability. Being closed to working with many official agencies particularly in those guises that explicitly sought to penetrate Muslim 'community' (Prevent) meant the Hubb could not extend its appeal among more constituencies of supporters. The Local areas entrenchment in identity politics, and people's investments in formal political party machineries and their allegiances to mosques and subsequent denominations seemed too far entrenched to be swapped for a politics with no name, but which *felt* nice, at the Hubb.

If this determined some of the form of the space and the Hubb as initiative, then, the organisers did not regret this, however. If it meant they could not go mainstream and would remain something on the edge; that was fine. The edge condition was a melding point between the past and future; a space of interaction between ethnicities, denominations, ages and genders. It was not so much this border condition that was celebrated, however, but the intensities generated as a result of this edge or border condition. This intensity was fed by regular guests from other cities and around the world and different events, often with different art genres side by side. This added further texture and diversity to the atmosphere. Ali, therefore, hoped this might encourage and attract other small outfits to join him in raising

funding to open in another location. He and others present at the away day discussed earlier were not apologetic for this when I met them on the closing night of the Hubb. They claimed that having no links with the authorities meant people felt safe there. They could practice dissent and they could be with others they didn't know without feeling fear, in sharp contract to the multicultural settlement existing in the public sphere of the city.

Afterlives of the Hubb

A few months after the Hubb had closed, In November 2014 I caught up with Ali and a number of other 'Hubbsters'[35] at the Midland Arts Centre (MAC) in a leafy suburb of Birmingham. They had heard about the Hubb and wanted to collaborate somehow but Ali had always put it off because the Hubb was where he wanted to be really. Ali had always wanted to keep it local and not take the cultural products elsewhere but bring people to them. On this occasion Ali found himself collaborating with another Birmingham faith outfit that specialised in interfaith work on a short theatre performance that melded spoken word and graffiti art, a concept he felt he had pioneered through the Hubb.

The show featured mainly black and Asian youngsters in a story about nuances between different people that result in conflict. Difference was being alluded to here as rubbing into conflict. I immediately sensed the contrast between events at the Hubb where difference was celebrated and the subject of inquiry, experiment, mockery and critique. Here there were siloed representations of BME identity being folded into a multicultural settlement built up of pathologised and caricatured BME identities. Through a short theatre performance there was a playing out of stereotypes about Asian families and religious extremism and black families and drugs. Although the event's objective was to go beyond these stereotypes, it was doing this by replaying them. The multicultural drama played on stage was being folded into a narrative now sponsored by the governments Near Neighbours

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[35] They jokingly referred to each other as this.

programme in partnership with the city's most prominent interfaith organisation. I discussed with the Hubbsters how this seemed to be returning us to an old racial-scape, which Karim remarked was under the hegemony of "the white man's religion". This was an observation that there were no white people in the performance, as though only blacks have religion.

The play was dark, intense and gritty. Ali looked incredibly uneasy throughout. He had encouraged a few of us who had been involved in running the Hubb to come along and engage in the question and answer session to try challenge the underlying assumptions of the event. He conceded that since the Hubb had closed he had taken up offers to do this kind of work to keep himself and his work 'out there'. Ali's work seemed to have been folded into exoticised and state patronized work on religion, granting him a different form of recognition far removed from the experimental and transformative realm that had existed temporarily in a run-down building in the heart of Muslim Birmingham.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have drawn on the Hubb, as a space that materializes different ways in which Muslim identity and collectivity is *felt* and situated as practice. What binds people together, in this case Muslims, is not an assumed idea of culture derived from ethnicity, but an assemblage of social, cultural and affective practices that produce relations between different ethnicities, generations and collectivities in the same area and beyond. I have explored the role of graffiti art as part of this.

The resultant relationality - sutured through art, imagery, and spoken word playing on different visceral registers - transgresses the practices of identity politics with its interpersonal dealings or representational regimes that have been hegemonic in places like Sparkbrook. In everyday Muslim life in the area minority ethnic histories are folded with new affects, which in turn unfold new ways of relating to the area and, therefore, to being Muslim.

I have suggested that the range of affective practices associated with the Hubb combine to make it a counterpublic resonating with what Keith has argued:

> The unruly spaces of the city disrupt the cartography of the neatly mapped and segregated mosaic. Space simultaneously mediates creolisation and marks difference. Thus graffiti as a communicative technology is crucially implicated in an emergent spatial politics of entitlement and belonging within the city (Keith 2005: 151)

Yet this unofficial Musim space was also marked by precariousness, revealing the power of political and economic forces in the development of run down urban areas like Sparkbrrok. The Hubb too could not resist this, however, it folded into the narrative of established community organisations by seeking to set up again in the Bordesley centre; a Muslim linked space. In the next chapter I explore some of the dynamics that go on between old and new, established and emerging traditions of Muslims in the city through the example of an established Muslim community organisation located within the Bordesley Centre.

Chapter 4: Radio Muslims

Introduction

In the previous chapter I explored the ambiguous role that urban space plays in shaping the way Muslim identity and community are experienced in the city. I considered received ideas about Muslim inhabited space and how these are challenged by Muslims in their own making of 'alternative Muslim space'. Here, still in Sparkbrook, I explore Muslims in relation to infrastructures already existing in the guise of a Muslim community radio station – Unity FM. I arrived at Unity through connections made at the Hubb and once I began spending time there it became apparent how closely networked Unity was with a range of other infrastructures serving Muslim life in the area. In this chapter I consider how proximities with some of this infrastructure, such as the Bordesley centre in which Unity was housed as well as affinities with the local chapter of the Islamic Society of Britain (ISB), Unity's parent organisation, are significant in shaping the authority of Unity FM.

The issue of authority is a theme identified in the review of literature on Muslims in Britain specifically relating to how Islam is transmitted across generations and the 'play' that, then, ensues. As I have already argued, there is a noticeable trend in the literature on emerging generations of Muslims that discusses authority as something that it is stake in the time and space between older and newer generations. Unity promised to be an interesting yet complex site for exploring such dynamics. On the one hand being a media technology it has liberatory potential, which resonates in discussions about how Islam is transformed and transmitted by newer generations or in modern societies through the use of new communication technologies. Yet, in the case of Unity FM, its situatedness within local dynamics of place and history of Muslim organising in Britain also meant authority was rooted and, therefore, less easily 'played' with.

In this chapter, therefore, I chart some of the tensions I observed between old and new forces in Muslim Birmingham as they converged at Unity FM. I consider how

ethnicity and religion interact in the formation of established Muslim organisations such as the ISB and how this gets expressed in the articulation of 'community', which is mobilised in the narrative, workings and location of Unity FM to garner authority. I explore these dynamics through the case of Unity FM and its aspirations and styles of working as a (Muslim) 'community' radio station. I draw on interviews conducted with a range of volunteers and presenters in which I observed overlaps between divergent interests and how tradition and authority actually operated in complex non-linear ways. I will describe a range of intellectual arguments and styles played out over the airwaves that were simultaneously informed by local experiences and perceptions into which were folded-in other more youthful, political, critical and global references; to circulate views about what was *also* Islamic. This suggests that authority, which Unity sought to embody through acting as 'community' organisation was not solid or stable but was fluid.

I conclude by arguing that Unity FM represents a unique affective technology through which new forms of authority and community are *configured* rather than adopted linearly or usurped as assumed in much of the literature on Muslim organising in Britain. I suggest, therefore, that Unity promises to be a new urban capability amongst the city's Muslim infrastructure, because of its unique qualities - being both rooted in the ISB tradition of Muslim organising in the UK while also enabling innovation by virtue of its technological qualities and the diverse range of people it attracted to work there.

(Un)placing 'community'

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Ali, when looking for a space to host the Hubb had initially explored setting it up in the basement of the Bordesley Centre - an imposing Victorian building situated on the edge of Sparkbrook. It would probably still be in existence if he had, for the Bordesley centre was an established 'community' venue in the area with regular events taking place. Historically it has had a number of civic uses. It was originally a grammar school (the name of which

nobody I knew there could recall) before becoming the *Centre for Multicultural Education* in the 1980's. Since 2006 it has also been known as the Muath Centre when it was appropriated by a group of local Yeminis through the help of the local authority and European Union funding.

The Bordesley Centre has since become a prominent part of Muslim infrastructure in Birmingham. As well as hosting a permanent youth club used mainly by local Yemeni and Somali young men, a nursery and sports hall hired out regularly by different groups, it attracts people from all over the city. The centre's many rooms are regularly hired out for Muslim charity events, meetings and conferences as part of various statutory agency's (recently the Police) efforts to 'reach out' to minority communities, as well as public meetings. My most memorable being one attended by over 500 people to protest against the 'Spy cameras' in July 2010 and an equally large gathering to protest against the Trojan Horse scandal in May 2014; both of which I attended.

From the main road the building is hidden behind overgrown bushes and metal railings with a gated entrance that only locals seem to know about as a short cut to the main entrance. Otherwise visitors access the building through a large car park at the rear where in addition to the imposing main building there are a number of newly situated structures as short-let offices or out buildings intended for mixed-use purposes. Most are occupied by national Muslim charities as their satellite offices in the second city. The studios of Unity FM, which is what I was interested in, are situated in an annex on the first floor of the Bordesley Centre. There is no signposting to the studios, so visitors usually spend a few minutes wandering around the car park before making their way to the reception and being directed back outside to climb a steep metal staircase leading to a cramped and busy corridor with a number of rooms off of it. The noise of phones ringing and multiple conversations wafting from rooms at different ends of the corridor, blend with walls supporting colourful and glossy posters about Islamic talks, conferences and general events explicitly targeted at Muslims. This is unmistakably a Muslim organization.

I joined Unity as a volunteer in February 2011 after almost six months of networking through the Hubb with various people who had links with the radio station. One of those was Jamila who was currently in charge of enlisting volunteers. Jamila was a trusted confidant of Ali's at the Hubb. Her experience in networking across Muslim organisations in Birmingham was useful for publicizing events and for bringing people in as potential collaborators. Jamila was also active within the Birmingham chapter of the Islamic Society of Britain (ISB), whose links with Unity FM will be explored in this chapter. Jamila was, therefore, valued for her pragmatic advice on 'doing the right thing' given her knowledge and networks that meant she knew what kinds of messages and events went down well in Muslim Birmingham. Jamila and I met throughout 2010 primarily at the Hubb and she subsequently invited me to join Unity FM as a volunteer.

On entering the Unity FM studios my first impression was one of homeliness and informality. Scholars have written about this area in terms of community and kinship (Rex & Moore 1967, Moore 1998) and Unity FM seems to sit well here. Being housed in the Bordesley centre – an established 'community' venue - on the main Stratford road and in Sparkbrook, Unity FM is accessible and conveniently located where religious, social and political events involving Muslims are in regular occurrence. It also melded into the local landscape of race and ethnic relations through a symbolic location within sensibilities of 'community' (as discussed in the previous chapter); for example, the original design of the founders was to give the 'community' a resource to centre around. It is significant that the venture began in Ramadhan the month of fasting and a time when Muslims are already on a shared tempo. This was seen as an important opening on which to fix onto and play into; weaving the radio and its mission into a rhythm of Muslim life already in motion. Amidst this general and regular Muslim activity, Unity FM, therefore, derived a sense of recognition and authority from being a unique, lone, radio technology serving Muslim Birmingham.

Dr Aslam one of Unity's founders iterated to me the brief story of Unity's genesis:

> yes we did start off as Radio Ramadhan back in the mid 90's. It was me and
> Dr Varsani back then. We used to store the equipment in my garage at home

and bring it out every Ramadhan. We only had a temporary license you see, a monthly one, which they issue to community groups. (Dr Aslam)

And this had worked. Many people remember the radio station as 'Radio Ramadhan'. Throughout the year they expect certain programmes like fundraisers or charity appeals that are synonymous with the month of sacrifice, giving and over-consumption.

Figure 11 A billboard that appears in Birmingham each year during Ramadhan

In addition to investing in the idea of 'community', Unity's valorising of connections with Islamic practices such as Ramadhan helped create a sense of continuity with Islamic tradition and orthodoxy.[36] As mentioned above, the genesis of Unity was as 'Radio Ramadhan' and a key strapline in its publicity material was 'Radio for Ramdhan and beyond'. Importantly, as I will show below, this sense of continuity

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[36] Simone (1994) notes: "It is true that aspects of this process of relinkage portray themselves in an often anachronistic light. As such popular Western conceptions tend to impose a notion of fundamentalism – an idea the west is familiar with in terms of Christian evangelical movements and reactions to the sweeping theological changes taking place during the past twenty-five years. These conceptions confuse the Islamic method of relinking with traditional sources of authority (as the moral basis of progress) with the strict Protestant emphasis on the literal inerrancy of scripture." (Simone 1994: 7).

also provided volunteers with an opening to reach back into the tradition of Islam when seeking to legitimise their actions *against* the challenges of the management who were perceived to still be acting in the mould of a 1980's public Muslim organisation – and in doing so it enabled their projection of an alternative Muslim disposition.

The station's programming tried to reflect the debates, questions, issues and trends that were current in local Muslim life. These were all tempered by the ethos the station's founders and current management liked to pursue. Much symbolic capital was derived by Unity being a unique conduit to the local Muslim population. The logic employed in doing this was that of acting as a 'community' organisation and also apprehending different ethnic groups as constituencies of listeners in a similar fashion. This was also done in the interests of equity. Giving different groups their own space and recognition followed the politics of representation approach of liberal multiculturalism. This was a classical way of garnering authority (Lukes 1979: 633-676).

The management at Unity also saw it as answering to a bigger social need. Hence the pre-recorded playing of lectures or Islamic talks from around the world and involving internationally renowned speakers and events, specific language programmes targeted at different ethnic groups and separate women's programmes; linking up various strands of Muslims. It, therefore, differentiated itself from other radio offerings that might also appeal to the city's South Asian Muslims:

> Since the BBC stopped their religious programmes, you know, the devotional music they used to play in the mornings. Now its just Unity or some of the TV channels that we listen to. And you *know* you're listening or watching a Muslim programme. With the BBC it was like, sometimes I didn't know whether I was listening to Sikh or Hindu songs, cus they all just sounded the same, like the stuff you listen to back home, you know the hymms and the high-pitched string instruments and all that. (Jan)

Through seeking to be relevant to a broad constituency of believers - particularly emerging generations of Muslims - and in shrouding the content and etiquette 'on

air' in what they considered to be the legitimate Islamic or Muslim way, Unity also sought to practice the discourse of responsible, mainstream British Muslims. That is, Muslims integrated into the UK while remaining loyal to their faith. Again, this dual role, of being a minority group while trying to live in the mainstream life of the city was delivered through adopting a 'community group' approach:

> the temporary (community) license was good for us, it enabled us to set up and get known just like the other community groups around the city. It was something that answered the Muslim community's needs. There were lots of issues that we thought needed addressing in the community and there really was not any other entity, be it the council or our mosques or existing community organization that was doing this. We got a very good response, hence we ran every year for a decade, and then decided to apply for a permanent license and do this full time. We now address a bigger need and involve the community in this too." (Dr Aslam)

Listening to Dr Aslam as he situated Unity FM, felt as though it was natural or assumed that the only legitimate way to go public was under the guise of a community outfit. In further remarks aimed at bolstering the credentials of Unity FM, Dr Aslam would differentiate its 'community' legitimacy from that of pirate radio, which was also something associated with Black and minority ethnic communities in Birmingham. He drew on Unity FM's associations with statutory actors, local politicians and efforts to link with mainstream radio stations such as the BBC to draw a boundary of respectability between Unity and other similar 'black' community ventures. Therefore, the voices to be allowed on air were those that would be publicly acceptable. Muslims and religion that fitted within a secular frame that rationalised how these should be; disciplined Muslim voices.

'Unity in the Community'

Unity's envisioning of its activities in the mould of a 'community' group was encapsulated in its strapline – *Unity in the Community*. This dimension of Unity FM was recognised and exploited by statutory agencies and commercial sponsors, who regularly used Unity as part of their 'community consultations'. Much of the interest in radio as a technological medium has been in relation to it as a medium for two-way communication and interaction (Hilmes 2002; Strauss 1994). Radio as public

broadcasting is a pertinent example enabling citizen participation in public life through discussions, interviews and debates (Hartley 2000). However, while radio has been celebrated for its qualities as an innovative medium of community building (Tacchi 2003), this has been dampened since radio underwent a period of commercial takeover beginning in the 1950's such that it is popularly seen nowadays as primarily a medium of entertainment (Hilmes 2002: 1-20). Indeed, as Alexander and Kim (2013: 357) have noted radio technology has played a part in the transitioning of South Asian popular culture from underground to mainstream as well as helping establish Asian 'community' stations in the UK.

Radio has further significance in cities like Birmingham where the expressive cultures of BME communities find various media for their cultivation and transmission. Indeed, cities nurture this (Amin & Thrift 2002b) and places like Birmingham with their vast ethnic infrastructure seem to require it or make it possible. In Birmingham there is even negative history with pirate radio being implicated in spreading tensions between Black and Asian communities that culminated in the Lozells disturbances of 2005.

While some non-mainstream ethnic radio in Birmingham might have a temporary quality about it like Bass FM[37] or Radio Youthology[38] or even a precarious one like the numerous pirate radio stations mainly associated with the city's African Caribbean population, Unity FM was hinged on a sense of tradition that gave it a sense of permanency and legitimacy. Just like Radio XL or the BBC's West Midland's Asian Network were rooted in an established sense of South Asian musical traditions, similarly Unity FM rooted itself in a tradition of social action established by Muslim organisations such as the ISB.

In fact, Unity FM in its ethos resembled radio's early use as a 'household utility'. In its model of broadcasting it followed earlier ones that played to an imagined

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[37] http://bassfmuk.com http://punch-records.co.uk/the-bass-fm-collective/
[38] http://www.youthmediaagency.org.uk/directory/radio-youtholody-ulfah-arts-media/

community where listeners were provided with familiar sounds and stories that helped form narratives about the nation. Tacchi (2003) discusses how the affective qualities of radio and sound enable a linear transmission of traditions through nostalgia. Public broadcasting agencies like the BBC that maintains a democratic rather than commercial purpose is testimony to this. Similarly Unity FM played to ideas of 'community' that were resonant of this. I would like to consider in more detail how Unity, given its relative invisibility as a radiowave rather than concrete entity embodying Muslim infrastructure in the city, was able to command the interest of a diverse group of people including volunteers, young people, women and statutory agencies. I consider firstly how Unity relied on links with established Muslim organisations such as the ISB and how this shaped its authority.

Ethnicity and religion institutionalised

In seeking to make a place for themselves in British society, Muslim organisations such as ISB – the parent organization of Unity FM - have been pre-occupied with working out relationships that early Muslims - as immigrants - had with nurturing belonging in the UK. The ISB appeared to be a classic example of this. It is a national organization whose Birmingham chapter is headed up by a group of older second-generation professional South Asian Muslims. It is one of very few Muslim organisations active around the city doing things, which mosques or other entities deemed as officially Muslim or Islamic do not do. The ISB has no official offices in Birmingham and nobody with a full-time role to represent the organization. It relied, therefore, on people giving of their own time for a greater good and this tended to attract older, middle aged individuals or those in public sector careers who felt the ethos of public service to be largely unsatisfied in their day to day work.

The ISB also has an overlapping history with various earlier moments of Muslim organizing in Britain that many of the now middle aged members were a part of in their youth. For example, it flows on from Muslim organisations such as *Young Muslims*, founded in the mid 1980's as a successor to the *Islamic Youth Movement* (IYM) (early 1970's), which in turn formed out of relations with the *UK Islamic*

Mission (UKIM) in the 1960's (Gillat-Ray 1997, Ally 1981). These movements have also been seen as part of the Islamic revival which, (although generally associated with Muslim majority societies particularly postcolonial) have spawned networks across the world. Since the 1960's in Britain they have been instrumental in helping form crucial infrastructure such as after school clubs, madrasahs and women's refuges to assist the adaptation of Muslim immigrants to their local areas. These organisations are also seen as instrumental in facilitating the transmission of Islamic tradition. UKIM and the IYM have been noted for their links to the prominent revivalist movement Jamaat-e Islami originating in Pakistan (although formed in pre-partition India) under the leadership of the prominent Muslim scholar Abul-ala-Maududi during the first half of the twentieth century. Maududi's thought is widely considered to be a major source of inspiration for various groups with Islamic goals the world over. In Britain these include organisations such as the IYM, UKIM and YM who were concerned with the take up of 'traditional' or literal Islam among early migrants to the UK from South Asia and the Middle East (Lewis 1994).

These Muslim organisations in Britain have served largely Sunni Muslims, the majority sect in Britain. In terms of doctrinal leanings they should also be seen in a context of the broader revival of Islam that saw the emergence of new Islamic inspired movements around the world during the first half of the twentieth century, including the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (Eikelman & Piscatori 2004) as well as the International Institute of Islamic Thought in the USA (Grewal 2013). Movements such as these with links to postcolonial Muslim states are considered to have had a significant impact on Muslim minorities living in the West. Not only have they laid the bedrock for Muslim organsations to emerge, including across denomination (Hamid 2014)[39] but have also provided intellectual and theological orientation for future generations too (Ramadan 2000). The ISB, then, owing to its historical and global links has accumulated a semblance of authority that enabled it to draw in a range of people - evident in its sizeable volunteer base - and in the number of different activities and practices it supported around the city.

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[39] Sadek Hamid (2014) discusses the role played by ISB in providing a platform for Sufi inspired organisations to also emerge in Britain.

Furthermore, organisations such as ISB have been seen as an instrument to achieve social and in some cases political change. As I noted earlier, this is evident in the pubic role such organisations have been keen to play with statutory agencies and the government, positioning themselves as a conduit to the 'Muslim community' as well as representative of it in the public sphere. What was instrumental about ISB, as with other religious groups in the city, was its organised nature that enabled it to have an identifiable structure, identity and, therefore, to be recognised in the civic sphere. In this respect the ISB embodied the way Muslim organisations in the UK have evolved from an emphasis on *dawah* activities in, which they worked to preserve and raise awareness among Muslims of their religion in a non-Muslim environment, to promoting self-consciousness of Muslims as a distinct social group in a multicultural society, and carving out a space for Muslims within it. Most of the literature that covers early Muslim organisations in Britain discusses the objectives and operations of these in relation to the public sphere as one hostile to Muslims as newcomers (see Ansari 2003 for a good summary). Also noted is the role of Muslim organisations in helping to preserve the faith and 'identity' of early migrants in the context of a non-Muslim West. In terms of the evolution of Muslim organising, some organisations have dropped off and others emerged in relation to shifting social and political circumstances in an emerging British 'Muslim community' (see also Bano 2010: 26-53).

As also noted in the literature review, Muslim's relationship to ethnicity has been central in ordering and shaping the Islam of the migrant generations. This is most evident in the discussion of folk practices carried over from the homeland and the organisation of mosques and congregations along ethnic, clan and nationalist lines from South Asia. Ansari (2003) notes how early Muslim organisations became established along ethnic lines where Mosques emerged aligned firstly to ethnic groups and then split again within those along denominational lines (Ansari 2003: 359-60). Religious leaders coming from abroad had to contend with localised ethnic networks largely based around clans. Subsequently, the Islam that took root in Britain's postwar cities was one fragmented along ethnic lines. Different mosques

and organisations representing and belonging to certain ethnic groups were concerned more with social welfare issues facing newly arrived migrant communities rather than religion (see also (Lewis 1994, Dahya 1974).

The importance of Muslim organisations and the concomitant public visibility of Muslims in the public sphere since the 1990s is reflected in the proliferation of literatures addressing the supposed weakening and even conscious disavowal of ethnicity in favor of identification with religion among young urban Muslims (Vertovec & Peach 1997, Eade 1994, Jacobson 1998). In the case of young men particularly, the literature suggests this to be an assertive, definite and conscious position that characterises how they feel about belonging and non-belonging to faith, nation and community (Soysal 1997, Gillat-Ray 1997).

The relation to ethnicity encapsulated in the notion of 'community' at Unity FM appeared to me complicated, and in the remainder of this chapter I seek to trace this particularly as it was negotiated by newer generations of Muslims for whom it is often assumed that growing up in a post-Rushdie and September 11 world has meant identification with religion is easier done. The straightforward adoption of religion in place of ethnicity or in contradistinction to ethnicity that has been the preoccupation of literature discussed in chapter two on the emergence of Muslim identities among racialised Asians in the UK, did not resonate in my research. At Unity I became aware of how this religious outfit was rooted in established sensibilities of ethnic 'community' organisations in addition to being run exclusively by South Asians. My encounters with young and newer generations of Muslims volunteering at Unity revealed them to be reconciling two forces – the need to experience personal autonomy (against the hold of muslim organisations that worked along the lines of ethnicised 'community' organisations in the city) and to experience religious integrity. In this context emerging generations of Muslims could be said to 'interrogate' the world (Simone 1994: 116, 2010) rather than straightforwardly inhabit spaces of organised religion. Therefore, I will suggest that Unity be viewed in a broader sense that captures the complex interplay of technology, age, gender, history, ethnicity and place.

Splintered Muslim authority

Eikelman & Piscatori (2004 [1997]) discuss the emergence of disparate sites of Islamic practice and the involvement of individuals beyond the figures of the scholar or Imam and including ordinary members of society in terms of 'objectification' (Eikelman & Piscatori 2004: 37-45) where heightened Muslim consciousness is affected by global, national and local developments that bring about a reinterpretation of religious doctrine and practices. The fact that 9/11 and subsequent spectacular events involving Islam and Muslims have prompted much soul searching *among* Muslims as well as *about* Muslims the world over is a recent case in point (Safi 2003, Modood & Ahmad 2007). Others have discussed how boundaries that preserve the hold of particular interpretations or 'authenticity' are broken down by the transnational flow of new influences resulting in 'mediated community' characterised by syncretism (Mandaville 2001; 2007).

There is also a tendency to think about heightened Muslim consciousness or the proliferation of sites of Islamic or Muslim authority as indicating individuated forms of religiosity where "authority is to an ever-increasing extent purposefully mediated by the individual" (Volpi & Turner 2007: 13). A noticeable trend in the literature on Muslims (discussed earlier) is the tendency to present Muslim agency through the prism of individuation. For example, historically in the UK the urban condition of Muslims has been assumed to be one of existing in the vacuum of 'between two cultures' (Anwar 1998, 2008, Gillat-Ray 1997) and faith polarized by denominational and sectarian histories (Lewis 1994), suggestive of Muslims being *caught* between the poles of tradition and modernity (Haj 2009: 1-12). For McDonald (2006) the increasing individualisation of religion is attributed to new horizontal methods of knowledge-sharing and a decline in the authority of the *ulema* (formal scholars). In the individuation thesis, then, the individual is positioned as self-reflective in a climate of 'de-traditionalisation' or the loosening or breaking of ties with preceding eras. This involves a shift of authority from 'without' to 'within' where "individual subjects are themselves called upon to exercise authority" (Heelas 1996: 2).

More recently, where Islam has been pitted as opposed to liberal democratic values such as free speech or gender equality, there has been active debate among Muslims in which sacred authority or opinions relating to the permissibility of certain acts are interpreted and re-interpreted anew (Sardar 2012). Hence we come to hear about the demarcation between good and bad Muslims or progressive versus traditionalists (Safi 2003). In all of this the hold of traditional or literal influences are considered to be eroding as people adopt new positions in response to their faith being 'hijacked' (Ahmed 2003) or in light of the need to interpret certain tenets of Islam to make sense in new contexts, for example: Muslims living in the west (Ramadhan 2004). The vexed atmosphere of the 'war on terror' and the hyper visibility of Muslims and Islam has created a 'crisis of authority' for young (American) Muslims against which they reach out across history and space to carve out an alternative 'moral geography' too (Grewal 2014). Even governments through the use of international aid, development agencies and think tanks have sought to transform "Islam from within" (Mahmood 2006, Massad 2015) or through cultural diplomacy using hip-hop influenced nasheeds to spread messages that might sway young impressionable Muslims away from extremist narratives circulating in the banlieues and ghettos of European cities (Aidi 2014).

All this points to how Islam is up for grabs, a tradition in which Muslim identity and 'community' are constantly being negotiated and fashioned anew. Salvatore (2004), for example, proposes the importance of a more positive notion of tradition as well as complex conceptualisations of the public sphere, particularly in relation to how Muslims raise demands for public representation. This is in contrast to literatures that have addressed Muslim's arrival in liberal democratic countries of Europe as resulting in 'drastic changes' in Muslim thought and practice (Salvatore 2004: 1022). Among these are the common notions of 'Euro-Islam' associated with Bassam Tibi and 'plural Islam' associated with Olivier Roy and Aziz Al-Azmeh (Meer 2013, Al-Azmeh 2007, Tibi 2010). According to Salvatore these 'overestimate the fluidity of the relation between tradition and social action' (2004: 1022). The excessive play in shaping of new identities these posit is because they imagine traditions to undergo erosion or fragmentation in new post-modern contexts to fit with new types of

identity claims making prevalent or appropriate to the public sphere. It is valuable here to acknowledge Asad's analysis of the discursive nature of religion in the modern public sphere characterised by mass media, technology and the dispersal of authority where: "traditional notions of the self, community and authority are not collapsed into modern models of the personal responsibility or the subject enshrined in law or through loyalty to the nation" (Asad 2003: 205-56).

In this sense, Unity FM was an example of the proliferation of new media technologies and popular Islamic resources such as pamphlets, newsletters and recorded sermons that have led to a fragmentation of political and religious authority in Muslim and non-Muslim societies around the world (Anderson 2003, Eikelman & Anderson 1997, Eikelman & Piscatori [2004] 1996]). As Eikelman and Piscatori (2004 [1996]) suggest, new communication technologies play a major role in the questioning and displacing of long taken for granted Islamic ideas and practices. While Unity made use of very local materials and technologies to institute and to re-site boundaries, behind these, however, there remained a concern with preserving authenticity and representation for Islam and Muslims. Below I will suggest that while these objectives were easy to maintain within the symbolic boundary of 'community organisation', they were open to much more negotiation over the airwaves. Further, I will propose that the activity of locally 'active' Muslims and the availability of a media technology like Unity FM combined to produce a unique site where Islamic ideas and also local politics were fashioned anew.

Forms of authority – the management

> I came in the other day and there was X, Y and Z here, sitting there with their feet up on the couches eating pizza. There was boxes and cans lying around the place. I mean what do they think the place is? We're supposed to be a professional radio station, people listen to us all around the world, we were the first Muslim radio station. You wouldn't think it if you walked in here. Last week I had a TV channel who wanted to come here and meet me. I couldn't bring them here; I had to meet them elsewhere. That's not good, we need to be projecting a professional impression, and instead this place is like a shit dump. (Faz, Unity FM Programming Manager, November 2011)

This was Faz on the first occasion I had a chance to converse with him. We had exchanged salaams a number of times when passing in the corridor at Unity's studios when I was there to do my Friday night drive time show. Faz had recently taken over as programme manager and was keen to stress his management skills that he was proud to claim were transferred from his day job as an area manger for a multinational firm. He had also worked at the BBC previously. That experience of working in mainstream media, combined with the disillusionment of it being within a corporation many Muslims considered to be biased against them, spurred him to want to 'do something for the community' through Unity FM.

This outpouring of his was typical of the general style of management at Unity FM. It captured the tone of the radio station's concern with preserving respectability and projecting its authority. The authority of the management rested on it invoking a moral order, which was partly earned through its links to the ISB and their claims to represent the trajectory of socially mobile Muslims 'at home' in Britain. The ISB having been around for at least two decades (in different guises) and being spread across the UK had developed contacts in numerous spheres (education, health, businesses, charities, politics, Islamic institutes overseas) that strengthened its claims to representativness and concurrently its authority. Unity made use of ISB's national support base/reach to build its content and link its offer with an idea of mainstream Islam in the UK. This was apparent in the *'not beholden to anything but itself"* (Simone 1994: 155) type attitude apparent among the senior members of Unity FM. As a consequence, Unity's management came across as so sure of its mission being an extension of ISB's to uphold Islam; it saw Islam as part of itself.

Unity's only allegiance seemed to be to the religion – the internal protocols the organisation functioned through were easily conducted according to principles of Islam that many people would be familiar or comfortable with – people addressed each other as 'brother' or 'sister', all activities stopped at prayer times, volunteers and visitors were only allowed in the building for the duration of their show to prevent people loitering, flirting or gossiping. Only people involved with Unity were given the door code to enter the studio, which further helped 'control' the

environment. The organisation made use if its own resources, ideas and people. It had little or nothing to do with people outside of its circle, and therefore, was not accountable to anything outside of itself or to any sense of an alternative. Faz, although only working at Unity part time was an instance too of a local person embedded in an external order - of the ISB - that afforded him authority.

Before I discuss what this means in the context of Unity FM, I would like to illuminate some of the significance of this preceding discussion in relation to an instance when I was invited to be involved in helping to organize the 2011 Islam Awareness Week (IAW) in Birmingham. This event revealed tensions between forms of authority embodied within older generations associated with the ISB and younger people who felt their needs were not being met. This example was a precursor to similar dynamics I would later experience at Unity FM, which I discuss in more detail in the final part of the chapter.

The IAW was probably the only consistent annual civic-type event on the Birmingham Muslim calendar apart from the Local Authority supported (but now dwindling) Eid Mela, which was a festival style event as part of the calendar of events celebrating the cultural diversity of the city. Organising the IAW was part of Jamila's larger role within the Birmingham chapter of the Islamic Society of Britain (ISB). I later realized that this was Jamila's way of assessing people's commitment before allowing them to become volunteers at Unity FM. 2011 was the twentieth anniversary of ISB and Jamila was seeking to do something different with the IAW. Hence, she had been busy networking with various Muslims around the city to try broaden that year's offer. Ali and others I had worked with at the Hubb had become involved in IAW 2011 expecting to shape the event. Ambitiously, they imagined they might release it from the hold of 'the ISB way of doing things'. They suggested ways of creating dialogues on a number of locally significant issues like Police and Muslim relations and linking Muslims to art and other technologies to explore expressions of the Muslim self. Those suggestions went unheeded; one in particular - a friendly boxing match between local Muslim youngsters and members of the local Police -

was dismissed as outright ridiculous by the older brothers who had been leaders of the ISB Birmingham since its inception.

As it turned out, and to the disappointment of many I spoke with during the week, the IAW 2011 ended up being a predictable mélange of talks about the hijab, Islamophobia and Muslim family. The only deviation from this staple of Muslim topics Jamila could arrange was on 'Islamic garden and healing foods' and 'Islamic astronomy', as well as a little attended discussion entitled ' *why we should defend multiculturalism*' held at the Hubb on the Sunday afternoon close of IAW. In my conversations with Jamila after the IAW had subsided I learnt how despite ISB's varied activities around the city – including a Muslim Scouts group, Unity FM, the local City Circle - the organisation was widely perceived by Muslims in Birmingham as rooted in ways of doing things that were historically specific to Muslim organizations setup by, and to serve the needs of earlier, largely migrant Muslims. Here I detected intergenerational differences at play between the desires and aspirations of new volunteers Jamila had drafted in, and the older group of Muslim brothers associated with the ISB.

The disquiet that people expressed about IAW 2011, therefore, could be traced to the event's links with the ISB. The Islam Awareness Week in Birmingham was perceived as an example of the ISB operating in the classic mould of a national level Muslim Organisation where the objective was to remind Muslims about their faith while simultaneously engaging wider society with Islam (as the slogan suggests) and in turn Muslims with wider society. There was no room for much outside this, as reflected in the events that ultimately made it into the IAW schedule.

Naim, a senior member of the Birmingham ISB and who had day-to-day responsibility for overseeing things at Unity FM, was sitting in on discussions at one particular IAW planning meeting. He later remarked to me that these were issues the ISB was seeking to influence more generally, but that the 'lead brothers' felt it to be too risky a deviation from the historically established objectives of the IAW event. He suggested that Unity FM was a much more likely home for such action among

emerging generations of Muslims in the city particularly of university-going age. This represented a generational shift. He qualified this point by suggesting that following the heightened interest in Islamism since the 1990's, the role of traditional Muslim organisations in British Muslim life had become rather mute, only to be replaced by alternative centres of influence such as student Islamic Societies or protest groups like Al Muhajiroun or Hizb ut Tahrir. As Song (2012) reveals in the case of Student Islamic Societies, these are spaces marked as Muslim that lend themselves to a different range of sentiments and practices beyond what dominant perceptions[40] of them may suggest. Naim seemed to be echoing a perception common among many 'elders' about the shifting sphere of influence within Muslim communities since the 1990's; one where Islam has experienced a de-institutionalisation in which the authority of formal religious leaders has weakened. Gole (2002) describes this as a decisive shift where meanings are increasingly constructed by political actors and cultural movements rather than religious institutions.

Many of the volunteers I worked with on the IAW felt that the ISB as sponsors of the event failed to authorize a more inclusive experience. The bond with earlier Muslim organisations through affiliation and continuation of things of concern around origin and authenticity; provided a guarantee to ISB's authority that only really served to legitimise the event in the official multicultural public sphere. The authority the ISB practiced was not one of fear that leads to dominance as the concept has evolved in political theory (Arendt 1956) or that many have associated with certain mosques, Imams or tareeqas[41] in the city; but of invoking a higher moral order to help nurture their subjects toward a 'British Muslim' sensibility. For example, there was a tendency to root aspects of behaviour in Islamic principles and respect for elders who were educated and 'integrated' in mainstream society through their

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[40] In January 2010 the University College London Council set up an independent inquiry in response to claims that an undergraduate student and member of the UCL Student Islamic Society had been implicated in a 'failed terror attack' on 25December 2009. The inquiry investigated whether the ISOC had a part to play in the radicalization of the student. http://www.ucl.ac.uk/caldicott-enquiry/caldicottreport.pdf

[41] see Werbner (2003) for an anthropological account of how a Sufi 'cult' movement is transposed from Pakistan to Birmingham centered around the charismatic authority of Zindapir as a saintly figure; also Geaves (1996) for a similar account of a Sufi oriented movement that emerged in a different part of Birmingham's inner city but still amongst the Mir Puri community, and (Joly 1987) for a more general mapping of Muslim organisations in Birmingham and their connections with local ethnic groups.

professions.

Many thus came to regard the ISB as having a hold over the way Islam was thought about and worked with in the UK. The 'good' Muslim or unquestioning British Muslim discourse it embodied and sought to cultivate, then, became the object of unsettling. It was seen by volunteers from emerging generations as limited and not allowing of dissent or critique. In the case of the ISB, given its resonance with revivalist Islamic movements, the concept of Tawhid, which denoted Oneness of God, was believed to be adopted in a one-dimensional way that subsequently oriented people toward traditional Muslim organisations of its kind that claimed to be promoting 'true Islam' - built on ideals that were universal. Instead younger people professed a radical sense of Islamic universality that brought in diversity and dissonance. As I will show below, there appeared to be a level of indeterminacy toward the legitimacy of the secular or 'proper' notion of Muslim citizen that the ISB embodied. The Quran as word of God applied to much more than political and theological realms.

Looking beyond the instrumentalist role of organisations such as ISB, people questioned whether their explicit aims to coordinate Islamic action were in line with the diversity of opinions, feelings of cynicism and the alternative more expanded political horizons of ordinary Muslims in the city. How could very local or street level understandings of the Muslim predicament be connected to the broad political ambitions for recognition? How could an attachment to a politicised notion of 'Muslim community' – enacted as the British Muslim/good Muslim – be maintained while allowing people to explore other forms of identity that intersected with 'Muslim'?

Discordant Voices

If the Islam Awareness Week disappointed many who were hoping to create and experience an expanded sense of what being Muslim and part of a Muslim community entailed in a 21st century British city, then Unity FM – although another

local ISB project - seemed to offer that promise. Unity represented a technology, which although was part of the ISB's wider concern with encouraging public discourse on Islam and Muslim's place in Britain, it did so through the deployment of a modern means that also reflected the 'at-homeness' of Muslims in Britain. It, therefore, represented Muslims as very much part of their locality. Radio, after all is an intimate technology that has sutured community in the home and as a nation since its inception (Hilmes 2002).

In order to ensure its appeal among the diversity of Muslims in the city, Unity from time to time enlisted volunteer presenters to produce and present new shows. During my time as volunteer I worked with a mixture of practicing and non-practicing Muslims who were attracted to Unity because of its novelty. On the surface it represented an alternative to the usual Muslim infrastructure in the city. Despite the strictures of 'community' discussed so far that were key to Unity's formation, much of its appeal also seemed to come from the fact that it relied on a looser and uncertain cooperation and commitment of people in the form of volunteers and presenters who might waver or just not show up to fill a live slot on air.

During my time there I gained first hand experience of how Unity FM's operations could be constitutive of a more expanded sense of 'community' than suggested in its strapline - *Unity in the Community*. The soundwave facilitated a whole new dimension and form of 'community' to come into being. The community I observed was not assigned to particular institutional spaces like mosque's or times of the day such as 'after work activism' or evening community meetings hosted in the Bordesley centre. Listening to Unity FM In their day-to day rituals of work, cooking, driving or child rearing, different Muslims came into the fold of community through a deployment of alternative senses; not by rationally opting to be in a circumscribed place or body marked as Muslim (or Muslim organization), but through being connected by the affective qualities of radio and sound (LaBelle 2010: 201-206, Bull & Back 2003).

Below, in my accounts of time spent at the Unity FM studios and from interviews with some volunteer presenters as well as staff and management, I will try to show how boundaries and differences were negotiated through practices not marked by tension as in the cultural clash hypothesis, which as I discussed earlier has been a feature of much literature on Muslims in Britain, but as emotional relations of loosening and tightening of bonds between the management and the various volunteers who went on air. People employed a range of affective energies in this negotiation that revealed ethical dispositions and sensibilities geared toward a common goal; not orientated toward a past tradition of Muslim organizing or in local sensibilities of 'community'; but toward an *elsewhere*. This signified a much messier role that this local radio technology played. Unity could thus be seen as a new dimension of Muslim organising that operated at the overlap of a number of frontiers: established traditions/authority, local community and media technology. It therefore represented an urban capability (Sassen 2013) of Muslims in the city that is not easily characterized in impressions of Muslim authority embodied in individuals or organisations alone.

Jamila, who had facilitated my entry as a volunteer did concede that Unity was trying to loosen its links with ISB as its parent organization. It was doing this through opening itself to multiple individuals, agencies and viewpoints across ethnic and denominational lines. Unlike most mosques or institutes that were popularly viewed as firmly wedded to a charismatic individual, tareeqa (way) or madhab (denomination); Unity tried to present itself as pluralistic in its functioning. Tactical alliances with outsiders were important, for example with statutory agencies so that Unity could fulfil the bigger ISB mission of engaging with mainstream society and being 'good' Muslims. Yet *relations* with outsiders were not considered as important.

Jan was a regular guest on talk shows and was usually critical of how things were done at Unity FM:

> The adverts are mainly for local fast food places, have you heard them?! like new restaurants or desert places that are opening and giving out special offers and also charity events; there's so many of them. They're like almost

always the same, with someone trying to hurry people to visit them. In Ramadhan especially and then all year round you feel the adverts are like ushering you toward a fast breaking session *always*! (Jan)

This point about limited engagement with audiences was one shared by volunteers too as I will try to show in the example of Alima and Mahtab below. These volunteer presenters demonstrated through their shows that to further the impression, understanding and vision of Islam it was necessary to have sustained interactions with *more* of the outside world. Alima through her promotion of a particular Muslim female standpoint and Mahtab through the use of music tried to project the importance of Unity as an urban capability to not merely be present or visible but also to penetrate, make an impression and be felt in the life of the city. While Unity's tactic seemed to be polite and reactive, these volunteers cultivated a more provocative presence that pushed boundaries and invited responses other than polite acceptance in the public sphere. Through dialogue and encounter it was hoped that a more expanded sense of what Muslims were about could be prompted.

One of my early experiences of this tension was in the regular conversations I had with Husayn, a Yemeni who worked as the Studio Manager. I made a point of arriving at the studios an hour before my commitments so that I could sit and talk with Husayn about the latest goings-on at Unity usually over tea. He would welcome someone making him tea because he disliked leaving the office with all the technology and controls unattended. Husayn's core job was to ensure the technical delivery of programmes. This involved synchronising things like commercial breaks, recorded programmes and announcements, microphones and editing, ensuring presenters turned up on time and guests knew how to interact with the technology in the studio. Husayn, therefore, knew the place and the presenters and volunteers intimately. It was through Husayn too that I made contact with a number of previous volunteer presenters whom I would not have otherwise encountered in my time spent there.

I got another glimpse from Husayn about the workings of 'community' at the radio station. In one conversation Husayn was particularly perturbed by the way the

management approached the different communities of listeners serving them along the lines of ethnicity only. There were not enough crossovers even though he had the power to do it through his job controlling the technology. He feared his associations (being a Yemeni) with the Bordesley Centre might be compromised if he strayed out of line.

A common criticism about Unity FM was that while it represented a medium beyond the usual Muslim infrastructure in the city – a media technology that enabled new content and form to spread - the management's ethos also hindered this. The management in their 'community planning' stifled the dissipation of a diversity of Muslim voices over the wavelength. Unity's technological potential as a *crystalised social relation* (Amin & Thrift 2002b: 37) was suppressed in favour of the linear movement of singular voices and ideas; for example, the separate ethnic language programmes, the morning programmes for women and elders, evenings for youngsters and late night for pre-recorded material[42]. These were considered as something easy to maintain where different parts of the Muslim public were demarcated and addressed accordingly without overlaps or mixture. Therefore, while the station appeared to be an assemblage of peoples, styles and topics; there was less transversality in its operation. Legitimacy was not accorded to out-of-place voices who were feared for their discursive controversy.

A key concern for others, such as Karima an anti-race activist who worked at a national level, was that too many people were quiet on these matters or saw identity politics as the only way to work. In the case of Unity it was expressed in criticisms centred on its unprofessionalism, which were linked to Sparkbrook, the Bordesley Centre and what this signified:

> I do think it's like very dominated by a particular culture like it's no secret that it's like Yemeni led which is great you know we need to maintain that legacy of who really actively went about creating this space. But then it's like we're coming back and again this is like issues of race in Islam, the dominant Arab identity in terms of like Islamic one; even though a lot of Asians are

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[42] See attached programme schedule from a portion of my time spent at Unity FM.

involved with The Bordesley Centre it's still very much an Arab skeleton….it just feels like Windrush period. Although you're opening up your space and you're allowing the people to lead on it they're having these strict restrictions, no we don't do this, no we don't do that. This obsession with driving music out of these places is ridiculous… in terms of like artistic expressions; the Bordesley Centre could accommodate for that, it's a lot more central than The Hubb and a lot easier to get to but it's not opening up… like oh my gosh it still feels like that Camp Hill school that it was. Like you know in terms of maintenance, in terms of decoration, in terms of everything it's so unapproachable… (Karima)

Dr Aslam persuaded me that much of the difficulties Unity faced was because of the pragmatics of managing a licensed radio station, therefore, a set of rules had to enforced to ensure it remained on air. Another strategy for achieving this was through the use of scheduled commercial breaks. Each show regardless of how important, topical, popular, heated or religious it might be was interrupted without fail at 26 and 56 minutes past each our. This was non-negotiable and kept things running in a uniform manner, just the way the management liked it.

In the remainder of this chapter I aim to describe how Unity FM represented a site of loosened or fragmented authority, and not necessarily a site of contested authority as proponents of new Muslim youth cultures often suggest. This became evident in how the radio technology put into play *localised* practices, discourses and traditions that acted upon the self and collective endeavors of like-minded Muslims around the city. Unity FM, I will try to show, was an example of how religion is mediated in a local setting through a very local technology: that of a community style radio station. In trying to characterise the operation of authority here, I find it useful to draw on Sennett (1981) who in one of his more neglected works entitled *Authority* advances a psycho-social approach to understanding authority as a bond that is built through the emotional expression of power (Sennett 1981).

In a vitalist sense and in its potentiality Unity could also be seen as an 'acoustic territory' (LaBelle 2010). It was a resource, technical in form but also with social and political qualities. The design politics of the wavelength were about adding to the already existing resources for Muslims in the city; working *with* these to supplement

and buttress Muslimness. LaBelle (2010) charts the *'ambiguity inherent to acoustic space as a productive force of tension' (2010: xxiv)*. He discusses the divergent sonic qualities of sound and how these provide "points of contact, appropriation but also meaningful challenge" (ibid).

I now turn to consider two popular volunteer presenters who demonstrate that Unity's search for authority in the interpretation of power or what was significant locally; was not complete. In their own ways these volunteer presenters were hesitant to let local sensibilities of ethnicity, gender or locality be the parameters within which they spoke. The dissonance that resulted was allowed to pronounce itself because the shows went out live on air. The management had to sit back and let presenters do their thing. This was only effectively managed through the regular advert breaks, when someone would storm into the studio, ensure the mics were muted and then remind presenters what they shouldn't say on air.

The volunteer presenters I worked with were attracted to Unity FM even though they believed the way it legitimised itself in the form of a community organisation foregrounded gender and ethnicity in troubled ways. As my involvement at Unity deepened I noticed that people were engaging with the tradition and authority of Unity FM's management to fashion new parameters for being Muslim; beyond the imagination of Unity's 'community' envisaged by the management. Through prompting debates and raising issues, listeners were invited to think more broadly and to know more about what could be involved in Muslim community and identity. Through pushing boundaries and experimenting they aimed to be more inclusive and relevant, developing critique and reflection on relations between generations, genders, selves and social, economic and political forces; the very things criticized about ISB. The volunteer presenters were a link between institutionalized space and technology.

My insights gained from interviews with volunteer presenters at unity FM reveal how interpretation is constructed through the social exchange enabled by the soundwave as an 'architecture of interpretation' (Sennett 1981: 26). Further, I take

from Asad (2006) his use of the term authority to refer to the "internal structure of a relationship that brings into play a multiplicity of material components." (Asad 2006: 212). According to Asad, understanding authority in religious tradition is about much more than the textual "signs to be read and interpreted" (ibid). He suggests we focus on the encounter rather than the communication as lying at the heart of authority. Therefore, below I place a focus on some of the affective dimensions of the relationship between volunteer presenters, Unity FM management and the airwave.

'I am Alima'

Alima[43] was one example. I followed her show *Inner Conflicts* every week for a year after meeting her at my induction session. I also helped out answering phones behind the scenes of her programme. I interviewed Alima in December 2012 in Birmingham city centre. Alima was initially uncritical of the authority exercised by Unity FM's managers, which she expressed through respect of its heritage, its achievements, impact, reach and influence. For her the informal nature of Unity FM as opposed to mainstream commercial stations meant that it was easier for her do 'Muslim stuff' more meaningfully than say at WM Asian network where, she thought, the usual clichéd discussions of Muslim women took place. In this case the authority at Unity FM was seen as less restrictive and actually *enabling*, providing her a platform and framework in the form of the station's tradition and mission that her work could identify with and progress from.

For Alima the radiowave provided her an outlet and freedom while also a cover to pursue her bigger project – *I am Alima*[44]. For her the soundwave offered a less threatening way to discuss ideas that were central to being a Muslim woman. In a similar vein to Aaliya and Jamila whom I had worked with at the Hubb, Alima suggested that a limiting issue for them was when certain groups/madhabs[45] claimed authenticity over public spaces and discussions relating to Islam, making it

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[43] This participant was happy for me to use her actual name.
[44] http://iamalima.org
[45] Interpretations.

difficult and even threatening for women to enter debates and dialogues. A number of women I interviewed felt side-lined in discussions about social issues as most of these occurred in public spaces presided over by men:

> Here in the UK we're very conservative that's why some of the Islamic institutes who are from the UK and some, inshaAllah I don't need to mention names, institutes I attend and I attend a lot of institutes in the UK and the reason why I do that is you learn from different people and you become open-minded. One organisation in Birmingham, they do not encourage the sisters to even speak so I'll go there for the knowledge but I will not put my hand up for anything because even like the shaykh he mentioned we'd prefer the women not to speak because they are a quote unquote fitnah[46] and that's crazy. (Alima)

Conservatism associated with Muslim organizations run by men has been a prompt for numerous separate Muslim women's initiatives to emerge over the past few decades (Bano 2012: 40-53, Ansari 2003: 374-380). Alima, however, had chosen to work within, deciding to employ fun and novelty to broker engagement across conservatism, which she also attributed to 'culture' that was code for Asian traditions emanating and belonging to the homeland:

> When I attended xxxx Institute we made everything fun, we made everything engaging, we would do a lot of fun stuff. But depending on the shuyookh and depending on their background, they will have certain opinions but we are open-minded enough to say you know what, that's their culture, that's the way they are, good on them as long as… but I don't feel comfortable being a mere name on a paper slip, I don't think that's what Islam advocates (Alima).

In place of injury based on gender, Alima chose to pronounce other vernaculars of her identity. Not wanting to be appropriated for the wrong reasons, knowing that Muslim women were currently all the rage, she suggested her show was a way of breaking away from stereotypes of Muslim women as silent, invisible and victims:

> We're doing a four week series on the vision of Muslim women in the West. Because one of the shuyookh (scholar) he did an article and he got a lot of slack (blowback) for that article, basically he kind of portrayed the role for Muslim women being a mother and being a wife, that's it. And that is true but there's more to that because a woman has emotional needs. If she is just

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[46] In Arabic 'fitnah' means to spread discord.

a mother and she is just a wife she's going to go crazy. She needs to be doing something productive in her life at the same time. But a lot of women, because he didn't portray it in the right way, he came across as very chauvinistic you might say. *And what he was saying was good, I actually agreed with what he was saying but I didn't agree with his method* so inshaAllah due to that there's a market for it. (Alima)

Alima demonstrated her sense of Muslim woman as not diametrically opposed to conservatism – but as something she was willing to work with. Saba Mahmood (2005) in her study of women within the Egyptian Islamic revivalist movement refers to such postures adopted by Muslim women in relation to conservative authority as "exteriority as a means to interiority" (2005: 134-152). Mahmood suggests that what matters, is not whether people follow conservative norms, but the relationships they establish between these and themselves. In Alimas case submission to external forms of authority at Unity were integral to the realisation of her project 'I am Alima'; the affective qualities of the radiowave provided conditions for its emergence.

Like other women I worked with, Alima was also aware of the sensationalism surrounding the figure of the Muslim woman and resisted being drawn into debates or social action around the hijab or other caricatures of Muslim women. Again, Alima focused on her own political and moral project – inner conflicts:

> I'm very wary of doing events to a mixed audience; not because I'm not confident enough, it's because of taboo within the Muslim community. Especially the groups I've mixed with are very conservative but I was invited to the Islamic Relief dinner in Walsall Town Hall and I did do my talk to a mixed audience and it was fine… I was hoping no brothers turned up. Like one or two brothers and like about 60 brothers turned up, I was like oh my God. (Alima)

Alima sought to go beyond the conservatism by engaging Muslim men in familial terms as brothers. One way of achieving this was through a reformulation of relations with older brothers. Alexander discusses this in terms of 'respect', which works "both as a marker of distinction from others and of continuity with the wider imagined community' (Alexander 2000: 177). Alima pursued a similar tactic through a careful engagement with things such as interpretations of religious opinion that configured differences between older and newer opinions:

> I did a tour, you probably haven't seen it, *The Heroine Rises*? When we launched that I did a tour in four universities, I went to Nottingham, Keele, Warwick and Leicester and we did it on Hawwa[47] and one thing we mentioned is that Hawwa – her whole legacy from the start she has been given an inferiority complex, from the very start as a woman she was looked down upon and you realise that that has seeped in to society. Women are seen as second class citizens, even by the way I was researching the idea of obedience. Islamically a woman has to obey her husband, standard. There's a hadith and that's good and great. But when you look at obedience, Allah decreed that because the end result is harmony. If the end result is not achieved then you don't have to obey him in the first place. (Alima)

The medium of radio also enabled Alima to cut across boundaries of age, gender and conservative interpretations, because of the anonymity it afforded and the affective energies it imparted to her work. Alima achieved this through employing an Arabic vernacular that was both traditional and chic among Muslims who were not of non-Arab ethnicity in the city. There has been little discussion about the mimesis of Arab language, dress styles and consumption (such as the proliferation of sheesha) among Muslims around the city. Here, it was an example of how faith became encoded in the language, dress and culinary habits of the original Muslims; the Arabs. Appropriating this as a vernacular in speech, dress or food offered a semblance of realness to people's aspirations of being Muslim. Arabic was thus adopted as a generationally-specific symbolic resource invested with meaning (Leurs, 2015). Alima presented respectability and competence through her mastery of the Arabic language, interspersing English and Arabic dialects to produce an emotive language that helped cultivate a positive predisposition to being alive – rather than obedience to commands of culture or scholars. Her play with language, dialect and copying was "a key technique in the folding of authority into the human being" (Rose 1996: 310).

Again, her refusal to foreground her pro-woman work in the popular narratives of oppressed Muslim women was striking:

> In my opinion one of the best shuyookh at this moment of time is Abu Eesa, have you heard of him? Abu Eesa Niamatullah. The reason why it is, that guy

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[47] Hawaa is the name of an iconic female in Islamic history being the wife of Prophet Abraham.

mashaAllah he is born and bred in the UK, he's a shaykh, he's studied under a lot of scholars, not only that is, he's a massive footie fan and he makes it clear and he speaks the talk and he's also very intellectual meaning mashaAllah he's a bit of everything. He's Pakistani, he's a Pathan I think, he's amazing, I think in the UK he's one of the best shuyookh at this moment of time. (Alima)

Alima demonstrated that there was something chic about projecting Arabness in her Muslim identity; it was important in projecting her authority. Her show, *Inner Conflicts*, enjoyed a regular weekly two-hour slot on Thursday evenings. It followed the style of a lecture, with occasional interruptions by callers who would praise her and attempt to describe how her talks had influenced them and been incorporated into their lives. Her commentary, on a set topic each week, was made up of switching between Arabic and English and then the use of jargon that was fun, engaging and visionary. She was also very diplomatic, not naming people she would be critiquing.

Alima had been influenced by the Canadian Shaykh Muhammad Al Shareef who is well known for his American management guru style of self-help programmes he runs for young Muslims around the world (Grewal 2014). Subsequently, she utilized flamboyant terminology and positive ethics to work listener's consciousness. She also employed generous sensibilities, giving of her time, knowledge and professionalism free on air – she was a life coach with ambitions:

ALIMA: I'm not your average sister, that's what I'm saying. I use my own initiative, I plan my own shows, I'm in control of what I'm doing

AJMAL: And where did the title come from, *Internal Conflicts*?

ALIMA: I thought of that, it's just an idea it's an 'internal conflict'. Basically what we have is we want our own terms within for example the term 'superstar', whenever people hear 'superstar' they think of I am Alima now because of Duas of the Superstars and we use it a lot. Like I heard someone say I have an internal conflict and I'm like great, because job done. We want like, the term heroine, when people think of that they think of I am Alima. We want our own terms. We own, and we do, we own the colour pink… on the Islamic dawah scene, when people… and we've done it in such an elegant way and that's why the pink doesn't look cheap, it looks like an elegant pink and people love that, and we look bigger than we are because of our website. I

understand that everything we're doing now is novelty, it really is novelty, it's not the success which I want for I am Alima, it's nothing close to what I want but that takes time."

This mixing of various linguistic, religious and corporate elements in her identity as 'I am Alima' was an example of what Les Back in relation to South Asian musical cultures has termed as "rhizomes, lateral interconnections of social and political elements.." (Back 1996: 341). This recognition of multiple positions or influences could not be located within an 'Islamic' identity position professed by the Unity FM management or in an ethnic sensibility, whether Arab or South Asian. Alima used the radio waves to project religious competence and respectability – her shows were replete with Quranic references iterated through a crisp adopted Arabic dialect presented in a 'self-help' style. Alima had honed her skills and abilities as an orator projecting herself as forward and outward looking bringing new style and content to Unity FM. This pointed to an ontology of becoming that involved working *with* the authority of Unity FM to gain a platform; utilising the electromagnetic energy of the airwaves and transmuting this toward new ends.

Mahtab Khan (aka 'DJ Pupoo') – 'streetstylin'

In contrast to Alimas global and outwardly projected style and content, was another volunteer presenter Mahtab who was remembered more as being 'street'; stretching things across a more local reference points and times. Mahtab had been with Unity for five years beginning back in 2006 when the station was focusing on culture and arts. He ran a popular Friday night drive time show playing 'music of Muslim origin'. This title was something that was in long dispute during his tenure at the station. It was arrived at eventually in hard compromise with the management who jostled with him regularly to accommodate differing views about the place of music in Islam, and his own reluctances to not have muted what he pushed for as the inclusion and celebration of music in Muslim life and history. He found the notion of 'Islamic music' or the refusal to include the word music - instead being labelled 'arts or culture or entertainment' - as refusing the role of rhythm, listening

and intonation that were key agents of sense and bodily practice in the way people found and expressed a Muslim self (Hirshkind 2006).

One of Mahtabs early influences was Goodness Gracious Me, the comedy series in the 90's, which he described as providing "*a sideways glance at how Asians lived*". Before joining Unity FM he was at New Style Radio, which he described as 'an Afro Caribbean Station on Dudley road'.[48] In 2005 Mahtab received a call from Naz Koser who ran a successful arts project for young Muslim women, infusing influences from punk with spirituality in the making of Muslim women's subjectivity[49]. Naz who had first worked at Unity to help set up ats based programmes, contacted him to say that Unity FM "*need(ed) some people to stretch the boundaries on radio and would he come over to do that at Unity for a while*". Mahtab, who was also locally known as DJ Pupoo, told me that he carefully considered this request and only accepted it because it was coming from Naz. Her credibility was built on her organisation's independent style, whereby she refused to be bound as an Asian women's organization dealing with 'domesticated issues'. Instead they experimented with Islam developing public events around what might be considered private dimensions of the faith. I attended one of her shows in 2009 in which she and other women performed the making of wudu (ablution) and salat (prayer) against a background of music, coloured disco lighting and a crowd of spectators.

Mahtab told me that he often refused the label Muslim complaining that it had become rather chic and over used. For him the problem was that it erased other aspects of his identity including ethnicity and other important events in his life trajectory, which included being active in local anti-race movements, and partially blind while also a practicing lawyer. In making this point, Mahtab was referring to the uncritical adoption of religion as a marker of identity without sufficient self-reflection, therefore, through his show he was keen to encourage reflection:

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[48] The same road on which three young Asian men were killed after being run down by a car at the height of the summer 2011 disturbances in Birmingham. The mainstream media and some locals had immediately claimed the act was carried out by black youths. This view was later discredited as a group of young men of different ethnicities were arrested, tried and found non guilty of murder.
[49] These were vey much about experiencing a free self, as she often painted her project against the backdrop of a failed arranged marriage.

> I listened to what else was going on the radio at first before I could see what I'd bring in. Initially what I brought in was music, of course you get all the calls *'music is haram', 'what are you doing putting it on Unity FM'* etc etc. I started off with Fateh Ali khan and qawalis, ghazals and all that stuff, and then I found a website called Muslim hip-hop from the US. I found actually there's a lot of these tracks: hip-hop kind of genre, R'n'B as well that I could put on the airwaves. Some of them needed expletives taken out of, some of them were clean as they were. (Mahtab Khan)

For him reflection was enabled through various art forms including comedy, theatre and music. His style on the airwaves carried this. Mahtab's two-hour Friday night drive time show had long been off air by the time I worked at Unity FM but it was still remembered by all in the studio for its affect. His style on the radio was inflected by his position on identity politics and his DJ influences. His show would open with lyrical rhymes in the style of black-nationalist speakers, punctuated with heavy break beats overlaid with him speaking in the style of a DJ, which I think mimicked that of Tim Westwood - the celebrated Radio One Hip Hop DJ. His intro would easily stretch over 10 -15 mins, made up of street jargon melded with greetings in Arabic and punjabi and stretched out with long pauses.

Mahtab was clearly a success at Unity, evident in his long tenure at the station on the most sought after slot – Friday night drive time – but he was also very controversial. There were rumours circulating in the studio that he had been asked to leave Unity FM after he had broken the rules by playing some bhangra and reggae music, which according to conservative opinions was considered a wrongful practice in Islam:

> Reggae, that didn't go down well at all. The old racisms that we Asians have toward Afro Caribbean people came to the fore at that time. So I actually had the marketing director come in open the door while I was on air playing a tune, I kind of swept him away and after the show said to him you have to listen to the show, listen to the words of this song because actually the words of this song were about all of us in humanity being brothers and sisters. What someone did was to tell them that I'd played a Bob Marley track. It wasn't. It was a reggae artist from France who was a Muslim himself. I knew that any future reggae tracks that I'd play would have to be by Muslim artists, because that was my line of defence. (Mahtab)

Mahtab told me he was conscious that such opinions circulated among certain members of Unity's management and that he had a strategy for handling subsequent challenges from the management. It included drawing on pious others, sometimes obscure figures, to legitimise his strategy and style:

> It got quite exciting in some ways, because actually when you interview the artists, I did a lot of interviews with artists and that kind of stuff - there's a rap group called the Muslim brotherhood over in Australia - when you listen to people and the way they explain how their doing their music, a lot of it will be about Islam, specifically concentrating on Islam, and that's the stuff I brought in cus no one can really question that you know…
> (Mahtab Khan)

In Mahtab's case, anachronistic forms of imagining and working with Muslims drove him to want to do things differently. This involved putting religion to work in ways that released it from the rigidity and systematicity of revivalist opinions such as those associated with Unity and ISB. For Mahtab, propounding a different opinion, interpretation, orientation and employing controversial practices on-air worked to temper the rigidity and authority.

Mahtab reflected on the structures of tradition and authority at Unity; and, then, how he challenged them:

> It's very frustrating for youngsters, it's really frustrating you go in with all cylinders working and you get told no you can't do this, or that, its actually more prohibiting than most peoples parents are. (Mahtab)

Mahtab was a fierce critic of the 'biraderi' or clan associations that characterized closed communion among the city's Pakistanis. He was insistent that this had seeped into the way so many Muslim Asians now conducted their lives in the city. He particularly referred to taxi-drivers who called into Unity FM about his show regularly. He saw these attitudes as in-built and constraining of the way Muslim identity developed among newer generations in the city. There was too much interdependence and not enough openness. However, coming from a background where this prevailed he also suggested that the mutual respect and ties that bound

people together in their clans was actually incomplete. Recognizing this, he sought to play to this complexity and work in the cracks offering people music that connected differences:

> I used to globetrot and bring in music from around the world. What's going on is there's a fundamental misogyny going on within our communities, and what happened is they wouldn't let me play women singing….and this is something I've kind've of not talked about openly.. (Mahtab)

For Mahtab difference was not an automatic trigger for conflict or tension between and within different groups in the city. It was something that was manipulated. He sought to do the same, but with musical difference:

> I had massive, massive hassle trying to get any women singing on, so what I started to do was sneak it in, so sometimes what I'd do was mix under, so you'd have a track with music going over, and under if you'd listen carefully you'd be able to hear a woman either speaking or singing. I knew that eventually once they catch up and say we can't have that, we won't have that and it then turns into an argument, and I could end up in court with them and there could be a judicial review over this breaching the sex discrimination act or not, I don't think our communities need that kind of headache. (Mahtab)

Mahtab spoke in a very local vernacular accenting local histories, ethnic relations and musical influences on local people. He targeted the unofficial historiography of Black and Asian relations that has been the cause of tensions in the city for decades. Racism within the Asian community was a taboo and recurring issue in his shows. He utilized musical and lyrical references to Sufi Qawalli and Hip Hop with a social message to move the narrative on. Mahtab's linguistic stylization and connection with street and everyday lived level of social justice explicitly dissented from the conservative family values frame that was hegemonic at Unity FM. He tried to normalize street youth while the management sought only to work religion on them. The affect that Mahtab generated was born in the 'in-between-ness' (Seugworth & Gregg 2010: 3) of the relationship between him and the management as well as his experiences with the 'community'.

In Mahtab's on-air performances we see a conscious and at times tense effort to challenge and bridge the difference between Muslims and blacks that have newly emerged in the city. Similarly in Alima, we see new strategies at play in challenging male authority. The soundwave enabled her and other women to *voice* alternatives in the midst of an otherwise restricted Muslim scene dominated by the hold of classical type 'community' organisations associated with male elders.

These volunteer presenters in their own ways challenged the circumscribing logic of 'community' by bringing in passions and emotions; different registers of affect that are usually seen as personal and, therefore, domesticated aspects of religion. Both cases exemplify a different play with authority. While on air, during their shows, these presenters sought to de-root Unity from local sensibilities of 'community' and traditional Muslim organizing through introducing new genres, styles and dialects. Doing this also led to confrontations, anxieties and conflicts. Yet 'negating authority' in this way also had the effect of knitting people together (Sennett 1981: 33). In the process drawing new spatial lines around shared religious identity rather than cultural differences. People rebelled *within* authority as opposed to *against* it.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to describe how the soundwave at Unity FM acts as a medium and boundary with bio-social qualities enabling the formation and existence of a unique type of community in Birmingham. Technology helps bypass traditional authority and control accumulated by Muslim organisations such as the ISB and was thus attractive to new actors seeking to establish their independence from the hold of such established organisations.

In doing so I have attempted to upgrade Muslim organisations from the natural association with preserving authenticity and representation for Islam and Muslims that much of the literature represents these as embodying. Unity, because of its technical qualities, is an alternative to established Islamic institutions in the city. However, this is not because it was constituted differently, but due to its functioning

and appropriation as a site of exploration of self and community by a range of different actors. Here very local materials and technologies were utilised both to institute and to re-site boundaries. The negotiation of boundaries involved practices not marked by tension as in the cultural clash hypothesis, but emotional relations of loosening and tightening of bonds between those in authority and those not.

Unity was a unique medium that invited a broad base of Muslims to participate in making a different layer of Muslim community beyond - but not independent of - Muslim Organisations associated with the immigrant generations. In their different ways, the volunteer presenters discussed above registered their disdain toward the way Unity operated. Yet they also made use of the soundwave to penetrate across the edifices of denomination or clan that were the hallmark of Muslim infrastructure in the city; despite that the radio and its programming were configured to answer the needs of community in a traditional way. Unity FM became a common space where a shared sensibility existed despite the diversity of individuals and styles that joined together in this space. It was not so much a space where practices of community could be sustained or challenged, instead people acknowledged one another, it thus joined together and assembled individual differences into a "unity of purpose" (Simone 1994: 134).

In the next chapter I discuss disembodied notions of political authority not confined to particular spaces but characterised by movement through dispersed sites forming a social infrastructure that challenges the politics of identity in the city.

Chapter 5 - Muslims being political

Introduction

As I discussed in the review of literature (Chapter 2) there is an influential strand of work on Muslims born in the UK, which views the adoption of Islam among this constituency as a reflex to a sense of un-belonging with the 'culture' of their parent/immigrant generations. I further addressed this in the previous chapter exploring the issue through the notion of authority and how differing stances toward a shared tradition are negotiated within a Muslim organisation. In this chapter I look at how difference, represented in a range of people's doings and aspirations dispersed around the city, might represent a productive force that helps them navigate through the quagmire of the politics of identity represented in the way politics is formally enacted in the city.

The research upon which this chapter draws was conducted around the time of the summer 2011 urban unrest, an event that arrested momentarily the emotions and consciousness of Muslim Birmingham while also projecting into the national limelight the figure of the Muslim, in a different guise. The city was also a site of the violence that swept parts of England that summer. The story that became the framing one in Birmingham was the tragic death of three young Asian/Muslim men who were mowed down by a car in north-west Birmingham on the evening of 10 July 2011 during the height of the unrest. This event was folded into racialised narratives of black communities with violence and disorder pitted against Muslims whose grief was represented anew in the form of injury that could be patronised by the authorities in a new regime of governmentaility; that of the figure of the injured Muslim. In doing so it seemed to symbolise a new site of the politics of identity in the city, challenging traditional views that confined this to space or ethnicity.

In my appraisal of the way politics is 'laid out' across the city, I consider a number of different sites, beginning with traditional forms within the sphere of formal politics. I then consider how this has shifted by paying attention to impressions of Muslims I

was working with toward the unrest, and the projection of the figure of Tariq Jahan (father of Haroon Jahan, one of the three men killed) as embodiment of a 'good Muslim' at a time when the city feared an outbreak of further violence. I suggest that the aftermath of this event revealed the gulf that existed between how the authorities saw fit to represent Muslim emotions and the conflicting ways these are felt, lived and exchanged on the ground everyday. While on one level the event propelled the figure of the Muslim into the limelight as injured and, therefore, (as some believed) to be deserving of justice; it also exposed the fragility and contradictoriness of the politics of recognition vis-à-vis Muslims in the city.

I contrast how 'old sites' of politics are displaced but not superseded by people in less spectacular moments and methods of social action including everyday acts of volunteering and networking in which Muslims work out a place for themselves in civil society. I explore encounters, conversations and various social practices for what they reveal about how the city, framed as a hotspot of dubious Muslim activity (because of unban unrest, violent extremism and criminalised networks like The Trojan Horse) is actually navigated and made use of in messy and less predictable ways. In contrast to a place where radicalism is actively being fermented, Muslim everyday urban rituals provide an orientation toward making the city more equitably habitable for them *and* others. This I argue is done routinely and unglamorously, not through conventions and formal claims making but mundane everyday manoeuvres employing a range of affective practices and spaces of sociality across the city.

In this chapter, then, I consider what being political means for Muslims in the city where it is usually enshrined in particular events and individuals and almost always inscribed by forces deemed outside the Muslim body politic. Amidst this fractured state of affairs where there is not adequate recognition at state level and in civic responses to the ordinary sentiments of socially and politically minded Muslims in the city, I discovered Muslims working things out themselves. Below, in my encounters with Muslims working in the left over spaces and the neglected agendas of Islamophobia for example, I will show how people were prompted to act in a

resourceful way becoming a 'social infrastructure' (Simone 2004) that also helped to expand the arena of political action in the city.[50]

The times and spaces of Muslim politics

Criticisms about who represents Muslims and how Muslims are engaged with in public life have accompanied discussions about 'social cohesion', 'integration' and the 'death of multiculturalism' as narratives that frame the Muslim presence in Britain. It is notable that these seem to be in response to the challenge faced by the authorities in being able to predict emerging trends within the Muslim 'community'; particularly younger Muslims' leanings toward more politicised expressions of Islam. The public condemnation by Sayeeda Warsi in August 2014 of the British government's stance on Gaza as "morally indefensible" seemed to echo broader sentiments among British Muslims of government insensitivity to a dimension of their identities, which involved identification with a broader faith community (ummah) beyond the boundaries of the nation. Her later proclamations that British Muslims were being shut out of decision making on policies affecting them such as Prevent, because of government's refusal to formally engage with Muslim organisations, served also as an example of how challenging it has become to accommodate Muslims in public discourses about living with difference [51]. Additionally, remarks by an outgoing senior civil servant Nazir Afzal that leadership within Muslim communities was lacking and not effectively recognised, are also symptomatic of this challenge and of the shrinking space for critique of the government's working relationship with the Muslim 'community'[52]. This episode of

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[50] As Tonkiss suggests: "It may be conventional to think about infrastructure in terms of 'technical means of congestion' and organization, but a great deal of the work of urban infrastructure is provided by low-tech and no-tech solutions; forms of infrastructure that are not engineered by experts but embodied by everyday social actors"…"these embodied infrastructures are the designs of resourceful actors" (Tonkiss 2013: 139-140).

[51] "Lady Warsi on Palestine, Islam, quitting ... and how to stay true to your beliefs" The Observer 14 October 2014. http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/oct/11/sayeeda-warsi-why-i-quitgovernment-has-lost-moral-compass-middle-east-gaza

[52] Nazir Afzal: 'Young people are easily led. Our anti-radicalisation schemes need to be cleverer'. The Guardian 8 April 2015. http://www.theguardian.com/global/2015/apr/08/nazir-afzal-young-people-anti-radicalisation-government-isis

my fieldwork, then, resonated with questions about Muslim's involvement in public life. Below I will discuss local manifestations of this issue.

As Solomos & Back (1995) noted, Birmingham has long been a cauldron of ethnic politics in which a range of different actors and structures such as political parties and community organisations have played varying roles in developing new forms of representation. They described the emergence of a 'new black politics' that was about racialised minorities responding to social exclusion and discrimination by enlisting into formal political processes. The new black politics emerged over the decades that also saw numerous immigration bills alongside opposition to immigration as well as Equalities legislation and the promotion of multiculturalism by successive governments in response to the growing presence and sometimes disruption, namely urban unrest, caused by ethnic minorities in the public sphere. Noting the changing terrain of race relations brought about by such political developments as well as shifting realities within minority ethnic communities, Solomos & Back in their conclusion pointed to a need to "explore the complex dynamics through which such political identities are influenced in one way or another by other forms of identity based on categories such as religion, gender, ethnicity and locality" (Solomos & Back 1995: 207). This 'new ethnicities' shift goes beyond identities shaped by ethnicity, culture and religion alone to consider the interplay between identification and identity and the different ways that people choose to participate in the life of the city; in my case where being Muslim is so politically charged.

In the time since their study, local politics in Birmingham have evolved in a highly charged way with the formal political parties vying and bidding for the ethnic minority vote more intensely. Whereas minority ethnic groups have traditionally been associated with supporting the Labour party, because of historic links partly due to their status as workers in manual industries and through trade union involvement (Solomos 1992, Miles & Phizacklea 1992) more recently the political landscape has become complex with fault lines being drawn along a number of different axes. Each of the main political parties now field ethnic minority candidates

in wards with large populations of minority ethnic communities. This has caused tensions within and across ethnic groups, most vividly reflected in the oft-cited case of rivalry between blacks and Asians in Lozells (Andrews 2015). Racialised politics in the city have also delivered public embarrassment for the local Labour party in a number of inner-city wards with sizeable Pakistani and Mir-Puri voters when a small group of disaffected local Mir Puris decided to form an alternative political party - The People's Justice Party (PJP) also known as the 'Justice for Kashmir Party' – as a result of non-selection within the Labour party in 2002[53]. Following a number of years displacing Labour in the Washwood Heath and Small Heath wards of the city, two surviving councillors of the PJP defected to the Liberal Democrats in 2006 helping the party solidify control of the council in coalition with the Conservatives. The early 2000's were a time of noticeable shifts in the traditional allegiance of Muslim voters in the city as New Labour's support for the global 'war on terror' marginalised many, mainly young Muslims. This concern with affairs in the global ummah combined with public scandals such as in May 2005 when six Muslim male councillors of the local Labour Party were stripped of their seats having been implicated in postal vote fraud and the city being labelled a 'Banana Republic' afterwards, to produce a heightened political consciousness that could be exploited in the political arena.[54] Subsequently, new political actors have entered the fray such as the Respect Party with a support base largely drawn from among Muslims and mainly young people disaffected with mainstream politics in the city (O'Toole & Gayle 2010).

Peace & Akhtar (2015) have commented on the emergence of a 'Muslim protest vote' as manifested in the rise of the Respect party:

> "Respect certainly employed a dual strategy of both criticising ethnic politics and appealing to disaffected youths while at the same time keeping older members of the community happy by selecting candidates who could guarantee a certain number of votes." (Ibid: 2015: 234)

According to Peace & Akhtar the appeal among mainly young Muslims or individuals

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[53] http://www.theguardian.com/society/2002/jun/19/localgovernment.guardiansocietysupplement
[54] http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/apr/05/politics.localgovernment

such as Salma Yaqoob who was a Respect councilor for Sparkbrook between 2010-2013 reflects a rejection of racial politics (ibid). Despite that a cornerstone of Salma's political approach has been to criticise 'the system' where formal political parties have exploited the biraderi system, she too was criticised for joining 'the game' of formal politics by people I was working with.

Changes in state form have also influenced the emergence of new actors such as third sector organisations through which additional spaces of citizen participation have widened opportunities for political action in addition to formal political processes. O'Toole et al (2013) in their study of Muslim participation in the governance structures of public and third sector organisations found that Muslims have become increasingly active and effective within these, and are enjoying an influence on decision-making and policy implementation. They cite a wide range of examples of officially recognised Muslim organisations that have become interlocutors of the state over the past decade or so. Similarly Back et al (2009) describe an expanded arena of "more participatory engagement in deliberative sites" between formal structures of the state and civil society.

What qualifies, therefore, as *participation* and the *political* subsequently should be understood in an expanded way. In these new sites of power, Back et al (2009) noted: "mobilization that takes Islam as its organizing principle became increasingly significant" (2009: 15). In this chapter I look at how some of these old and new dynamics blend in a climate of hyper-Muslim visibility in the city. As I will suggest in the next section, although constructions of Muslim politics appear to have shifted to moral and ethical domains away from ethnicity and space discussed in the previous chapters and above, processes of racialization still persist. I will try and demonstrate this using the example of a lone figure around which a politics of injured Muslim identity is propelled and patronised, and how this exists alongside the persistence and rejection of 'godfather figures' (Solomos & Back 1995) or 'machine politics' (Back et al 2009), traditionally embodied in biraderi networks that still wield significant political authority in parts of the city. I will try to show how new spaces around the city in-between formal and recognised spheres of political activity and social acts such as volunteering become sites of overlap and autonomy where

politics *also* happens. These challenge the politics of representation and demonstrate how political authority and the spaces where it is vested have changed for Muslims in the city. It is not restricted to spaces of formal politics but in everyday actions within less recognised arenas and infrastructures that become new spaces and moments of political action.

In this chapter I am concerned, therefore, with the contemporary shape of Muslim social and political action enacted through networks and loose constellations of people, that have a trajectory which does not necessarily follow a linear pattern across time and territory, but zig-zag's across the city (as home) influenced by different social, economic, cultural and political considerations of the time. A more messy, de-essentialised version of Muslim political action or sociality involves a decoupling or disconnect from fixed structures of homeland, family, denomination or ethnic group that is often characterised as denoting conflict or representing a pathological state where young generations are adrift from established values. I want to argue that this ambiguous zone between generations/traditions should be seen differently. In its simplest form it reflects 'difference' (Brah 2006) but there is also uncertainty and an alternative notion of what it means to be political encoded in dynamics between groups, individuals and organisations such as charities. In the remainder of this chapter I will discuss different examples of how politics is enacted by Muslims in the city, beginning with the ambiguous representation of Tariq Jahan in the aftermath of the 2011 summer unrest.

(Con)figuring the Muslim

18 August 2011 was a long summers day. It was also the 17th day of Ramadhan; a few days into the second half of the month of fasting in the Islamic calendar. During this month Muslim Birmingham gets folded into a rhythmic cycle of religious and social rituals that revolve around abstention and consumption. I took part in some of this with Muslims I was working with that summer. On this particular day there were two events at opposite ends of the city I attended. The first, in the middle of the day was the open-air funeral prayer in Summerfield Park, Winson Green for the three 'martyrs' who had been killed when a car mowed them down in the street on 10

August at the height of the Summer 2011 unrest. Later that evening, I was invited to an Iftari (fast breaking) dinner on Coventry Road in Small Heath – a busy predominantly Asian but increasingly African and Middle Eastern commercial street lying between the two areas that were the focus of Project Champion (The Spycams Affair) a year earlier. Below I aim to discuss the different significance these two events had in Muslim Birmingham, which symbolised the contested nature of identity politics among Muslims I was working with.

That week had been an intense one for the city's black and Asian populations. The deaths of the three young men, Haroon Jahan, Shazad Ali and Abdul Musavir had gripped the national imagination. Rumours were spreading about black youth being responsible. These associations were easily drawn given the areas troubled histories of 'race' and policing. The Handsworth 'riots' of 1985 were a first expression of breakdown in relations between young people, particularly black youth and the police in the area (Benyon & Solomos 1997, 1998). Against a backdrop of high unemployment, poor housing provision, inadequate schooling and racial hostility, their existed a deep sense of injustice and disaffection among the areas black and Asian communities toward the local authorities and public agencies, which came to be expressed in violent reaction (West Midlands County Council 1986). Similar to then, mainstream media commentaries racialised the events of summer 2011 seeking to explain the tension in terms of inter-ethnic rivalry between the city's black and Asian populations. This had become a familiar mantra in both official and popular discourses since the 1985 Handsworth riots and the 2005 Lozells disturbances, which happened not far from where the three men were killed. Therefore, some were expecting urban violence to become a self-fulfilling prophecy on the streets of Birmingham that summer.

Tariq Jahan, father of Haroon, one of the three young men killed, was famously heralded for preventing an outbreak of violence through his emotional televised appeals to the city's young Asian Muslims to refrain from seeking any redress to the deaths. Tariq subsequently became the public face of grief and measured response. His fatherhood and his Muslimness were reconstructed from earlier images of him as

a bodyguard to the demonised founder of the radical group Hizb-ut-Tahrir, Omar Bahkri, into the spectacle of a 'good Muslim'[55]. I encountered Tariq a number of times at public events and noted how his new found public stature had made him amenable to Prevent (the UK government's initiative to tackle violent extremism) and Muslim charities who co-opted his grief, turning it into opportunities for engaging Muslims to give and to believe in a different Muslim sensibility; one where injury did not straightforwardly translate into rage and violence.

This was a time when news media was saturated with the crisis in Syria. There were debates about whether the UK should intervene in Syria and how. The decision taken by the government not to intervene militarily and instead commit to humanitarian effort was received well if not with a tinge of scepticism by Muslims I was working with. There was already significant charitable and humanitarian work going on across Muslim Birmingham. I encountered college and university aged Muslims (many women) engaged in bucket collections on local high streets as well as around the city centre. Muslims my age (mainly men) were embarking in convoy's taking old ambulances and lorries packed with all sorts of materials to Syria. Tariq Jahan had recently visited Syria to deliver aid and had now been asked to speak publicly about his experiences in the hope that his testimony might dissuade young impressionable Muslims from going over there for the wrong reasons. Muslim gut feeling was being harnessed here toward cultivating a different sort of sensibility, a muted politics of protest that channelled hurt toward 'civilised' outcomes. Thus, it appeared useful for Birmingham City Council and a number of Muslim charities to officially enlist Tariq Jahan in their campaigns as he appeared to be a conduit to the Muslim 'community' at large. This resembled a bypassing of traditional political authority usually embodied in the Asian elder type figure, 'community' representative and local councillor who were starkly invisible in the media and official fanfare around these events.

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[55] The New Statesman ran a feature article on Tariq Jahan based on an interview he gave to journalist Mehdi Hasan. 22 August 2011 "I don't see a broken society".

For a moment, in the figure of Tariq Jahan, the politics of identity relating to Muslim Birmingham was represented anew. We were witnessing a changed terrain of where politics happens and how it was embodied, in contrast to South Asian political representation that has been based on ethnic affinities understood through the biraderi system – a network of largely males who delivered bloc votes in wards containing sizeable numbers from the same ethnic group. De-linked from the traditional spaces of ward boundaries and ethnic groupings that have been the usual frame for thinking Muslim identity and 'community', the power to represent and affect Muslim emotions became vested in an individual and an event. Tariq Jahan was a new conduit to aggrieved and marginalised communities whose symbol and occasional person could be co-opted into semi-formal processes when the authorities desired. Yet, the incorporation of Tariq Jahan into the formal sphere of 'community' politics by the authorities was also an example of 'old politics' at work. It reflected the persistence of culturalised ideas of Muslim community as being foreclosed by unchanging tradition that vests authority in dogma and masculinised authority[56]. It, therefore, represented merely another moment in the decades long history of processes that have shaped racialised political identities in the city, similar to what Kundnani (2001) noted in relation to the 2001 unrest in Oldham where the "state's response to earlier unrest had been to nurture a black elite which could manage and contain anger from within the ranks of black communities" (ibid 2001: 108).

Muslims' development or evolution into liberal democratic values such as democracy has long been seen as stunted because of such paternalism. As Massad (2015) masterfully reveals, however, this discourse has not been a stable or linear one. There have been examples in history of restive Muslims opposing colonialism or seeking pan-Islamism that have prompted orientalists to adopt a pluralist opinion of Muslims as existing in different guises. While some have fixated on Islam and Muslims as wedded to tradition and, therefore, as static, others have favoured the idea of many 'Islams'; thus making the religion and its adherents amenable to being

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[56] Prior to the scare of 'homegrown' terrorists in the wake of the London bombings, engaging Muslims through male elders has been the *de jure* way of doing business with Muslims (Akhtar 2012)

liberalised (Massad 2015). This attitude has carried through into contemporary ambitions to manage the revival of Islam through the use of different idioms. Rather than ideological the opposition has become cultural employing liberal themes such as 'rights of women' democracy and freedom of speech (Massad 2015: 74).

Massad notes how contemporary US and European government's concerns with the way the 'future' of Islam may pan out for their liberal secular polities has led them to cultivate 'moderate' Muslims (Massad 2015: 72-76). Others too have astutely uncovered the practical forms these efforts take in the form of major US foreign policy initiatives pushed by think tanks like RAND (Mahmood 2006) to cultural diplomacy in the popular Muslim nasheed and hip-hop scene (Adi 2014):

> Thus it appears that Western and American cultural and political commitments to democracy are as malleable as the "Islam" that they seek to mobilise for different strategic ends. This change of tactics reflects what Foucault described as the "tactical polyvalence of discourse", which includes "a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies. (Massad 2015: 84)

Thus Massad draws us to an irony at the heart of the Muslim question, that while the de-essentialisation of Islam is seen as important for assimilating Muslims into European civilisation, new forms of culturalisation are relied on to continue orientalist ambitions. In this chapter I acknowledge how a paternalistic approach to managing Muslims, as an unruly population, is worked through extra legal measures that Muslims are subjected to (Kundnani 2009, Kapoor 2013 et al). I also suggest it is important to ask what people who were left outside or deliberately sought to evade these frameworks of power and representation might do.

Working Differently

At the Iftari dinner on the evening of the funeral I was struck by how little interest there was among people present toward the unrest that had just gripped the nation and stunned thousands of Muslims across the city and nation. No one there that

evening had attended the funeral for the three "martyrs", while 20,000 others had[57]. Bilal, one of the organisers of that evening's event remarked sarcastically in relation to the recent urban unrest in Birmingham:

> Muslims don't do riots you see, we do more crazy stuff, we blow up things or terrorise people and places, that's the narrative about us isn't it? (Bilal)

He was trying to humour me while also making a point at the same time. Although Muslims have been implicated in earlier episodes of urban unrest, for example, the 2001 Northern riots and even the 2005 Paris banlieues riots, which was dubbed 'the French intifada' (Dikec 2007) using nomenclature borrowed from the Palestinian resistance, Bilal's point was suggestive of how the sensationalism surrounding Muslims has prompted representations of them in new terms of 'terrorist' and 'fundamentalist' rather than in racial terms as has been synonymous with urban unrest involving ethnic minorities in the UK.

Speaking to a number of others present at the Iftari dinner, I pieced together an impression that urban unrest was seen as a 'race' thing and that Muslims, because they were marked by their religion could not be written into the commentary around those events. Muslims fell outside narratives of 'race and disorder' they felt:

> You see, they tried to draw us into it [the frame] by saying that there's gonna be violence between us and the blacks, because Muslims are seen as violent fanatics right, but that didn't happen, obviously because of Tariq Jahan but also because it was never really gonna happen anyway was it. There's other important stuff we need to be doing (Bilal)

These sentiments also played into confusion around how Muslims were or ought to be represented:

> We don't know whether those guys were killed because they were Muslims. I mean who knows? It's probable, because they had probably come out of the mosque and were chilling out before going home, you know it's a summers night, people know that Muslims are gonna be out on the street that time of night after prayers. If you live in them areas you know. The problem is we

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[57] http://www.theguardian.com/uk/gallery/2011/aug/18/london-riots-birmingham

> can't even claim it was a racist attack against Muslims because there's no such thing. (Abdul)

The disquiet also signalled that these Muslims saw themselves outside representations encoded through 'race', and as a consequence outside concomitant fantasies about inter-ethnic violence. At the same time they were unsure about what to do in the face of racism as it was pronounced in new ways against Muslims. If there were any outlets for action it was initiatives like *Tell MAMA*[58] that was criticised for its close links to government. While Muslims were invisible as a category that could seek recourse in racial terms, they were hyper-visible in racialized discourses. What troubled them, therefore, was that anti-discrimination initiatives that responded to this hyper-visibility relied on a construction of the figure of the Muslim *without* concomitant political basis (i.e. the racialization that produced the troubled figure of the Muslim was denied a logic for defence based on that racial demarcation). The ghostly presence of the figure of the Muslim (Tyrer & Sayyid 2012) resulted in uncertainty, which led many Muslims to be sceptical about a political space (in mainstream terms) that was truly open to them. Muslim hurt could be exploited but not converted into action against anti-discrimination they felt they could believe in. Among people I was working with, there existed thus, ambivalence about the virtues of political organising around race or religion.

At the Iftari dinner a number of Muslims felt that the Birmingham episode of the riots had valorised the figure of the injured Muslim instead of political action to address structural issues around discrimination and over-policing that dogged everyday Muslim life. I will consider examples of responses to this below when I discuss the types of work people engaged in to redress this dissafection. It was felt that Muslims only existed in spectacular moments and in relation to death and destruction, when actually it was more mundane issues that were of concern to those around the table that evening. The nature of discrimination facing Muslims was changing and this was affected by the lack of recognition about the Muslim question combined with ineffective representation to be able to deal with it as a

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[58] http://tellmamauk.org

result. The exclusions generated by the formal public sphere that patronised Muslims based on a politics of representation approach, prompted critical sentiments toward 'the game' or 'the system', which I will explore below.

In an interview some months after the unrest, Q - a self-proclaimed 'community activist' who was also the West Midlands coordinator for an independent Muslim run national campaign to tackle Islamophobia - stated that he was aware of an inquiry that had been initiated by the city council in the aftermath of the unrest but that he did not expect it to deliver much:

> You see the thing is the council is sponsoring that inquiry and they are gonna direct the people who they are paying to do the review to certain sections of the community, who aren't really gonna say anything challenging. Or they are gonna be people who aren't relevant, because they aren't doing anything in the communities, they're just groups who have been around a long time and are part of the city council's consultations. They're not going to come and talk to us because we're going to make noise about action we're already taking to tackle discrimination and issues affecting our youth and community, which ultimately will embarrass them because its really the job of the council to be doing these things. They're just interested in patching together a story about what went on during the riots, to say that they looked into it and after that it's business as usual. (Q)

Similarly, Jalal, whom I met at the Hubb held sceptical attitudes toward his local councillors. He lived on a street where covert cameras had been installed as part of Project Champion. Through his involvement in the resistance to the Spycams he had observed with disappointment the role his local councillors played around the time:

> Councillors apparently were consulted about it. So they told them basically that there's going to be a camera scheme and it's going to be about fighting crime and anti-social behaviour and we're going to encourage business in the area...even though there was some scepticism, in reality they [Councillors] never really chased up. They didn't do their job properly. (Jalal)

Jalal had an idea of what the councillors should have done:

> So here's an issue that you could roll with. You know what I mean? Now you could say look, our communities are being targeted, we are Muslims, we're being targeted this is a classic right wing hysteria you know racism feeding in, targeting Muslims all of the buzz words, key words and they flopped, they didn't do it. (Jalal)

The role of official representatives of Muslims and parts of the city they lived in who participated in what people saw as the public life of the city, was viewed critically by many Muslims I worked with. They saw the public sphere as inclusive of only certain Muslim sensibilities and politics, largely those enacted in a way that represented religion in a domesticated or personalised fashion. Official community figures, be they local politicians or individuals who headed up organisations in the name of local areas or people, were criticised for embodying non-belonging and for their complicity in reinforcing the alterity of Muslims in areas of their long term settlement (Back et al 2009). Although they were not seen as architects of policies that produced problems for Muslims, they were seen as people who legitimated processes such as the surveillance of Muslims and worse, as actors who helped erect and sustain ideologies and representations of Muslims that reinforced their marginality and deviance. Thus, they helped normalise divisions and racial politics in the city.

The dispersal of power to represent and control Muslims, were two examples that I encountered in my fieldwork (Tariq Jahan as representative and the 'Spycams' as controlling). These issues also reflected something about the way Muslim politics was 'laid out' across the city; in terms of where power was believed to be concentrated and where it operated. The representative power of the figure of an injured Muslim male along with new regimes of surveillance and control also created new avenues of interaction, new surfaces upon which negotiation and resistance could be enacted[59]. As John Allen suggests with regards to the shifting spatial domains where power can be found: "mediated relationships of power multiply the possibilities for political engagement at different times and spaces" (2004: 25).

In the following sections of this chapter I will draw on encounters with socially active Muslims in the city. Some of these were following introductions others were

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[59] O'Toole et al (2013) note the move toward a more complex 'democratic constellation' of representation in which a range of local and national actors have entered the arena to 'speak for' Muslims. Here I am concerned with the symbolic power of representations as transmitted through media and popular discourses at the time.

arranged as follow-up meetings and some were spontaneous interactions, which occurred while I was present at an event or socialising with others during the course of my fieldwork. This social action, I argue, could not be mapped and caught in the regimes of representation and control that hung over Muslim Birmingham. These include popular representations of the 'good Muslim' discussed above, as well as official or governmental concerns with 'extremists' discussed earlier. Further, I will suggest that these forms of social or civic action were not always conscious efforts but a consequence of the impermeable mainstream public sphere where such sociality was felt to be out of place; because it could not be officially represented as a result of being enacted by obscure figures not patronised by the system and, therefore, recognised.

Muslims being social

Aaliya, whom I had got to know through my time spent at the Hubb was the other organiser of that evenings Iftari dinner. She and Bilal had invited 25 others as well as me through a Facebook message to: *'Break fast, pray and mingle with like-minded others'*. There were people present from different parts of the city, professional backgrounds, ages, denominations, male and female and all south Asian. Not everybody knew each other, which was part of the purpose; to connect people with others and socially interesting things that were going on. Aaliya suggested to me that this kind of event was part of an expanded range of activities young Muslims were partaking in nowadays:

> From my experience, university was all about going to the cinema and going to restaurants, it's the safest thing you can do. Now what I see a lot of girls do is get involved with voluntary organisations, Islamic Relief, Al-Kauthar or whatever. They get involved in these things and that's their way of socialising as well so they meet like-minded people, they volunteer or go to charity dinners or Snowdonia challenges. But that's not everyone, that's a group of people who are active in the community. (Aaliya)

Aaliya shed light on how this was a way for different people to mix freely while keeping it *halal* at the same time. Gole (2013) in her assessment of how European Muslims alter the public sphere around them comments on how the adoption of

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halal goes beyond being a static label for what is permissible in religion to being "..understood as permission, a lawful extension into new areas of life and pleasure that Muslims seek to enjoy" (ibid: 6). Thus Muslims are able to penetrate newer realms of life including consumer worlds where they mimic mainstream consumer trends in food, leisure and fashion branding them in new halal terms and opening up markets and spaces of leisure and consumption at the same time (Sametoglu 2015, Yassin 2013). In the case of people I was working with, expanded boundaries as such also allowed them to reimagine conventional concerns such as gender relations enabling them to fashion new dynamics where men and women were not separate and one no more empowered than the other.

The atmosphere at the Iftari dinner was remarkably open, with people expecting to gain something from being in the setting that evening. Here I met Q whom I would go on to spend time with over the next year as he organised events and networked as part of his role as West Midlands coordinator of an independent Muslim run national campaign to tackle Islamophobia and generate Muslim engagement in political action. Through Q I met a number of other mainly young enterprising Muslims involved in volunteering with different Islamic charities. I spent time at events Q had set up as part of his work to negotiate what he described as the tensions between being 'others', newer generations and wanting to be practically Muslim and positively political. Q's work, as I will describe below, was built up through distinct practices and the construction of associational forms that maintained loose links with the political activities of the older generation as well as the 'community' engagement initiatives of the city council.

The Iftari dinner was a regular event in the group's calendar. I would attend at least two more over the next few months. Besides being a way of keeping in touch, I noticed how these events were used by those present to trade and exchange information about different social concerns. People exchanged information about charity events going on and activist stuff taking place locally. In the overlap of bodies and people present that evening (the event went on for at least five hours) everyone

got to speak with one another and were thus able to exchange some sort of 'social good'.

Speaking to Aaliya that evening she explained to me that the spaces in which this network met and the people chosen to be present were selected for their ability to affect 'positive vibes' and be generative of good for others present. According to her, being in proximity to others who were trusted and of the same ilk generated happy or positive feelings; something she thought would drive us to *"do good things out there"*. Ahmed (2010) in her discussion about objects or things that are associated with making people happy suggests that where and when these appear also affects feelings among those present (Ahmed 2010: 33). Individuals themselves like objects may be a source of happiness, which in turn becomes enhanced by the context in which they appear or are encountered. By virtue of being invited that night and being part of Aaliya's network, individuals were already imbued with qualities of like-mindedness. In arriving at this distinction, Aaliya and her co-host Bilal had differentiated us from other political or politicised Muslims around the city. The non-feelings toward the riots and the raced relations represented in the politics of identity emerging from that episode were the dividing line it seemed. All the people present shared an orientation toward doing politics *differently*.

This orientation was on display that evening and being nurtured through encounters between those present. There were no business cards being exchanged and no ideological or dogmatic discussions taking place where people's affiliations with a mosque or active group being made apparent. Social bonds among those present were structured by hyper-local ritual practices such as giving charity (zakat) or praying. Whether it was daily or weekly for the Friday *Jumah* prayer: this ritual practice enabled people to become familiar with one another. Following the Iftari dinner I would later encounter people I had met there at mosques, a funeral and various charity events. The feeling of solidarity generated at those moments would help to confirm and extend our friendships. For example people who had promised to meet me for an interview would remember after seeing me at a mosque and, then, offer to set a time for us to meet - with more conviction than earlier promised.

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At the same time people suggested to me that pious action was not confined to the mosque and social action not restricted to what they could do with an organisation. People who were committed members of religious institutes (for example, K below) or those in organisations like the Young Muslims or Islamic Society of Britain were found mingling in social events looking for further action they might tag onto. Here people worked to build new spheres and transform existing practices as a result of new encounters, reflecting a broader shift in how politics is enacted, which are less ideological and collectivist yet highly networked and involving alternative 'grammars of action' (O'Toole & Gale 2010) or feelings (Millington 2016).

New networks

I recognised here that people did not like to be forced to conform to values associated with their faith in the monastic way. They sought something open, because they believed religion carried on outside of the mosque. They professed a notion of religion that was not contained by rituals but was not left unbound either. Bayat (2007, 2009) commenting on Islamic inspired social activism in the Middle East suggests that what characterises the social life of urban Muslims shut out of formal politics is the practice of 'informal life' – "a social existence characterised by autonomy, flexibility and pragmatism, where survival and self-development occupy a central place". (Bayat 2007: 580). In such scenarios people are pragmatic, they make use of different strategies and contacts in diverse places and struggles both governmental and not, so long as they chime with central objectives. I experienced something similar among Muslims I was working with in anti-discrimination campaigns, charities and local schools where the concern for official Muslim recognition seemed only to be secondary. Primarily their concern was with making a place for day-to-day Muslim life, expressions and aspirations of which were not couched in the language of identity politics, but were instead a range of embodied and social practices that expressed involvement and making of a public space that demonstrated their 'integration' or 'right to the city'.

Their competence in negotiating the city and penetrating parts of it outside of the mosques, ghettos and enclaves associated with Muslims, helped challenge ideas about Muslims as dispossessed. They made sense of the city through popping up in different places, utilising different spaces and not confining themselves to places marked as Muslim, thus suggesting that seeing urban Muslims as marginal to the city is misleading. This climate of already existing things going on and well-entrenched ideas, as well as people symbolising what normative Muslim social action was, prompted individuals I worked with to anticipate what kind of response their activities might attract. In turn it enabled them to be reflexive and survey whether there was room for them. It also set them apart from the existing Muslim political scene dominated by associations of mosques, biradaris or male Muslim councillors. Q remarked to me:

> See when I go around and speak to people as part of my networking, some of them get surprised that I'm wasting my time doing that and that I should just start doing the work I want to do, which they assume is the same they're doing. It's funny, one guy said to me just get yourself set up and leave the networking for when the council organises something for us groups to get together. That just revealed to me how they were in the hands of the council. I told him that many of us don't like those events because they're just talking shops. The real work happens out here, and I've managed to do so much by just meeting and teaming up with others in my own time and at events like this dinner. (Q)

As Q took on his new role as midlands coordinator of a national anti-Islamophobia and Muslim engagement lobby group he would regularly hold small events to attract an 'audience' as a means to find out what was going on around the city. He would also meet regularly with his counterparts in London, Leicester and Bradford to build attachments across scales of the local, city and nation. Simone describes such "commonality" among people with disparate interests as "a platform to accommodate certain measures of risk in order to reposition themselves in relationship to various prospective economic opportunities" (Simone 2014: 23). Q and most people present at the Iftari dinners were aged between 20-28. Not all were graduates from university and were in professional jobs that were uncertain due to being fixed term contracts. They could, therefore, be distinguished from the

upwardly mobile or middle classes who have been criticised as forming the professional sector of ethnic minority representatives in town halls following the disturbances in the 1980s (Kundnani 2001, Anthias, Yuval Davis & Cain 1992: 112-140). For these Muslims I worked with, networking, volunteering and building social contacts were viewed as a key resource in an economic and political climate for Muslims marked by precarity.

Elsewhere, in small, temporary one-off encounters people worked to affect each other to take on a new responsibility or join a campaign. Sometimes this was done through exploring a person's family heritage from Pakistan, discovering a connection (usually between father's friends) and then playing on that affinity. I encountered this at one of Q's Islamophobia awareness raising events. I was sat with a group of core volunteers who were attempting to recruit newcomers. A common approach to build affiliations was through ethnic affinity. This worked to create a sense of security, which mattered for some in a hostile time and place for Muslims. There were certain links, those of ethnicity, that were utilised to generate a foundation upon which to build further alliances and projects. As Back et al (2009) note, expressions of Islamic political identity in the European metropolis involve the juxtaposition of diasporic south Asian identities alongside the cultural traffic of globalised religion (ibid: 4). In this sense it would not be out of place to fall back on associations with the homeland in the context of pursuing something bigger. The networks that emerged were grounded into other connections too while also being bounded by new rules, for example, events and spaces where people met were based on invitation only.

In the same room I would meet people involved in different 'community' projects, which a decade or so ago would have been competitors for public funding in the areas of youth work, mentoring or drug rehabilitation projects. These all appeared in the same room finding common ground in concerns around Muslim representation. For example, discussing and agreeing how Citizen Khan caricatured the Muslim community and that no one really knew anyone who's house resembled Khan's or who lived such a colourful life:

Lets face it if there *were* people like that (Citizen Khan) in our communities, don't you think we'd all know about it and they'd be the butt of all jokes in the area. You know, there's a lot of us (Muslims) here who are doing well out there in our careers and business and community work, but none of that gets reported. (Taz)

Here people coalesced around representations of elitism that bothered them:

What I'm saying is be a Muslim but don't wear it on your sleeve in the sense that don't talk about it or only do Muslim related things. You know doctors are Muslims but you don't walk in and say I'm a Muslim doctor, you just do your job, they know you're a Muslim, you look like one, you've got a beard or a headscarf but that doesn't matter, it's your actions that matter. A lot of people think it's enough to just look like a Muslim, it's about being open-minded and being supportive. (Aaliya)

In contrast to what were perceived as elitist, dogmatic and out-dated practices of established Muslim organisations and mosques, which projected their expertise and authority; captivation and motivation were utilised by key people within networks to win over others to their causes. The overlaps between people and social activities meant that the power to act was multiplied. This meant there were more possibilities for political action in different settings and moments. People brought with them skills and knowledge from their different professions and sectors, which included businessmen, health professionals, teachers, lawyers, council workers, 'community entrepreneurs' and youth workers. People from these different backgrounds criss-crossed each other to form relationships and to mobilse around campaigns or novel charity events going on or planned in the near future. Q's events were a prominent example of this. They were also about negotiating the various tensions that arose for Muslims as 'others' and newer generations and how to be practically Muslim and positively political through distinctive practices and constructing associational forms. What appeared to be key was that these mobilisations always sought to be independent of government or Islamic institutions but did not negate or dismiss them. There were different layers of engagement where groups came together sporadically some having an organisational link while others did not:

Really I like to help and support the masjid not work in or with them. We did a conference on 'how to create positive change'. As the forthcoming year was being seen as a very gloomy year, high unemployment, Islamophobia etcetera we wanted to set a positive agenda. We got mosques, churches, police and the council together to set a positive agenda. We wanted them to see that they have a positive asset in the diverse community. It was a place to share information and knowledge about things going on. If you know you can signpost someone to something going on by groups like ours here, why would they need to create them [services]? Go and add value to them instead, that was our message to the council. (Q)

The range of individuals involved with their various backgrounds, interests and ambitions provided a "honeycomb for politics" (Allen 2004: 29) where others could also join to modify and add effect to their goals. Allen discusses this type of more diffuse workings of power (in his case governmental) as it operates away from centralised authorities or peripheries and is mediated through "networked interaction at points distant in space and time" (ibid). I adopt this analogy to challenge the workings of Muslim identity politics in the city and how these are centralised in certain figures and institutions from which political action flows linearly toward communities where it might be appropriated or displaced. Instead, the Muslim networks I have described above were porous entities that sought to affect change in a number of spheres mainly related to the lived reality of life for Muslims in the city, and occasionally abroad through the work of charities.

The Muslims I worked with in these networks saw possibilities for politics in more diffused and dispersed arrangements of people and place. Because power and in this case politics of identity were considered to operate through fixed forms and domains, a network was less easily graspable:

You see we get over-looked a lot because we're not your conventional local organisation. We don't seek funding so we're not out there lobbying councillors and rubbing shoulders the way they [statutory agencies] expect community groups to do. (Q)

The informal nature of these networks meant that decisions could be made and implemented in quick time. This was particularly important given the rapidly changing pace of issues affecting Muslims. I encountered people doing anti-

discrimination work in different ways, without the slogans and in more fluid and diffuse ways, going against normative trajectories of politics and mainstream BME public life. This also involved developing different spheres of activity (Muslim governors, for example) targeting the issues differently (under achievement of school children as indirectly experienced discrimination) through setting up a network of concerned teaching professionals, parents and concerned Muslims that also in the process became racialised in the Trojan Horse affair.

This revealed the way racism had morphed and, therefore, the politics of representing Muslims needed to become unbounded and generated through new means. Identity as belonging to some sort of alternative sense of Muslimness was felt and generated through being 'involved' in various things that overlapped with Muslim futures. The notion of investing bodily efforts – being active, doing stuff physically – rather than merely representing or being represented by a slogan, seemed to be key. It materialised sentiments and allowed people to express and 'live out' their faith (McGuire 2008).

Charities – gaining blessings and worldly skills

Volunteering for one of the big charities in the city was a common activity for many young Muslims in their early 20's. Q had also experimented with this. According to him the large charities had cultivated a scene:

> I used to volunteer for Islamic Relief for two and half years years. There was a core volunteer team and we used to train other volunteers. It's positive that people are active and not just Muslims at home. However, a lot of these IR work and charities is some of their environments are very sociable, free mixing and open, and it attracts that kind of individual. Young people have got a lot of free time and energy they want to burn. (Q)

> It's a positive avenue for young people. You'd rather invest your time in that then other avenues (absence of other anti-discrimination avenues). It keeps you on a positive straight line in life. You learn things, you develop interpersonal skills, you learn about yourself, about team work. You learn these skills without knowing. (Q)

The large Muslim charities in Birmingham brought in young people to help at fund raising events that occurred throughout the year and in elaborate settings such as banqueting halls dotted around the city. These were often owned by local Muslim businessmen who regenerated dis-used warehouses and factories on the periphery of the city centre in a gentrification of new sorts. The young people I worked with who had been involved in volunteering confessed that their involvement with charities was usually short-lived, pursued also as a social activity to try meet others and a way of gathering experience and interpersonal skills that were vital and prized in mainstream society, if they were to have any chance of a job.

Shakur was like many others who had volunteered with a number of Islamic charities. He was 21 and having chosen not to go to university he had instead developed a portfolio of marketing ventures that linked mainstream businesses with new constituencies of Muslims through social media. For him volunteering was considered a valuable social activity, which enabled him to exploit the skills and networks he was constantly developing in his business. Muslim individuals and organisations were a key part of his supply-chains and markets.

Through Shakur I also met *Project Akhira* (the Hearafter) a group of young women involved in fund raising and support work for different charities in novel and independent ways. They organized pop-up style events at different venues across the city throughout the year. Miriam and Kouser, the two Bangladeshi women who ran this venture, were recent graduates with full-time jobs. They had a vast network of followers whom they interacted with regularly through social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Youtube. Miriam told me how their networks were dependent on these contemporary forms of media. For example, they mentioned the case of a local Muslim woman who had established her own Youtube channel doing 'Hijab tutorials'. She had amassed a following of over 1oo,ooo, which, then, enabled her to generate income from Youtube from her videos. Miriam and Kouser would invite such popular Muslim woman to their events and announce this on their Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts to generate turn out. This approach was

recognized and exploited by Muslim charities and dessert parlors in the city who would enlist Miriam and Kouser for occasional promotional events to generate new customers and exposure.

This expertise enabled Project Akhira to act independently and exist outside the control of large charities and to determine their own methods. It, therefore, empowered them to introduce new terms for engaging in charitable action, particularly in opposition to certain charitable leaders they considered corrupt, unprofessional or strict in terms of ideology and dogma at a time of heightened skepticism within the Muslim population toward giving to charities, prompted by accountability and transparency concerns. It also reflected the making of a zone that overlapped with numerous others. Project Akhira's activities were multiple, including hosting talks, setting up 'meet the fans' sessions for Muslim celebrities (mostly young trend setters with their own YouTube channels) as well as organising charity fairs. Project Akhira was fluid, dynamic and isamorphous incorporating various different elements of the Muslim scene at the same time.

The loose nature of this network also meant that people of different levels of Islamic commitment could be part of it. At their events, not all people had met each other, or would meet each other. People were pragmatic. The one thing that appeared as a common thread was that women felt safe; it offered them a credible outlet to be active and social in the face of cultural restrictions. Embodied practices such as collecting for charity, baking cakes, organizing family fun days, going on sponsored walks and other outdoor pursuits were all things that affected certain emotional and spiritual developments in those present; embodied practices that "link the material aspects of peoples lives with the spiritual" (McGuire 2008: 13).

People practiced care and concern for equality and social justice through these practices. In the process they challenged ideas about religion as a logical choice based on volition and cognition alone. Events were filled with nasheeds[60], wedding

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[60] Islamic themed songs

style arrangements and dinners in elegant banqueting halls, where giving was encouraged through long drawn out emotional speeches and motivational speakers billed to headline events.

Roxy a regular at Project Akhiras events, was in her mid 20's and working full time as an assistant psychologist. I knew her from her volunteering with various charities and as a core volunteer on Q's Islamophobia awareness raising campaign:

> R: I started volunteering because I was sitting at home doing nothing. I got to know so many people and went to all these fun events. I always met my target of raising £100.
>
> A: I guess you could get your family and friends to make that up
>
> R: no actually, I'd just meet loads of strangers around where I live. I 'd say please donate I'll make dua that you get a really good wife". People always responded to that

It was these small acts that made up her efforts. Roxy was also an avid Bollywood fan who adored Amithab Bhachan. "Even though he's got links to Hindu nationalists?" someone once asked her. To which she replied:

> In the film Cooli, he plays a Muslim you know and he reads the Kalima (declaration of faith). I think whoever reads that comes into the fold of Islam you know."

Here Roxy was projecting elastic terms of belonging to her faith. Unlike the hardline Jihadi frames that circulated in mainstream media, small acts informed the way religion was thought of and practiced. This "lived religion" (McGuire 2008) was made up of many personal concerns people like Roxy had, largely social justice oriented. Some activists even complained that Muslim political identitarians did not like the work of these ordinary Muslims because it involved a realm of activity that could not easily be contained in their normative political structures, which were chiefly about lobbying for Muslim recognition or inclusion rather than action to affect Muslim lives at ordinary levels.

Of the scores of Muslim charities I became aware of in the city, only a few could be said to be controlled by 'Islamists'[61]. Considerable activity was organised by non-Islamist pious Muslims, volunteers and professionals who did things in their free time or emerged and followed market rationale[62]. This was echoed in the commodification of Islam as expressed in literature, fashion, music, food, gifts, decorations, travel and 'Islamic holidays' and often visible at charity events. I noticed that the market for Islamic educational and cultural goods and services had grown significantly during the course of my fieldwork. As I interacted with Muslims across Sparkbrook and neighbouring Small Heath I observed how shops that closed would soon re-open selling something to do with Islam. Nurseries catering to Muslims and solicitors firms offering Islamic solutions in will-writing or family law were also a growing feature of the Sparkbrook streetscape. These not only point to an emerging Muslim economic sphere but also provided jobs, volunteering activities and social outlets for ordinary Muslims. For many these were not about religious obligation but were answering a market need. A number of Islamic schools in the city, for example, were dismissed as 'Islamic' only in name[63].

The city of (and for) Muslims

> "In cities there are always different kinds of actors—collective, institutional, associational—looking to use the city as a way in which to do something."
> (Simone 2011b)

As I noted in the literature review, the movement generally associated with

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[61] Commenting on the political participation of young Muslims in East London, Back et al (2009) afford more importance to the role of Islamic consciousness or ideology when they suggest that: "groups of young people whose main organizing principle is determined by Islamic perspectives that are in part about the emergence of forms of consciously political Islam but are equally about what it means to act as a good citizen within contemporary society" (2009: 4).

[62] On 20 July 2013 The Times newspaper published an article entitled "Muslims 'are Britain's top charity givers'. http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/faith/article3820522.ece This scale of giving to charity is mirrored in the number of Muslim charities that exist and was an issue many Muslims I worked with commented on as resembling a market place.

[63] In February 2015 Al Hijrah school, Birmingham's largest and long established Muslim School was publicly dismissed for financial irregularities prompted criticism among people I worked with about its commitment to "Muslims and the faith". 'Troubled Al Hijrah School is £3 million in debt, council reveals' http://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/troubled-al-hijrah-school-3-8596141

minorities and Muslims in their earlier incarnation, as South Asians has been a linear one, in the context of them as diaspora groups; between homeland and here, or an elsewhere and here. In these accounts the emergence of Islam in the city and the arrival of Muslims in the city is a process of coming *into* the city from some outside, rather than it being something generated here. The missionary activities of south Asian led groups such as Tabliji jamaat are a key example (Sardar 2005).

Outside the traditional institutions or spaces of Islam in the city, however, people engaged in discussions that cut across generational and gender lines. For example while out raising money, doing charity walks, volunteering at events ushering people in, Bilal and others deliberated with each other about matters relating to their faith, the plight of Muslims and their future in the city. Questions about the correct direction in which to set out prayer mats, when prayer times coincided with an event or social gathering started off among the men in their all-male prayer space and carried over onto the dinner table involving women who were present too. I observed how such conversations about articles of faith would quickly morph into ones about women teachers becoming governors at schools and involving themselves in social and political action.

People encouraged others to become active in different civic and political activities going on around the city, motivating individuals to associate with causes or projects. These were not always aimed at Muslims. For example, K was the organiser of a 'feed the homeless' campaign. This was the social action arm of an Islamic Institute formed a few years earlier by a British born and trained Alim (religious instructor) in his late 30's. This institute attracted young Muslims who were interested in learning the traditional sciences of Islam but who were also socially and economically active in the city. The institute was based in an unused office block in Aston behind the Barton Arms pub where a group of young black men were filmed from a police helicopter allegedly shooting at the Police during the 2011 unrest. The institute had a reputation for being 'street', in terms of being able to connect with youngsters in a way other mosques and institutes could not.

Below is a transcript of a conversation I ended up having with K inadvertently while interviewing Jamila (in charge of recruiting volunteers) at Unity FM. K had come to the studios to promote the Homeless project and Jamila asked him to join our conversation:

> K: We're doing it (the Homeless project) as part of [name of Institute]. It's not just traditional scholarship; it's also about putting it into action..we give out food once a week in Birmingham city centre.
> Jamila: Because we did something similar for about two years. Every month one or two of my friends would cook and we would take the food to venue run by the Fire services outside the city entre.
>
> K: Yeah, what we did was we decided that we didn't want to reinvent the wheel so we'd work with somebody and learn the ropes then think about potentially doing something ourselves, so I contacted the sister (who works at SIFA Fireside) and I said let's not be the typical Muslim organisation and try to do everything, let's find out what's there and let's try to tap into it. Tried to tap into something and didn't get a response at all.
>
> Jamila: Really? They're not very good at getting back to you but I've found that Mary is one of the few people who is very good.
>
> K: If you could give me Mary's contact that would be fantastic because what we're saying is we've got the place, we've got the food….
>
> Ajmal: So whereabouts do you distribute the food?
>
> K: Behind central library. So we're there every week for the last eight months now. It's absolutely brilliant, subhanAllah, because the homeless guys don't feel intimidated eating. There's a seating place, there's nice lighting there, it doesn't smell at all, unless I'm just immune to it now. By Ladbrokes, do you know where?
>
> Ajmal: Did you have to get permission to do that?
>
> K: No no. you know I work for the Council so I was able to find out if there were any restrictions on using that public space…We did a collection in Ramadan and we raised enough money to do it for about one and a half years in one day. But mashaAllah because it's been so successful we're looking at doing it two days a week.
>
> Jamila: How many people do you feed?
>
> K: About 100…The difference is because we do it from an institute we take into account all the risks. So the hygiene and all that stuff and I'm very risk averse when it comes to giving food out, especially. So what we do is buy it

from a catering unit in sealed boxes so we're not touching the food so there's no liability so just thinking ahead and making sure you cover all the bases.

Ajmal: And what kind of food is it?

K: Chicken biryani, love it, they call it curry night!

K's Homeless project was not unique in the city but it was on a larger scale than what Jamila and another group of Christians were involved in. Through extending the network of people involved in his venture (donators, producers and packers of the food, volunteer distributors and other partners) K was able to expand his social action. It was underpinned by a desire to put his faith into action, yet at the same time it was more than just religion coming into the public domain. The project was an assemblage of material (human and non-human), organisational and ethical dimensions of faith (Lancione 2014, McFarlane 2011). It enabled K to 'live out' (McGuire 2008) what he believed. K's efforts were also more than just "moral selving", what Allahyari (2000) in her ethnography of two Christian charity ventures supporting the homeless in Sacramento, California describes as *"the work of creating oneself as a more virtuous, and often more spiritual, person"* (Allahyari 2000: 4). In taking to the streets with his professional skills and knowledge as advisor on housing affairs for the council coupled with an ethic of care derived from his faith, K and others were affected by the enterprise in ways that bolstered their attachment to the city. Through their weekly actions they affected the homeless clientele toward Muslims as well as Muslims toward belonging and moving around in the city.

K and Jamila were always looking to forge connections that might or might not lead to something bigger, but were utilised for the knowledge they brought about happenings around the city. I noticed that these 'provisional consolidations' (Simone 2015: 31) were important in a city where new things were happening to Muslims and where the social and political climate for Muslims was constantly evolving to affect what it was like to be a Muslim. This also explained why people I worked with did not settle or choose to affiliate themselves with any one formal political party or organisation. In such a climate pursuing a plurality of options was seen as a 'good bet'.

The charities and activities of volunteers charted above contributed to Muslim political action sprawling across city spaces, sometimes involving unlikely individuals and toward different ends. The social action that occurred across different parts of the city, sometimes in established places of community such as the Bordesley centre where a certain comfort was afforded, and then in newer, off the map times and spaces, which hinted at more experimental moves being made. This made for an unstructured, splintered and even "unglamorous urban experience" (Amin 2013). Meetings took place in cold buildings, deserted by other users and now appropriated by a more recent concern. This sociality was unsettled, unsure and ambiguous, yet it was oriented toward action.

From dinner people would flow onto shisha lounges or dessert parlours. These are a new and fast becoming entrenched phenomena in the city. Initially popular in the Balti triangle to capture the established footfall in that area, shisha lounges have spread out beyond the ethnic enclaves and taken root in the city's abandoned industrial units.[64] For the people I moved around with, their sense of neighbourhood was expanded through these manoeuvres – out of the ethnic enclave with its distinct economy and into parts of the city that were former employment areas of earlier generations. These areas now bustle with life throughout the day. High-end sports cars can be seen parked purposefully outside the entrance doors of venues from which the exotic smell of Arabian tobacco fused with fruits and quintessentially Euro-American soft drink flavours and neon lights give away the exuberance of a new trend in Muslim leisure and consumption. The linkages between different establishments – food, desserts, shisha – pointed to an expanded circuit of ethnic consumption. There seemed to be contiguity evident in the itinerary of the meetings I attended, where discussions had a different tone and tempo as we progressed through the evenings and venues.

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[64] This phenomenon is absent from the official narrative of re-birth of Digbeth; the city's newly celebrated chic quarter. An article in the Independent celebrated the 'resurgence' of some of Digbeth's eclectic architecture but totally missed the many new shisha lounges that have appropriated some of Digbeth's oldest and largest industrial buildings. http://independent-birmingham.co.uk/blogs/love-letter-to-digbeths-forgotten-architecture/

These new vernaculars of Muslims in the city also provoked different sentiments of excess, bad taste, 'detrimental to health' and as spaces of promiscuity. One female I worked with commented in relation to a particularly successful and always busy dessert parlour in the city: *"that place is like SingleMuslim.com in the public sphere, the virtual sphere of Muslim online dating brought into the public sphere".* Yet in this disjuncture agency was at work. These *surfaces* enabled relationships; they became "zones of a felt commonality or shared past and present." (Simone 2014: 28)[65]. They sutured reciprocities based not on obligations of those like biraderi or clan network that have for decades shaped the zones of political affiliation in the neighbourhood.

Talking about the city in terms of values of virtue, good and hope associated with Lefebvre and the powerful notion of 'right to the city' (Schmid 2012) does not encapsulate the type of Muslim life I encountered around the city. For Muslims there was an imagination that was different to laying claim simply to a 'right to the city'. Through their movements it was rather a 'right to be there', mess it up and traverse the city in nonsensical ways, irrationally. I encountered blasé attitudes among Muslims I worked with toward 'fitting in' with the third sector scene, and instead more a desire to work alongside it, overlapping with it, critiquing and co-opting it where it could provide a benefit to them. This did not fit the mould of straightforward BME citizenship that was normalized in the city by previous enactments of political identity by black and Asian people.

I encountered simultaneously critical and accommodating stances toward these structuring forces. Muslims I worked with did not all believe they should have to fall into being one or the other as represented in the debates about integration/assimilation, 'between two cultures' or being 'sell-outs'. All people I worked with were involved in mainstream secular activities whether as school teachers, students, self-employed artists, psychologists or NGO workers. They did

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[65] "Infrastructure then is not only the materialization of specific practices but a surface of interchanges and transactions that largely "discover' themselves, enacting their own potentialities in moments of unanticipated densities" (Simone 2014: 28).

not see being Muslim as a contradiction or as compromising their class, gender or ethnic identities. They also did not believe in their faith being privatised, compartmentalised or simplified. Instead they invoked their social action as a religious duty on the Islamic principle of *amr bi'l-ma'aruf* (enjoining the righteous).

Conclusion

The ordinary, everyday nature of Muslim sociality that I have described in this chapter contrasts with the spectacular, sensationalized and deeply politicised atmosphere that Muslims in cities like Birmingham are to be found in. In the figure of Tariq Jahan we witnessed political identity being vested in a new site, which while representing a shift in traditional political authority, was still fixed in a notion of moral authority expected to exercise a hold on Muslim consciouness. Instead, Muslims I was working with, in their social practices represented a disembodied notion of authority, taken out of particular spaces and bodies and into dispersed sites.

In this chapter I have described novel actions and practices that Muslims engaged in. Much of this I have suggested sought to exceed the capture of formal identity politics by operating outside the optics of government and religious institutions, although not always in antagonism with these. I have focused on how notions of injury, hurt and concern for the future were actualised, challenged and re-arranged through networks of sociality and action. In addition to the work that went into building relations and what emerged through interactions, outcomes were also shaped by the limited time and the ad-hoc nature of efforts people committed because of their day-to-day commitments of work. This meant there was a force and passion that underlined these encounters and subsequent ambitions. In part it also points to the impossibility of representing a Muslim subject position as a group in terms of 'identity politics', (Gole 2013, Mahmood 2009) or thinking them as a stance or position whose recognition or entry into a liberal democratic public sphere is negotiated through rational deliberation such as claims making for identity rights (Levey & Modood 2008; Dressler & Mandair 2011).

Chapter 6: Conclusion

> Living as a Muslim in a secular context means living in a state of constant reflexivity, in a perpetual coming-and-going between subjective piety, private life and day-to-day experiences. This pendular movement creates tensions, readjustments and renegotiations in various cultural, artistic and commercial domains. (Gole 2013: 6)

Capturing Muslim Birmingham life

This thesis opened with a discussion of Sparkbrook as a place marked by the presence of racialised minorities. I noted how the history and organisation of minority ethnic presence in the area presents a picture of segregated settlement and life marginal to that of the city as a whole. Certain imaginaries about minority ethnic life surface as a result of cartographies of old and new settlement. These can be read off census data, landmark and spectacular events, as well as patterns of political representation in which identity politics shape the terms and discourses of minority groups' presence in the broader public life of the city. I have considered how religion as a new site of difference has been mapped onto groups to be read through 'old' ethnicity, therefore, rationalising Muslimness in line with the logics of prevailing race relations management that codes difference in simplified terms to fit within an official paradigm of multiculturalism.

During the course of my fieldwork I experienced how official and popular representations of the area as one of Muslim 'community' could, then, be folded into broader concerns encapsulated in the Muslim question. I reflected on challenges this posed to me as an ethnographer interested in everyday life, and knowing how to move amidst the sensationalism while not getting subsumed within it. Amidst the cacophony of politics of representation, race-relations management and urban evolution relating to Muslim's presence in the city, I have sought to investigate how Muslims *live* this in a politically charged time and place. The way Muslims inhabit the city through creating connections across areas, ethnic groups and spaces of Muslim 'community' – both formal and informal – as well as being

visible and heard through their social and cultural practices, disrupt this received wisdom, I have suggested. I have tried to show how places, memories and frames of representation and governance are folded into new formations of belonging and non-belonging that speak a different sense of minority subjecthood than one, which informs the official narrative of multiculture in the city.

With Birmingham being my home and Sparkbrook a place I grew up in and passed through daily, meant I was positioned well in terms of familiarity with the field in which I was to conduct my research. However, I also ran the risk of muting other people's perceptions and experiences of Muslim Birmingham if I failed to listen (Back 2007: 159) and merely folded them into my subjectivity and accounts of place. I, therefore, attended to a number of sites and social practices where Muslim-making happened rather than just individuals to interview. My focus on space in a relational sense and the various tactics employed by people - be it a radio technology or everyday sociality and networking - led me to the *vitality* inherent to Muslim Birmingham life. Here I have hoped that my attunement of research methods to the nature and location of everyday Muslim life could be a practice of 'live sociology', which Back (2007: 165) makes a convincing case for in such 'dark' times for sociological research on messy and unglamorous social issues.

A key concern of my research has been to try understand Muslim identity and 'community' as it exists outside popular and sensational framings about them as a group. I noted some of the prevalent ways Muslims are addressed in the various literatures. For example, as a social category sitting alongside or rivalling ethnicity, as produced out of ethnicity or in opposition/clash to it. Another inescapable dimension of Muslim lives in the burgeoning literature is their foreclosure within social and political concerns as in discourses about extremism. In her study of pathologies surrounding young Asian men, Alexander (2000) suggested that the folk devil of 'the gang', revealed much about the way black and Asian communities were understood in policy and academic accounts. There was less space for ordinary and happy or 'celebratory' accounts of black and Asian lives in a climate where peer group, friendship or 'community' were ascribed through pathology and criminality

that defined 'the gang' (Alexander 2000: 222). Recognising some of the challenges presented by celebratory approaches to marginalised identities that sought to supplant older approaches, her study straddled both by "recognising the continued power of the old and the constrained impact of the new' (2000:243).

Working in a similar vein with the figure of the Muslim as the contemporary folk devil, this research leads me to suggest that what it means to be Muslim in Britain contemporaneously is to be figured out through exploring the discursivity between the various coordinates that go into making religion a new site of difference, rather than simply reading it off from essentialised notions of ethnicity and culture, as well as normative understandings of religion alone. In this thesis I have tried to show that how we make of what is particular about the Muslim experience in contemporary Britain – new Muslim identities – involves a new relation to the hegemonic categories and processes that work to frame the Muslim question and deliver the figure of the Muslim as we know it today, while also recognising and attending to the transgressions and disorder that interrupt possibilities of closure of these frames. This involves focusing on the lived reality of Muslim life in the cities, towns and spaces in which it unfolds – while at the same time avoiding a reduction of this to the conditions of those spaces and times alone.

Engaging with the Muslim question

As the quotation from Nilufer Gole above at the opening of this chapter suggests, Muslims are an entrenched and multifaceted phenomena in European public spheres. Gole also suggests that their presence is characterised by conflicts *as well as* interactions in the public sphere; making for controversy. She advances an approach to the Muslim question that does not see the visibility of Muslims, which is an inevitable consequence of their presence and participation in the public sphere, as one that should be marked by inevitable conflict - but by agonism. As Parekh too (2008) has argued the difference that Muslims represent on Europe's changing racial landscape is one that is misunderstood rather than one to be feared; it is Europe's

'unfamiliarity' (Parekh 2008: 22) with the character and language of Muslim's political and cultural expressions that leads to unease. The paradox at the heart of the Muslim question, then, is that the figure of the Muslim simultaneously interrupts liberal multiculturalism while also seeking official recognition within it[66] (Tyrer & Sayyid 2012, Modood 2007). In this light, the future oriented, *becoming* nature of Muslims I have uncovered through my ethnography could be interpreted as "accretion(s) of capacity and possibility" (Simone 2014: 28) where the traditions practiced by new Muslims are less easily co-optable in a politics of identity approach as they cannot be rationalised to fit within liberal multiculturalism that grants a reductive type of faith-based identity recognition in the public sphere. The voices and social practices of Muslims featured in this thesis point to a difference that is ordinary and living and interacting in public, one that desires to be identified yet evades capture in the hierarchies of official race-relations paradigms used to working with difference in historically reductive ways.

Staging difference

Gole (2013) describes the challenges and even impossibilities of representing Muslims within existing paradigms of cultural pluralism or religious freedom in terms of 'controversy'. For her, this enables taking a broader look and interrogating the role of different actors, discourses and temporalities beyond the immediacy of spectacular discourses that have framed Muslims as inimical to life in European cities. She suggests:

> Through their disruptive effects on the social order, controversies provoke debates, produce new actors and repertoires of action, and engender simultaneously, synchronic and diachronic assemblages (Gole 2013: 12).

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[66] Anne Norton in her detailed deconstruction of the unease within liberalism that has produced the Muslim Question notes: "We tend to think of freedom of speech as existing in the right to speak freely or 'say anything.' Now, however, the most effective threats to free expression come not from those who would silence speech, but from those who would compel it. Muslims are not permitted to speak freely. They are obliged instead to engage in specific speech acts, dictated to them by others. These compulsory speech acts are a prominent part of contemporary political discourse". (Norton: 2011: 69)

In this thesis I uncovered spaces and practices that were important sites for staging and challenging notions of Muslim identity and community. The Hubb, for example, through its material presence, location and cultural production operated at the intersection of narratives of community associated with Sparkbrook, while also registering broader social processes and structures such as the ummah (global sense of Muslim community). Through ordering relations between genders, generations and a global family of Muslims, the Hubb helped give way to a Muslim subjectivity that is not bound by notions of space or ethnicity, but is *made* in active negotiation with these. The Hubb, thus, was part of a new Muslim scene in Birmingham. The art spoke of various influences that resulted in hybrid formations through blending graffiti street art with high art of Islamic calligraphy, for example. The spoken word performances enabled women to be heard and to experiment with politics away from the gaze of male elders, while the building itself stirred intimacy amongst strangers creating a sense of togetherness, albeit momentarily. As Amin notes "there is merit in considering body/space dynamics, for they simultaneously amplify and dampen the collective moment" (Amin 2015: 250).

The confidence I observed in the cultural and political stance of Muslims at the Hubb, where they adopted a less antagonistic and more agonistic approach (Mouffe 2005) toward racialised politics and belonging in the city, is also a response to shifts in the broader cultural and political climate for religion in the contemporary world. In a moment when debates about the importance or resurgence of religion abound, alongside questions about the 'secularisation theses' (Warner et al 2010) where the divide between profane and sacred worlds is questioned through the figure of the Muslim; there are renewed spaces and conceptual arenas opened where religion and social life are able to be discussed. Jurgen Habermas acknowledged this in a recent observation that developed societies (by which he means the west) when confronted with their pasts and their 'blind spots' that have prevented space for hearing other discourses, are now being forced to take new perspectives (Mendieta 2010).

In this changed terrain, Muslims can be seen as espousing a new ethic that seeks to decouple the figure of the Muslim from structures that have determined it - politics of representation - to turn back to itself (Ramadan 2009). Therefore, a new orientation for Muslims and for 'community' can be seen as envisioned in the social practices I have described in this thesis. The coordinates of this are many and articulated differently and variously by people in my study. The examples of people I worked with who engaged and negotiated with authority as embodied in established Muslim organisations such as Unity FM, for example, revealed a reflexivity of consciousness that lies below the radar of state bureaucracies whose ambitions to co-opt Muslim subjectivities have been received mixedly since Prevent and The Rushdie Affair. This reflexivity emerged from the interaction of competing conceptions of what symbolized Muslim 'community' in the area, as well as the different energies and opinions that mixed in networks of like-minded people involved in social action around the city discussed in chapter 5. These reveal the possibilities for politics that exist in space (Massey 2005: 149-162). What is important is that Muslim 'community' did not require a conscious espousal of collective identity but was formed through 'a myriad of practices of quotidian negotiation and contestation…"(Massey 2005: 154).

My work with Muslims has uncovered new styles of building 'community'. People assembled and came together around new repertoires and vernaculars. These are reflective – they connected with histories of earlier racialised presence in the city including earlier generations of immigrants, Muslim organisations as well as evacuated buildings and established sectors of the economy such as the balti triangle now transformed for halal consumption. Of the two Muslim spaces – The Hubb and Bordesley Centre - that I researched out of, both embodied a different relationship to the locality and to sentiments of 'community'; the Hubb resisted the mainstream and saw its authenticity as tied to the neighbourhood, while Unity courted the mainstream and, therefore, shaped itself in the form of a traditional 'community' organisation whose authority was then challenged by local Muslims. In both these cases people sought to fashion a sense of Muslim 'community' that involved re-working relations with the official and narrative hold of identity politics

in the city. I have shown how sensibilities of 'community' derived from race relations approach still shape the terms of Muslims' inclusion and engagement in local politics and national recognition. While some Muslim organisations build their authority and authenticity out of this encounter, others worked with and against it to assert a different stake and aspirations.

The Ambivalence of Muslims

Seeing Muslims' everyday acts as political has not been a feature of much research on Muslims in Britain, where acts of organising around structural issues such as census inclusion, schooling needs and halal provision have been privileged in the politics of representation approach. Yet as Amin suggests:

> ".. much of the collective mobilization is in the minor key—dispositional, rather than directly political, silently regulating collective orientations, rather than through conscious acts of organization (Amin 2015: 250)

Muslims I worked with were not simply enacting a tradition of inherited citizenship, therefore. They have interrupted racial and ethnicised narratives about 'community' (chapter 3) that were part of Sparkbrook as well as the trajectory of troubled or unruly citizens unable to reflect on tradition in the making of new Muslim identities (chapter 4). Their competence in negotiating the city and penetrating parts of it outside of the mosques, ghettos and enclaves associated with Muslims, helped challenge ideas about Muslims as dispossessed. They made sense of the city through popping up in different places, utilising different spaces and not confining themselves to places marked as Muslim, thus suggesting that seeing urban Muslims as marginal to the city is misleading (chapter 5). This climate of already existing things going on and well-entrenched ideas, as well as people symbolising what normative Muslim social action was, prompted individuals I worked with to think about what else they could do and anticipate what types of responses their activities might attract. In turn it enabled them to be reflexive and survey whether there was room for them in a public sphere unwelcoming of a Muslim disposition they

embodied, which set them apart from the existing Muslim political scene dominated by associations of mosques, biradaris or male Muslim councillors.

The type of Muslimness that is made here also challenges positivist notions of religion encapsulated in discourses about faith groups in Britain. Muslims I worked with took religion out of institutionalised and formal spaces a well as times of religion. Instead:

> Religion, far from being a recalcitrant hallucination of continuity, signals an inevitable resilience and opened of the present – a series of possible futures all potentially applicable and liveable to a particular people" (Simone 1994: 12).

Simone, here referring to the role of religion in the life of disparate groups of socially minded individuals in Sudan, describes this as an "image of the future" that springs fluidly from its "very particular reappropriation of traditional forms.." (ibid).

I have tried to show from my research that the conditions of governance and various forces of history and politics that shape life for emerging generations of Muslims in cities like Birmingham, have engendered certain ways of moving through limitations of systematised or accepted ways of doing things that rely on a particular image of Muslims as unreflexive and essentially bound to dogma and rituals that get in the way of their belonging in western European countries. Instead, Muslims I worked with sought to be flexible and looked to advance themselves through innovative means. Rather than plugging into opportunity structures that only guaranteed the status quo, they utilised very local resources and narratives to assemble Muslim identity and 'community' that is of the moment.

This includes complex negotiations of the sense of exclusion generated from non-recognition in the normative multicultural public sphere with feelings of attachment to traditions of being here (ethnic minorities) as well as the promise of 'going-somewhere' realised through being part of a global Muslim community – ummah. Islam; these *labours* are not easily reflected in the moral rational argument for Muslim recognition in the public sphere. Thus, "religion challenges the authority of

existing assumptions of rationality, accessibility, and universality" (Chambers et al (2013: 12). However, when Muslims work to alter the terms of the public sphere, as in the case of the Hubb, I noted how the outcomes are precarious, being subject to city planning, availability of funding and recognition by established forms of Muslim authority in the city.

During the course of my fieldwork I was exposed to a range of designs the state seeks to have on Muslim life in the city. The absence of public funding to develop distinct spaces of Muslim cultural production such as the Hubb was contrasted with millions of pounds being spent to survey, police and subsequently criminalise ordinary life in the streets of Muslim Birmingham symbolized in the Spycams Affair. Alongside this there was a benign acceptance of authoritative spaces such as Unity FM and the Bordesley Centre that were officially accepted as embodying Muslimness in line with identitarian politics in the shape of 'community' organisations. Between these over policed and officially recognised examples of Muslim life in the city, my research also revealed additional expressions of 'community' and identity. Alternative publics were formed in solid space, over the airwaves as well as in more fluid constellations through the coming together of people as infrastructure. They are the after-life of historical expressions of racial and ethnic identities and also the left over bits from contemporary strategies of policing and governing Muslims; they are also the ordinary moments in which Muslim life is made.

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