YOUNG PEOPLE'S TRAJECTORIES THROUGH RADICAL ISLAMIST MILIEUS:
COUNTRY LEVEL REPORT UNITED KINGDOM

'Muslim street'

DARE
Dialogue About
Radicalisation & Equality

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DARE: Dialogue about Radicalisation and Equality

**Young people's trajectories through radical Islamist milieus:
Country level reports**

UK

'Muslim street'

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Contents

Executive Summary

This report describes interactions with a group of young people within a milieu characterised by a street where a growing range of Islamic infrastructure serves the religious, social and cultural needs of Muslims from across the city and beyond. I worked primarily with a group of Muslim men who identified as Salafi, which is a strand of Islam that is increasingly popular among young people including women. It is also prevalent in discussions of Islamist extremism given its highly literal nature and the public visibility of its proponents.

I draw on depth interviews and participant observation carried out at a regular Friday night gathering, as well as a number of impromptu meetings at different cafes, stalls, restaurants, pavements and mosques with additional people who were either regular visitors to the milieu or influential in shaping young people's experiences in it. I also consider some of the socio-economic factors as well as governmental and media attention that combine to shape people's experiences of citizenship. These include their experiences of schooling, further and higher education, employment, interaction with statutory authorities and fellow citizens. I note that the milieu – in the form of a street – becomes a condensed or hyper-local site in which life is negotiated and made for these young people. Being visibly Muslim they are caught between stigma, lack of opportunity and loosening attachments with familiar modes of authority including family and established spaces of Islam. The milieu, then, offers familiarity and cover for them as Muslims, but also confusion and risk as they seek to access the mainstream.

I note that the discourse and lived experience of radicalisation figures in a number of different ways in this milieu, which has been a site of 'passing through' for a number of individuals found to be implicated in 'jihadi violence' in the UK and abroad, but also as a discourse propelled by media and governmental attention. This made for a challenging environment to carry out research with young people on the theme of radicalisation. Respondents were hesitant to engage in discussions on this topic, not only out of fear for being implicated in something that they agreed was to be condemned, but also because, Islamist radicalisation was something that they felt was misunderstood and frankly overblown.

Through participating in a range of activities and conversations that my respondents engaged in either in the milieu or facilitated by it, I was able to discern how young people negotiated different moments in their lives that are marked by uncertainty, disadvantage and disenchantment (among other things). I also experienced how certain features of the milieu – its density, familiarity, opportunity – that might be envisaged as resources, for example to enable networking, presented challenges to young people as they experimented with new ideas and forged their identities.

I close by noting a particular disposition for 'engaging the world' among people I worked with, which was simultaneously a desire to escape some of the strictures presented by the otherwise popular milieu, but also something they felt was propelled by their faith. This took the form of *dawah* activities, which were used to both engage young Muslims who might be susceptible to radicalisation, while also to engage broader society who might be sceptical about Muslims and Islam in their midst.

1. Introduction

The street where I concentrated my research is one of at least six in the city of Birmingham (UK's second city) that is conspicuous as a site of diaspora communities' settlement from former countries of the commonwealth in South Asia, as part of the post-war migration to the UK. The city is also home to the largest number of Muslims for any UK municipality[1]. The 2011 Census showed the Muslim demographic of the city to be around a quarter of its 1.1m total population. Although, activists from these communities have claimed it to be closer to a third of the overall population. Further, almost half of this population is under 24 years of age. It is therefore, a young and emergent community, reflected in the burgeoning commercial enterprises, formal and informal organisations that cater to the social needs of young Muslims. Another key feature of the city's Muslim demographic is its topography - with around 70% of Muslims being located in a quarter of the city's 40 wards (ONS, 2011)

In much of the early literature on radicalisation among south Asian Muslims in the UK, their places of settlement - largely post-industrial urban areas with high rates of multiple deprivation - have been assumed as factors that predispose them to a range of negative life chances, including a propensity toward violent extremism (Abbas 2007).

The street presented itself as a milieu – referred to in this report as Muslim Street – because it is an assemblage/constellation of actors and material infrastructure - mosques, cafes, shops, miscellaneous places of assembly - that gives rise to and also offers possibilities for social relations to emerge and crystallise. There is an interplay of spatial and temporal forces here. For example, in the way historical (south Asian Islam) mixes with new global trends, making it a site of extraterritoriality (Saint-Blancat, 2002). This means that milieus such as Muslim Street are not just the site of Muslim diaspora setting down, but also of an emergent scene of Muslimness that also transforms public space and culture. This is apparent in the media and policy gaze that has helped to exceptionalise the street and broader neighbourhood in which it is situated (Hussain 2014). The presence of an external gaze works to envisage the street as a maligned space where extremism is fostered. Subsequently there is much official attention given to the street in terms of Prevent programmes and Channel mentors who operate in partnership with a number of prominent mosques on Muslim Street. From the point of view of young people, I worked with, the street was described as the 'hot spot' for people to gather, connect and pass through, because of the significant Islamic infrastructure available. All these factors combined to make Muslim Street a unique milieu for this study.

2. Setting the Scene

2.1 Historical context

Religiously attributed radicalisation in the UK has become the focus of considerable academic, policy and popular attention since the London attacks in July 2007 known as 7/7. However, claims of 'religious fundamentalism' had been associated with Muslims and Islam since the Honeyford Affair in 1985 and the Rushdie Affair in 1989, which can also be considered antecedents to an emerging Muslim consciousness (Meer, 2010) that accounts for the visibility and interest in British Muslims over the past few decades.

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[1] Although London has largest number of Muslims for a city, I deliberately use municipality here, which enables comparison with London boroughs as councils/municipalities and, therefore, as administrative boundaries. This is important because government interventions such as Prevent are administered at local authority level. Scale and administrative boundary are important for this case study where the workings of governmental activities are also part of life in the milieu.

Over the past few decades, policy attention on Muslims has evolved from foregrounding them as a cultural problem in terms of living parallel lives and a threat to social cohesion and Britishness, toward being a corporeal threat in terms of violent extremism and 'home grown terrorism'.

Critics and activists have commented on this shift in policy strategies as moving from benign concerns with race relations to bio-political control of Muslim communities, where the vast policy, security and surveillance apparatus that targets Muslims/Islam, does so in order to mitigate against erosions of Britishness (Croft, 2012).

Conceptually, the thesis about a clash of civilisations has meant a focus on Muslims/Islam as inevitably in opposition or dichotomous to the West. This sits alongside 'in-group/out-group' as a base explanation reflected in prevailing theoretical understandings of Islamist radicalisation. Islam as 'other', or incompatible with the West has also meant that identifying with it or belonging to it automatically becomes problematic. Add to this a sense of grievance fed by awareness of injustice in the way Muslims are treated by the West at home and abroad, and what emerges is an image of Muslims as siloed, separate, 'other', closed communities who are prone to radicalisation. Further, socio-economic realities work to reinforce an impression of Muslim communities as 'ghettoised', which also plays out within Muslim communities (particularly among men) through appropriation of ghetto culture/lifestyle borrowed from US urban/street cultures and affinity with the political situation of minorities in France (Dikec, 2007) and the USA (Aidi, 2014) . Hence, in the fieldwork for this project, I encountered a certain street vernacular that tinged the identities of people I worked with. It was apparent across different class and educational attainment levels that differentiated my respondents.

The resulting disjuncture between Muslims/Islam and the West has also been adopted in understandings about Islamism in Europe through an interplay with discourses of generational difference, whereby the authority of already existing Islam is questioned by younger cohorts or is seen as a point of conflict between younger cohorts, who have mostly been brought up in Europe, and the Islam of their parents as migrants. Implications of these impressions about the Muslim community include that young Muslims lack competency or 'social capital' in learning about their religion, which is exacerbated by the 'out of touch' authority of existing leadership. It follows that governmental interventions that focus on imams, and which lead to mosques becoming viewed as sites of governmentality for the promotion of 'liberal Islam' create a 'good Muslim, bad Muslim' dichotomy. Yet, little or no attention is given to how we might measure levels of religious literacy among younger cohorts of Muslims. This is particularly important in contexts where young Muslims are exposed to new modes of learning such as online, study circles, conferences and overseas courses (see: Bano, 2018)

This case study and the methodology pursued enabled me to witness how youth with a Muslim consciousness felt *empowered* by: (1) the proliferation of sources of knowledge (lectures, online, mosque talks etc.); and (2) western liberal/individualism that licenses methodologies or pedagogies that place the individual at the core, therefore legitimising young people's discoveries or efforts to learn about Islam even if they are unconventional or controversial (in relation to the dominant discourse within their Muslim community). As a result, there is a market for various types of religious learning to flourish. We see black American and Arab speakers gain popularity largely due to the styles they employ in their sermons and mannerisms, which appeal to young people looking for Islam to be relevant in their everyday, which is permeated by global popular culture. So, when Imams employ slang or analogies, often crude, from contemporary life or street vernaculars, these manage to affect young streetwise Muslims who want to incorporate Islam into youth culture.

Alongside the mainstream interest in Muslims accelerated by the so called 'war on terror', there have been studies that call for more nuanced understandings especially of terms such as fundamentalism, Jihad and Islamism that have a lot of valence in shaping societal relations between groups. This mirrors the deliberation that goes on within the Muslim community on issues such as collaborating with government

on an agenda that many believe to be damaging to their social integration (Qureshi et al., 2020; Daulatzai and Rana, 2018).

There is also an abundance of government funded research and a focus on case studies to see how the different factors - including religious, social and political - operate in young Muslim's lives. Some of these works can be criticised for their tabloid feel, however (Kenny 2018, Wiktorowicz, 2005). Such is the nature of this field that, because of the media exposure, governmental focus and civil society attention, radicalisation has become an _unexceptional_ state, yet also an uncanny one. For example, while policy and media help disperse a sense of emergency, in popular culture the topic of Muslim men and their propensity toward extremism and violence is treated satirically. For example, in the film Four Lions 'The joke comes in the form of the folly that ensues from such grandiose plans' (Ramji, 2010).

2.2 Contemporary context

Since the war on terror, links between Muslims in the West and countries in the Middle East, as well as South Asia, have been imagined along new lines. No longer are these merely a dimension of diasporic life, but they are taken to be active channels in which terrorism is cultivated through networks such as Al-Qaeda with its links to the Arab world (Maher, 2016; Rana, 2011). While the global visibility of Salafi Muslims, as those who orbit a Saudi sponsored Islam has heightened, they remain a marginal phenomenon in the demography of Muslims in the West, despite the growing allure of this strand of Islam among youth (Inge, 2016). Beyond numbers, the marginality of Salafism owes much to a distinct religious 'creed' that is said to bind adherents into a movement (Wiktorowicz, 2005. Here, Salafism is remarked upon as a highly doctrinal version of Islam that is canonised (Thurston, 2016) or instrumentalised (March, 2015; Roy, 2017) toward political ends. Yet it is also considered for its quietist or apolitical influence in everyday religiosity (Olidort, 2015; Ramadan, 1999) where the obscurity, coupled with public scepticism toward Islam as a foreign religion, not so much lends Salafism to being seen as an occult phenomenon, but something radical to be distinguished from the already existing ground of Islam in the UK (Hamid, 2018).

Just as the 'terror' threat and related technologies of counterterror imbued by what many commentators and activists consider to be countless and continuing capacities to monitor and control (Qureshi et al., 2020) leads to a perpetual state of emergency, threat and violent danger, so too it is possible to discern effects of this on how young Muslims live day today as well as imagine a future for the global Muslim diaspora/umma and themselves, in a political climate that is hostile to them. The dangerous future that counterterror seeks to secure the nation against, has as its object of concern the figure of the Muslim, which has come to symbolise a moral panic. The focus on 'terror' has given way to an economy of amplified fear that is propped up by various 'affective recruitments' (Masco, 2014) that ensue from technological and bureaucratic efforts of the state most often recognised in the 'Prevent programme'. In this highly affective field of threat, terror and fear, individual level emotions, senses and feelings of self-worth receive attunement.

There is a sense that the actions of extremists/radicalised Muslims have an impact in society and on the discourse about Islam. Despite their general apolitical stance (which is shifting), as I note below when reflecting on the interviews conducted for this study, Muslims I worked with are not so much aggrieved by the negativity but spurred on to help affect alternative sentiments toward Islam. They do this through _dawah_, which makes them visible in heterogeneous public space. This in turns also feeds interest and suspicion of different sorts, away from complaints about parallel lives and community cohesion, toward fears expressed in theories of the Great Replacement, for example.

2.3 Locating the 'Muslim street' milieu

> [Muslim Street] is a place where it's very mixed, you know. There are a lot of people round here with different backgrounds. We integrate a lot. There's no, you know, a long time ago, yeah, there was probably a lot of racism as well. But now, because of the masjids that are opening around this area, it's very... it's brought people together basically from different backgrounds, I think. Personally, that's what I think anyway. You know, four, five years ago it wasn't like that. People were, you know, on their own; had their different views. (Mo John)[2]

Although the area seems homogenous – as one of Muslims/Islam – it is made up of a variety of groups whose presence is marked by different temporalities of presence, such as immigrants from the former colonies of the Commonwealth. This report describes some of the circulations and encounters across the diversity of the groups - ethnicity, levels of piety, age, employment status, that *made* this milieu. I draw on regular events I participated in with a group of males aged between 16-27, from a range of ethnic backgrounds including Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian, Somali, Arab and Maghrebi, all of whom identified as Salafi, a strand of Islam most associated with Islamism.[3] Being a fellow 'believer' enabled me access to internal debates and deliberations, as well as insights to the way religious authority is negotiated among the people I worked with.

The area is popular among Muslims who identify as Salafi, evident in the attention Salafism has received in a number of studies already (Kenny, 2018; de Konig, 2014; Wiktorowicz, 2005; Inge, 2018). Respondents traced the salience that Salafism has gained to a split that occurred in the 1990s, which was described as the high time of 'fundamentalist' Islam in the UK marked by the popularity of 'jihadi' groups (Hamid, 2018). The split resulted in a younger group (considered radical or cult-like) deciding to form their own mosque, that has gained a national and international reputation for being 'purist' Salafi. Although Salafi groups have been studied before and particularly in relation to their *dawah* activities. My milieu differs in that it drew in different groups of Salafis, whom Wiktorowicz (2005) describes as 'ideal types'.

My study in this milieu enabled me to witness the interaction *between* different types of Salafi identifying young people. As part of my fieldwork I attended events by various groups who were all rooted in Salafi Islam such as *Hizb ut Tahrir* and CAGE, while also seeing them interact at events organised by the local Counter Terrorism Unit. What emerges is a picture that is complex. Even my participants appeared baffled when witnessing the strange concoctions of people moving between ideas and spaces. This points to an unsettled and ideologically incoherent milieu in which people find themselves. It is far from being 'home'. Yet the vitality inherent to it and, therefore, importance in young people's lives are captured in descriptions by my respondents of the area as a 'hotspot' and the group of men I worked with as a 'motley crew'.

Through the process of research, I was reminded that even within an atmosphere saturated by the war on terror and Prevent, other forms of civil action, solidarity and togetherness are at work. The respondents in this study suggested to me that it was in particular the main Salafi mosque that helped bring a semblance of unity or togetherness to the area through events such as the annual Eid prayer in the park that attracts around 100,000 people twice yearly to the area.

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[2] This and subsequent quotes are from the respondent set and use self-chosen pseudonyms. The methodology and respondent set profile is discussed in Section 3.

[3] On this, see Olivier Roy (2017) who notes, 'It is very common to view jihadism as an extension of Salafism. Not all Salafis are jihadis, but all jihadis are supposedly Salafis, and so Salafism is the gateway to jihadism'. https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/apr/13/who-are-the-new-jihadis

> Eid in the Park, 2014 I think it was, where they did it at Small Heath Park. And that brought a lot of other Muslims, you know, Muslims together. And now, even now, if you go and pray there, you see Barelvis there bro. Barelvis, you see Deobandis, everyone prays there. (Mo John)

The milieu is also an important space to witness changes that have taken place in the Muslim community since their arrival in the middle of the last century. Alongside the established infrastructure of South Asian communities, there is an emergent sense of newer generations as initiators and consumers of newer trends and directions in Islam.

Subsequently, newer configurations of Islamic presence have emerged over the past three decades as a result of shifting relations of competition, collaboration and confrontation with various overseas Islamic sponsors and causes. For example, the early 1990's saw an Islamic consciousness emerge partly in response to the conflict in overseas Muslim majority countries such as Bosnia, Chechnya and Afghanistan. Young Muslim's political agency has been understood largely in relation to such events:

> We have various generations of Muslims, practicing Muslims. Especially in the UK, and specifically in London. We had those before 9/11, the Islam was something in England. The mainstream Islam, meaning the way the narrative of Islam was something. And amongst the practising Muslims, because before that was, wasn't long ago Afghanistan. So, and then Bosnia. And so once... so those who were practicing, they had the chance to go away and fight and so on. (Hilal)

It was also then – the high point of jihadi influence – that commentators noticed young Muslims being drawn to politicised Islam, whose reference point was the damage being inflicted on Muslims overseas, because of an unjust world order. 'Muslim street' helped connect younger cohorts of Muslims with a longer history of Islamism in the UK that preceded landmark moments such as 9/11 and 7/7. Mo John, a key interlocutor in this research, 17 at the time of interview, was friendly with a group of Muslim men who in the 1990's had travelled to Bosnia, Chechnya and Yemen to participate in humanitarian work. These people now operated successful businesses on Muslim Street that employed young Muslim men, often at the behest of their fathers who were concerned that they would end up in trouble with the police. These established businesses and the individuals who ran them, were a key source of support for young men whom I worked with and provided a credible outlet point for discussing challenging issues that young Muslim men might be faced with. A key issue was being able to talk about the fate of Muslims around the world:

> You know, yes, I have my... I'm strongly against Isis – strongly against it, you know. I hate 'em. You know, I don't agree with that. That's wrong. But I think where credit's due to other people around the world. For example, Bosnia, where people got butchered. Yemen where people are getting butchered. I think, you know, there are places where they sincerely need the help. But you know, I strongly hold my opinions against Isis. I think they are disgusting. Actually, they're not Muslim. They're not – that's my personal opinion. (Mo John)

For the young people that I worked with, not only were Muslim lands and communities being attacked but in plain sight of international institutions and conventions that Muslim westerners had come to see as guarantors of universal rights (Li, 2020:9). I will discuss how such global narratives are encountered and apprehended by young Muslims in this study, as these often feature in discussions about grievance and vulnerability.

This milieu – with its global/national/local or macro/meso/micro nexus – offered a possibility for seeing 'from below' how a concern with Islamist lifestyles unfolds, grounding it in a local context without being limited by it. Such an approach sheds light on the enfoldment that goes on between these different scales, while avoiding an interpretation that presents Muslims as configured by historical and global forces alone;

leaving unread the everyday dilemmas, relations and negotiations of young Muslims living in and through highly politicised times.

For the majority of young people I worked with, the milieu presented opportunities to take part in a number of activities such as:

- Volunteering at one of the prominent mosques
- Attending *madrasah* regularly for a number of years
- The site of economic opportunities

For those who did not spend considerable time in the milieu, it was still important as a site for consuming Islamic lifestyle and events.

> Muslim Street is cool. Conference time, when they've got the Salafi conferences…going on at the same time as well. That period, but more so Ramadan in Muslim Street, that's the best time you have. Ramadan, obviously for me is the best time of the year anyway. And coming here and seeing so much, it's a beautiful feeling anyway, beautiful vibe. I agree with them in that sense, that Muslim Street is the best. I hear sometimes best in the country. A lot of people come all around. So I can see that sense (Abu Levi)

The sociality afforded by the milieu was of key interest to me, thus, and not just the physicality or geographical fact of it. Recent research such as the report of the Greater Manchester Preventing Hateful Extremism and Promoting Social Cohesion Commission[4] noted the importance of social factors in addressing radicalisation. Another study[5] based on cognitive analysis of radicalised individuals also stressed the importance of tackling social exclusion felt by individuals who subsequently enter trajectories to violent extremism.

The area in which the 'Muslim Street' milieu was located attracted activists, because of the simultaneous presence of vulnerable individuals that made projects there a good opportunity, but also availability of resources in the form of spaces and individuals that could be assembled into eventful opportunities for social action. Through the course of this research, I noted how the sociality afforded by the milieu can also usher vulnerable young people toward violent outcomes. This can happen through clandestine connections with obscure individuals (newcomers to the area, peddlers, Al Muhajiroun (ALM) members). This I discovered through witnessing changed behaviour when people encountered new ideas/people. But also through conversations with key individuals who chose to operate in this milieu precisely to help counter negative forces that they described as south Asian Islam and folk practices, which 'turn-off' young people who look for more rationalised interpretations that fit with contemporary lifestyles they seek). This involved interpretations of Islam and particularly dissonance with 'inherited' Islam, which the people I worked with viewed as 'backward' or connected to folk practices from 'back home' (mostly south Asia). This often created an atmosphere of confrontation with 'authority' expressed in strained relations many young people had with their families, teachers, employers, for example. It is important to note that work done to tackle radicalisation among young people in this milieu, rarely, if ever, was conducted through engaging in discussions about radicalism, Prevent or extremism. Instead, attention was paid to conditions around which young people navigated their aspirations and life.

For the participants in this research, beyond the material infrastructure (mosques, cafes, restaurants, Islamic lifestyle shops) the area was a valuable site for connecting with peers and getting information about training and employment opportunities. Even for those who didn't hang out daily or regularly, it helped influence certain choices such as training courses and employment opportunities. So even while

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[4]https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/communities/preventing-hateful-extremism-and-promoting-social-cohesion-commission/

[5] https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/jan/06/social-exclusion-radicalisation-brain-scans

respondents were dismissive of the area, because of entrenched minority ethnic groups and their attitudes, they still fell-back on the prospects offered through networking to find employment. Similarly, it was a source of information on a range of matters including rumour and gossip. There was, therefore a level of comfort people felt that they could talk and exchange information safely on 'Muslim Street.'

What makes this milieu interesting then is how life is negotiated and made for these young people caught between stigma, lack of opportunity and loosening attachments with familiar modes of authority. It offers familiarity and cover but also confusion and risk. For example, the discourse of Social exclusion while relevant as a descriptor of the siloed lives these young people live, also has the effect of stigmatising the same individuals. It risks depicting or identifying these groups as hard to reach and becoming pathologised as outside norms of acceptability. This is most evident in representations of communitarianism or segregated lives that have been prevalent in popular and political discussions about Islamist radicalisation. Through listening to my respondents, I learned how too much responsibility is put on those communities to remedy their otherness. The call for 'Fundamental British values' is a key example, as is the discussion about Islam being out of place and time; evident in calls for Islam to reform.

The role of institutions that have operated at the micro level through programmes such as Prevent and Channel are important here. Many of the people I worked with as part of this research acknowledged that there needs to be institutional support in place and not just through flimsy partnership efforts, which because of the imbalance of power apparent to young Muslim onlookers, prompted suspicion and scepticism that actually such arrangements are not likely to result in anything better for them. It continues the 'Muslim as oppressed and disrespected' frame. When this discrepancy in their enjoyment of citizenship and human status comes up against values they have come to love through learning about Islam (racial equality, dignity for the poor, protection of women) a contrast becomes apparent to them. Such dispositions are abundantly captured in a strand of literature which addresses grievance and powerlessness as drivers into radicalisation. I was interested in seeing how such sentiments or realities of living under the war on terror are mediated - given succour, discussed, evaluated, amplified or diffused.

3. Field Research

3.1 Data collection

The data drawn on in this report consist of a total of 20 interviews with 19 research participants, one influential religious personality without affiliation to a mosque in the city and 15 field diary entries based on informal meetings and events attended. While a detailed discussion of the backgrounds and socio-demographic profiles of research participants is provided Section 3.5 (below), an overview of the data collected can be found in Table 1. Of the 19 research participants who took part in interviews:

- 15 were men and 4 were women.
- 10 were Pakistani or more correctly Mir Puri (part of Free Kashmir and often identified as Pakistani)
- 4 were Somali - all having lived in other parts of EU prior to arriving in the UK
- 1 was African Caribbean (and a convert to Islam)
- 1 was of mixed Pakistani/Chinese heritage
- 1 was Bangladeshi
- 1 was Afghani
- 1 was of Arab/Libyan heritage

The interviews were all conducted some time after I had been introduced to or met each participant. This enabled me to try to broker rapport. For example, informal meetings were a valuable way to find out

about participants' relations to others I already knew and/or the milieu. Looking retrospectively, these were also moments when participants were more comfortable to talk and divulge information on what was a tricky topic for them to be engaged in a conversation on with someone whom they didn't know. My status as a researcher, albeit for a higher education institution, was always met with suspicion among the male participants. I was, mostly jokingly, asked whether I was a 'spy' or if I worked for 'Prevent', which is one part of the government's broader programme CONTEST that addresses violent extremism and radicalisation through a multi-pronged effort involving numerous statutory agencies at international, national and local including neighbourhood level.

One person I worked with while negotiating my entry to the milieu- Abu Abdullah - during August 2017 offered me advice on how to gain access to young radicals. He suggested that I not use the word 'research' in my approach. He claimed it would automatically turn people away, because they would think that my doing research is really about wanting to find out things about them. Such was the level of suspicion and cynicism.

In the informal meetings, I would endure sometimes lengthy conversations about my opinion of the government's Prevent programme, which would always bleed into bigger discussions about the so-called War on Terror and the 'West vs Islam'. In these moments, my status as a university researcher would help displace concerns, because I was viewed as someone scientifically informed on theory and case studies in these areas. My being a fellow Muslim also helped in this regard.

There were three occasions when people refused to participate in a recorded interview. These exclusions – a 'White' convert, a *Meghrebi* and a *Pathan* (Afghan) – would have made my data set more diverse in terms of ethnicity.

In addition to interviews and informal meetings in the milieu, I documented 37 fieldwork entries, which have been distilled into 15 short fieldwork reports (see Table 1).

Table 1: Data set

	Number
Respondents	19
Audio interviews	20
Field diary entries (total)	15

3.2 Access and researcher-respondent relations

Several participants in this research identified themselves by a *kunya* [epithet], which are widely used in jihad activism. Their preferred monikers denoted seminal figures mentioned in the Quran or in Islamic history. At the same time, the motivations, orientations toward Islamic piety, and class backgrounds of the people I worked with varied and confound any straightforward attempt to profile. For example, educational attainment levels and employment histories. One variable, however, that did correlate was family and relations with authoritative male figures. This will be discussed in more detail below. Specifically, I comment on relations with fathers, significant teachers and fellow males who enjoyed a level of authority or prestige among these young men. Mostly this was apparent in how certain males-controlled access to others for me to interview through encouraging or permitting them to engage with me or not, but also the importance respondents gave to discussions about family in their lives.

Among the people I spent time within the milieu, many were hesitant to conduct an interview about radicalisation. This apprehension was pronounced in a number of ways: some refusing to answer specific questions, others not responding to messages to meet, stringing me along and then doing a short

interview only. Refusal, hesitancy to engage in speak about radicalisation signified a fear of being 'picked up' or labelled as a spook or sympathiser, which is a theme common in literature on radicalisation and the war on terror.

Most of the people I worked with were apolitical but interested in politics, however, being of Salafi disposition meant that they expected not to get involved in direct action politics, including even voting. Justification for this was given in Islamic terms; that democracy was a western invention and, therefore, alien to Islam.

A number of young people appreciated having the opportunity through interview, to talk about their lives and to put this into perspective with their current situation. This resulted in friendships emerging. Some strategic (i.e. educational guidance, networks).

Through paying attention to posture, mood and the scenario in which people spoke and interacted with me as a researcher (rather than as commentator) I determined that respondent's hesitancy was also a refusal to be limited to a pathological framing. It pointed to the 'besides' – that they wanted to engage in other dialogues as a way of displacing the normative hold of such a discourse. This was also mirrored in their corporeal strategies of presence in the milieu. For example; choosing to meet in lively, busy spaces, which spoke of a desire to be in less antagonistic spaces such as protests or marches, were viewed as antagonistic. This spoke of a different ethic of challenging their social designation as outcasts, vulnerable or problematic young men. I observed how they sought out and generated comfort from being in numbers, as a 'gang' or crew. What differentiated their public presence from earlier iterations of pathologised young men who participated in the Asian Youth Movements or anti-race movements decades earlier, was the temporality. They are able to commune more often. They're faith enables togetherness more often in the day, regularly rather than just at random/occasional demonstrations. Such that when they did attend street protests, they did not seem to be effective in joining in the mood. For example, at the 'no outsiders' protest that I attended as part of this research, the young men I worked with were either absent or on the on the fringes.

Mo John who ended up being a 'fixer' for me in terms of introducing me to people and spaces within the milieu, offered to make a short film that would help animate the milieu. He invited along a friend who had just graduated from a local university and was now producing promotional videos for local businesses. His multi-media productions were geared toward new consumption trends, which allowed him to experiment and apply innovative graphics and videography that resonated among young people. They both produced a three-minute 'teaser' video for me of the street/milieu. I came to notice that the film – as final product that I could use in presentations or to introduce audiences to the street as milieu where I conducted this research – also operated as an invitation; to relate to their world and not merely interpret it. This was achieved through camera effects and music over. As method it is also inventive: it is inventing a different relationship to knowing. Even if people have done this work before – documenting inner city life through visual representation of multiculturalism – felt like a new way to experience the lives of my respondents on their own terms.

Repetition, in the Deleuzian sense always reveals difference. Even though a method (film, visual representation) known as 'inventive method' may be repeated, it is always addressed to a specific problem and in being attuned to that specificity – it reveals something different. It, therefore, has the potential to 'make a difference'.

This element of young people's lives was something I came to learn about over the course of the various encounters I had with people during fieldwork.

3.3 Ethical practice

Informed consent was obtained through participant's signing a consent sheet after being informed of the project's aims, what they were being invited to participate in, how their confidentiality would be maintained and their right to withdraw in a Participant Information Sheet. A copy of the Participant Information Sheet and the Consent Form was kept by the respondents as well as the researcher. Basic socio-demographic data on the respondent set is provided in Appendix 7.1. Respondents chose their own pseudonyms, some of them choosing names relating to real figures mostly from Islamic history. Visual images used in this report are photographs taken by the author in the course of fieldwork; none depict respondents.

3.4 Data analysis

Interviews were transcribed and pseudonymised as required by the wider project protocols and ethical clearance procedure. These, alongside pseudonymised field diary entries (see Table 1) were uploaded into an NVivo12 database for coding. Coding was conducted as per the agreed method set out in the General Introduction to this series of reports, that is using the shared skeleton coding tree, adapted as appropriate to this particular case.

3.5 Socio-demographic portrait of the respondent set

The 'Muslim Street' milieu is conspicuous as a site of significant racial and ethnic diversity. The majority of the population can be characterised as south Asian. However, over the past decade the street has taken on a characteristically Islamic feel with a number of mosques being situated there. This in turn has attracted business activity that also caters to the needs of consumers seeking halal and ethical/modest goods, expanding the range of shops and people in the area to include sizeable numbers of Somali, Sudanese, Maghrebi, Arab and convert inhabitants of the area. This is illustrated in Plate 1, showing a local shop advertising a 'Blessed Friday Event'; a play on the 'Black Friday' consumer events that were happening around the time the picture was taken.

Plate 1: A shop located just off Muslim Street advertising 'Blessed Friday Event'. Photo taken by author

The area also ranks among the city's most deprived. Below I describe how these demographic characteristics feature in the lives of the young people I interviewed as well as others I encountered in field but did not interview. I also include reflections of others I met in the milieu such as entrepreneurs, cleric and general outliers.

3.5.1 Religiosity

The group of young Muslims I worked with were not similar to *Al Muhajiroun* (ALM) who are represented in the literature already as chief agents of an Islamist milieu in the UK. They did, however, overlap with ALM and other popular groups such as CAGE occasionally while also actively trying to avoid them. For example, on the street there are a number of establishments that had leanings toward more orthodox/extremist strands of Salafism. There would be tensions with these. We wouldn't meet in those establishments even though aesthetically they were more modern and up to date in terms of décor and eating trends and, therefore in their appeal to the young and impressionable. Instead, the people I worked with would often refer to ALM as '*Khawarij*' who are generally believed to be a fringe fundamentalist group existing during the early period of Islam, and characterised by their youth and inexperience.

A number of people I worked with reported tensions within their families, which were often also referred to as broken families, because of differences in opinion on Islam, where they were seen as extreme in their opinions because of their overt religiosity in becoming Salafi:

> I used to go down Green Lane [Mosque] on my own accord after I started doing a bit more research. And this is as well coming from a family from, from Kashmir as well, Kashmir Mirpur, where majority of my family... I think in fact nobody would claim to be sort of Salafi. Majority Barelvi or Deobandi. And when my dad found out, he was pretty angry. When my grandma found out, she was pretty... I was getting a lot of hate for it as well. But I just didn't... I don't live with my dad, so it kind of made it easier as well. So I just took it on the chin and just carried on. (Abu Levi)

I was informed of and introduced to another layer of young people who were friends of my respondent set. These were university students, some doing medicine and STEM subjects at local universities. The popularity of STEM subjects among Muslim youth involved in radicalisation has been suggested to be linked to a 'closed mind-set'.[6] These young people were evasive and not often willing to be interviewed. With the exception of one or two. They were active in running Islamic Students Societies (ISOCs) and came to 'Muslim Street' to socialise and connect with local religious influencers such as Minnie/Abu Yahya. When we'd meet on the Street they'd express a level of comfort being here.

> The Islamic community is well-established here. And in terms of family activities, it's easier. And safe environment when... in this particular area, the Muslim community is quite big, large. So you can go like out, a sister can wear a hijab. You feel a sense of safety. Because most of the neighbours are Muslims, not isolated in an area where you're the minority. So it brings that comfort. And there is loads of mosques. Easy access to mosques. Regular conferences. Islamic shops. And warehouses for job, whatever you want to do. (Hilal)

At least six respondents were non-south Asian, having been born elsewhere in Europe – the Netherlands and Sweden – and had moved here with family:

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[6] Martin Rose, Immunising the Mind: How can education reform contribute to neutralizing violent extremism? British Council, November 2015, https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/immunising_the_mind_working_paper.pdf

My family moved here because it's a lot easier to practise religion and there was an Islamic community as well as a Somali community here. (Dhul Qarnain)

I came to learn of a sizeable Somali presence and associated infrastructure centred around Ar-Rahma mosque situated on a road off 'Muslim Street.' Again, the networking function of the mosque was apparent in how a group of Somali men from Sweden had learned through connections at the mosque about an opportunity to acquire a hostel in the area to house homeless men. This points to a shift in nature of the ethnic enclave that this area resembles; now it is not a homogenous economy of trades as associated with earlier migrants/south Asians *only*. It is more diverse including addressing a new type of service/vulnerability needed for homeless single men. Here I encountered a participant of my previous research from 2011 who had been embroiled in the Trojan Horse scandal. Having since lost his job as a senior primary school teacher, he was now working in the Muslim charity sector. He was running poetry workshops for formerly homeless men (Nov/Dec 2019). This was part of a bigger programme of activities aimed at men's emotional wellbeing (see, for example, Plate 2).

Plate 2: Leaflet advertising poetry workshops for formerly homeless men

The people I worked with demonstrated to me that the mosque is not only a stable urban unit that anchors Muslims, but provided insights into how it is an incubator of connections that push and pull globally. In this sense, and in addition to their purpose as place of worship, mosques were appreciated for their 'network value'.

It is important to note that despite the optic placed on Muslim men and their surveillance, they were not deterred or dampened in their enthusiasm for going out and being adventurous. For example, the young men I worked with regularly participated in outdoor events such as camping and visiting remote woodlands for contemplative walks where they would go to bond as a group. Note, that such activities have attracted the attention of security services as key moments in the radicalisation trajectory of young Muslim men. It was not taken for granted that their Islamic faith would be the common denominator in holding them together as a group (especially in light of the racism and different trajectories of migration that brought them to the area). The group feeling had to be worked on. In addition to the Friday evening gatherings, there was also a summer barbeque that I attended as part of fieldwork.

3.5.2 Identity

> Before I'm anything else, I'm Muslim. And then after that, I'm a Somali. And after that... not sure what I am after that, to be honest. Maybe British, 'cause whether you want it or not, if you grow up in a country, you tend to take on a lot of the ideals and a lot of, a lot of the influences. (Dhul-Qarnain)

The above quote by a Somali Muslim who worked long shifts in highway management and construction, revealed that his identity is affected/shaped by *where* he is. The given aspects (Muslim, Somali) are accompanied by in-process life/becoming. Other respondents were cautious of this more open and fluid conception of identity and sought to guard against 'erosions of the Muslim self'. Through my time spent in this milieu and discussing issues around identity and religion, I discerned among many of my respondents a sense of insecurity toward losing one's traditions, whether these were understood to be Islamic, ethnic or other. This was in contrast to a key motivation for first generation migrants who set up Islamic organisations to help mitigate against the erosion of Islamic tradition.

A number of my respondents offered insider accounts of having attended Islamic schools, which they all confessed were at the behest of their fathers. A common reflection was that they would not recommend these. In fact, most lamented the time spent in an Islamic school criticising the professionalism and efficacy of teachers. Dhul-Qarnain described his Islamic school as 'a bit of a bubble'.

> It is, but I think a lot of people don't realise, towards the beginning, it's a lot tougher in terms of becoming accustomed to the system, obviously with Islamic education and all of that. But obviously, once you're into the flow of things, I think usually about year nine, I think you get a lot more comfortable with your surroundings. (Dhul-Qarnain)

Now that they were of adult age there was more desire to engage the world, and the network with its Friday night gatherings and Saturday afternoon city centre strolls offered this. It was a cover that guarded against various factors that they experienced as limiting of their life chances, while presenting opportunities to socialise and develop. A crude and key feature of radicalised networks has been their offering to be a safe space for youngsters.

These negative sentiments rolled into a larger critique of the already existing *ethnic* and non-Salafi Islamic infrastructure, which most Islamic schools emerged out of or had connections to, and which were viewed as out of date.

Other respondents spoke about ambitions to live abroad one even spoke in terms of doing '*hijra'*, which is tradition associated with the Prophet to escape persecution in Mecca during the early Islamic period.

> The only draw for me to go abroad is that I can make more money because, you know, working towards a PhD in the UK, unless you go and work in academia and no one really gives a crap if you've got a PhD. In a lot of other countries, if you've got a PhD you'll earn more money and as a Muslim who tries to practise their religion in a certain way, I don't believe in interest. So I don't wanna get a mortgage, but I do wanna own my own house, so I need to earn big money in a different way. So for that reason, I'd like to move abroad. I would happily stay here. (Freda)

> I'm optimistic anyway. My plans are, yeah, just to make enough money to get out of this country. Because I don't want to live here – look at the weather, man. There's a reason Ronaldo didn't sign for Manchester United, because the weather's crap! (Abdullah)

For one respondent who had converted to Islam while in prison, he saw 'Muslim Street' and the networks it enabled him to access, as a promised land:

> They come to England to make *Hijra*. So a lot of the, like the backgrounds of Algerians, African backgrounds, even the reverts, French girls, and French boys there, they come here 'cause

you can't, you can't pray at work or you can't pray in the streets, you can't go nothing, you can't do nothing, they banned everything now, in Switzerland, in some, Denmark, there's many places, New York, they banned it. (Ismail)

In contrast to some of the south Asian respondents who were born in the UK, some newcomers to the area eschewed socialising locally (partly because they didn't find a fit with their south Asian peers whom they accused of racism occasionally) in favour of developing the self through not becoming a 'road man', which was common parlance to refer to minority ethnic youth who had adopted a vernacular street or urban identity. Here this had connotations with hanging around (in cars as well) on the streets, drugs, consumption and swagger that was seen as raw and deviant:

I go from place to place, to be honest. I'm not a, I'm not a social buff, how can I say, like I was before. I tend to now keep a low profile, stay more low key and try to keep focussed on what I want to do. Because if you're too social, what tends to happen is your focus in life tends to shift. Your focus tends to slip. So at the moment, it's just really me trying to graft for the next year. Working and also trying to do a couple of courses on the side, trying to move forward as an individual, and develop myself, my character. Mash' Allah. (DHUL-QARNAIN)

The only thing that is different sometimes is like the language and the skin colour but other than that I kind of relate to a lot of the people that come from that ethnic minority. I feel like growing up around Asians it just kind of gave you that understanding of Asians in general and how what their culture's like and the more you grow up like with the, for example, Pakistanis that are second, third generation, you see that how much culture's kind of now rubbed away just like it's been rubbed away pretty much from me. (Abu Abdullah)

Islam was the common denominator between people I worked with. It was celebrated as the point at which they come together with others from different ethnic and national backgrounds. It is an ideal that they live out or the promise of which makes mundane, restricted (coloured by parental culture) and even boring life liveable. They searched out and created opportunities to nurture this through neutral cultural moments like the summer barbeque I was invited to, for example.

Being Muslim is important, it is the salient feature of their identity, therefore. This was apparent in conversations when respondents sought to differentiate Muslims from identifications with deviancy encoded in gangs, for example. They also recognised that young Muslims were not immune to being enrolled into street culture, and lamented the impact this has on impressionable Muslims and the public image of Islam:

Obviously, you do see some people, but obviously, due to the misconceptions and the stereotypes that we label them with, we've got that negative attitude towards them…But it's not always the case. I think it's more on the increase now obviously, this gang culture kind of thing. It's been adopted a lot by, unfortunately, the Muslims. Obviously, the Muslim youth nowadays have adopted that, with hanging round in gangs, obviously anti-social behaviour, you know, filthy language, etc. It's not nice to see, but unfortunately that's just how it is. (Sayyid Qutb)

The young people I worked with defined their sense of Muslimness through differentiating themselves from peers:

I think... there's a lot of aggro in society, with the youth especially. I think nowadays, I think the youth are a lot more confused than they were a few years ago, or even five, ten years ago. With all of this influx in popular culture and mainstream culture that we have nowadays, there's a lot of youth that are attracted to it; and as a result, they don't actually know what to do. I think they're all caught up and attracted to this western lifestyle, that they're losing... I think it's a loss more of Muslim identity and cultural identity than anything else. I think

obviously, from a sociological perspective, it's, you're wanting to fit in with the crowd, and you lose all traces of uniqueness that you identify with your own culture and your own religion. Instead of, like, sticking with that, sticking with something that's more comfortable and... you want to... they kind of go out of their way to be in with society. And it's quite sad to see. (Sayyid Qutb)

This indicates a spectrum of belonging to the *deen* (religion)/Islam. Although nobody talked about poles and extremes, nor did they try to define themselves as centrist. It was clear that young people were interpreting religion how they wanted to. A key part of the work of the Friday Night gatherings was to (1) help arrest the slippage of local young Muslims into anti-social behaviour and crime; and (2) help affect a more positive public image of Islam and Muslims.

3.5.3 Family

A salient feature of the sample was the complicated relationships they had with family. This was also a feature among female respondents. Sometimes this was due to estrangement resulting from their immersion in religion. Some participants reported support from their families for their work with Muslims when this was carried out in conjunction with a formal organisation such as volunteering at the mosque or being active in ISOC.

Others, who were involved in informal activities not easily recognisable as part of an organised and, therefore, trusted outfit, reported levels of estrangement with the family. Mostly this was because others in the family were not as committed to religion and were described as 'secular'. There were rarely tensions between respondents and their family members, however. While for others, such as (Abdullah) who had dropped out of college and were working 'dead-end jobs', their families were hopeful that coming into the religion might provide some structure to their disjunctive lives.

Most of the young men who participated in this research reported that they did not have an authoritative male figure to help guide or signpost them to opportunities. My respondents reacted to this in different ways. An important example was how one young man spoke about influences when discussing the role of prominent leaders and how he would reflect on their styles and achievements in his own duties as head of ISOC:

...you look at them [leaders] and sometimes, there's less admiration, but there's more like the thought: so if, for example, as a president of the Islamic Society, I'd want to see how people thought, like manage problems and stuff like that. I mean, look at Hitler. He was a, he was a killer basically. He murdered people, but the way he thought and the way he managed, crisis management, was one of the best out there. So, you look at his sort of tactics and crisis management, how he kind of like pushed his weight around wherever he had to deal with problems. (Abu Abdullah)

In the absence of respected male authority/leaders today, this young male revealed how references for leadership were sought from prominent figures who also happened to be problematic:

…I think, someone said, "the worst people provide the best examples", because you can kind of look at how many mistakes they've made and you can learn from that. But at the same time, you look at, again Hitler, and his approach and the way he spoke to people. The way he established that connection with people. He had a massive following, hundreds of thousands used to attend his rallies and because he spoke. I mean, Donald Trump, thousands attend his rallies. Politicians fail to get these sorts of numbers, but he brings these numbers because he speaks the same way as the layman does. He speaks to them, he's very like vocal and he's focussed on what's out there on the street. What are people talking about? What are my audience talking about? And he'll come out and speak about that. (Abu Abdullah)

Much of the discussion about jihad influencing young people in the UK, has addressed the appeal that prominent figures such as Abu Hamza, Shaykh Faisal, Umar Bakhri Muhammed, Anjem Choudary and Usama bin Laden have in the lives of radicalised youth. There is little consideration given to how these individuals' rhetorical styles or influence comes to resonate with young people. This could be gleaned from drilling down to consider relations with authoritative male figures, in a context of the absence of these and also key moments in their lives where they have felt let down by teachers who they expected to guide them, or a parent whom they would have preferred to have stayed in their life. Given the prominence of masculinised jihadi culture, links between drugs, violence and deprivation that the area is known for, as well as the sense of alienation from formal society and the male-dominated cultural aspects of Muslim life, I wondered whether the female participants might have something to say about the influence of societal patriarchy on young men's participation in radicalisation. I also probed whether the absence or troubled relationships between research participants and their fathers might lead them to embrace radical mentors.

> You know, all of these young Muslims now, they're drawn towards a certain sect in Islam. So, you know, 'We're such-and-such a sect, and we don't follow you guys because you're following this, that and the other.' And again, it's that sense of belonging. We came to the agreement and the conclusion that it's a sense of belonging. Being in a sort of sect is a sense of belonging. It's like a family almost, a role model, something that you can look into. At the same time, there's that excitement of us versus them: 'We're following the right stuff; they're really not following the right stuff.' And, you know, you can argue against them. And it's sort of excitement that you get. There's a buzz from following this certain clique that you're in. (Sayyid Qutb)

Even though the sects talked about here are not identified as extremist, of interest to me was the dissonance that results when young Muslims get caught up in choosing to follow one mosque/denomination/strand/scholar of Islam over another. Difference is apprehended rather than as something of intrigue and curiosity that may elicit a desire to get to know or engage in dialogue with, nor is there an indifference, rather it is filtered:

> ...you know, all of these young Muslims now, they're drawn towards a certain sect in Islam. So, you know, 'We're such-and-such a sect, and we don't follow you guys because you're following this, that and the other.' And again, it's that sense of belonging. We came to the agreement and the conclusion that it's a sense of belonging. Being in a sort of sect is a sense of belonging. It's like a family almost, a role model, something that you can look into. At the same time, there's that excitement of us versus them: 'We're following the right stuff; they're really not following the right stuff.' And, you know, you can argue against them. And it's sort of excitement that you get. There's a buzz from following this certain clique that you're in. (Sayyid Qutb)

The milieu I worked in was thus marked by competition between different denominational groups. The inter-Salafi strife has been discussed in (Kenny, 2018; Wiktorowicz, 2005) yet I also observed and learned about solidarity and collaboration between interlinked, but even ostensibly hostile groups. The competition between groups made it difficult to enact de-radicalisation work.

3.5.4 'Ghettoised'

Despite being visibly Muslim or constrained due to socio-economic situations (no work, low paid work, working unsociable hours) or assumed to be ghettoised, the group of young people I worked with were competent in moving around the city. They drifted around the city on a regular basis to attend college, to visit sports centres, city centre *halakas* [social gatherings where Islamic teachings and spirituality is discussed and practiced]. So even youth centres that have been identified as belonging to a particular postcode or because of turf wars, are frequented by these guys. This was a sign of their confidence that

they can be anywhere at any given time. Upon probing this, I learned that their faith spurred them on in this. It gives them excuses in terms of events and moments, an itinerary.

> Well I'll come to Muslim Street. Like I say, I'm very comfortable at the same time with being here. I'll also visit town or sometimes go outside of Birmingham, Coventry, just on the outskirts, meeting friends, things like that. In terms of what I do for like activities and what not, cinema, shopping. I like to go to conferences. I'm really into *qawwali* music right now. (Afia)

3.5.6 Regular informal gatherings

The Friday night gathering known to my respondents as 'Spiceland group' (named after the first restaurant they used to meet in and subsequently the name of a Whatsapp group set up) was one salient example of togetherness. One respondent recalled it for its diversity:

> ...the gathering there is quite, it's quite a motley crew. So different ages, you know, ethnicities, backgrounds. So obviously me and you are different ages, different ethnicities, different professions, but you know, we're able to come together as one and you know, discuss different topics. It's quite nice. (Dhul-Qarnain)

The space is also lauded as a forum where different topics can be discussed. From my observations, I noticed that the kind of topics that came up were those that were deemed contentious in wider society or press vis-à-vis Muslims and Islam. So, for example, the Prophet Muhammad marrying a young girl (Aisha) was discussed as being about the norms of society in those times.

> I said Muslims peace, peace people, our religion's perfect. He goes to me, why did, Aisha, why did the Prophet Mohammed marry a nine years old Aisha and all this. They misunderstand it. (Jalil)

Often things would be contrasted with the present and how contemporary times are hostile to Muslims/religion because of secularism, atheism, individualism.

> Yeah, and that's the other side of the coin, which is I personally don't want to fit in to the point where I'm just seen as any other person. Because we, we live in a secular society. I'm a Muslim. Secularism and Islam doesn't really... I mean, there's certain things that are compatible between the two. But generally speaking, Islam governs every aspect of my life. That's totally opposite to real secularism. So I, I prefer it in, I prefer it in certain instances where I'm actually seen as a Muslim, if that means just wearing a *topi* or wearing a *thawb* or just, I don't know, professing my Islam in some way. (Abu Yahya)

Crucially, this space was valued for the exchanges – across age, ethnicity, life experience – that it enabled. This pointed to: 1) the young people being open to being affected or actively seeking to be affected, which was understood to be a symptom of how empty some of them said their lives were; and 2) the virtues of this space for affecting youngsters who were on the look-out for something new – an opportunity, information, knowledge, people – that might help break the monotony of knowing little and having not much to do.

However, this also became a point of disappointment as many – mainly Pakistani – participants would tail off and lose enthusiasm (i.e. Abdullah, his friend, Ali) and I wouldn't see them for a while. They would then lapse back into 'road life'. I interviewed Abdullah after a period of not seeing him at the Friday night gatherings. It took me a while to pin him down for a meeting. He was rather 'down' and bored in his demeanour when I interviewed him. While he talked about how valuable he found the Friday night gathering, this was something I also observed as his mood visibly changed when in attendance, and he was always accompanied by two others, which suggested to me that he enjoyed it. For a few weeks in a row during (autumn 2018) the Spiceland gatherings didn't take place. Mo John and I would still go along

to Muslim Street to visit a Syrian brother who Ali had befriended while working at a restaurant on the strip. This Syrian had now opened his own establishment. We bumped into Abdullah and his friends a couple of times as they looked for an alternative space to still assemble on a Friday night.

3.5.7 Schooling

Many of my respondents had received formal Islamic education, whether in Islamic schools, *madrasahs* or courses. Some had a blend of Islamic and university. Four male respondents (Mo John, Curly, AbuAbdullah, Sayyid Qutb) and one female (Rozina) had attended Islamic schools. Mostly they conveyed negative experiences, complaining about the long hours (9-7 five days) and the style of teaching as well as problems with fellow pupils. In one instance, the choice of the Islamic school was because of negative impressions of local comprehensive schools.

> One of the things I didn't agree with was that the school ran for twelve hours, from seven AM till about seven PM. That's a bit much for eleven to sixteen-year olds. (Abu Abdullah)

> It was a bit of an eye-opener, in terms of the experience. Obviously, with the Islamic background, with education as well, it's quite different. It is, but I think a lot of people don't realise, towards the beginning, it's a lot tougher in terms of becoming accustomed to the system, obviously with Islamic education and all of that. But obviously, once you're into the flow of things, I think usually about year nine, I think you get a lot more comfortable with your surroundings. (Sayyid Qutb)

3.5.8 Employment

Precarious employment such as zero hours contracts, working in the buoyant food retail sector, security and warehouse packing were very common among my participants. Some worked for Muslim owned businesses.

Among those who had stable employment (Abu-Dhar and Smurf from the Friday evening gatherings and whom I did not interview) they were still shift workers who had to organise their personal lives around unsociable working hours.

> I had to work on a Monday and Friday and I would call up if I wanted more work. More often than not, I would be able to get more work. But it wasn't anything, wasn't anything set in stone, if you see what I mean. So you couldn't rely on them to give you constant shifts. I know some people work at Amazon. And Amazon, yeah, they're run in Erdington where they do packing. It's quite bad actually. You get sent home more often than not. As in when there's not enough work to go around. (Dhul-Qarnain)

3.5.9 Activism/Agency

I attended a number of events hosted by CAGE – a group which campaigns to raise awareness of the impact of the war on terror on Muslims in the UK – being held in the vicinity of the 'Muslim Street' milieu, as well as one organised by Hizb ut Tahrir, which was accompanied by less publicity, and I had heard about through word of mouth. CAGE was initially set up to campaign for and support Muslim men held in prison without trial and particularly in Guantanamo Bay. Since the release of Moazzem Begg, who was a high-profile captive from Birmingham, CAGE has assumed a more UK based role as a campaign group for Muslim civil liberties. It's public profile was boosted in 2015 when the group were dubbed 'apologists for terror' after likening 'Jihadi John' – a British national who had been implicated in beheadings in Syria – to 'a beautiful young man'.[7] CAGE has since garnered a following among critically minded Muslims (as well

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[7] Widely reported in British media, Cage's research director, Asim Qureshi spoke to the BBC in 2015 in a press conference where he explained that he had met Mohammed Emwazi (AKA Jihadi John) before his trajectory into terrorism and he was looking for help, see: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-31650427

as non-Muslims) across the UK evident in their staging of regular events in cities including Birmingham (see Plates 3, 4 and 5).
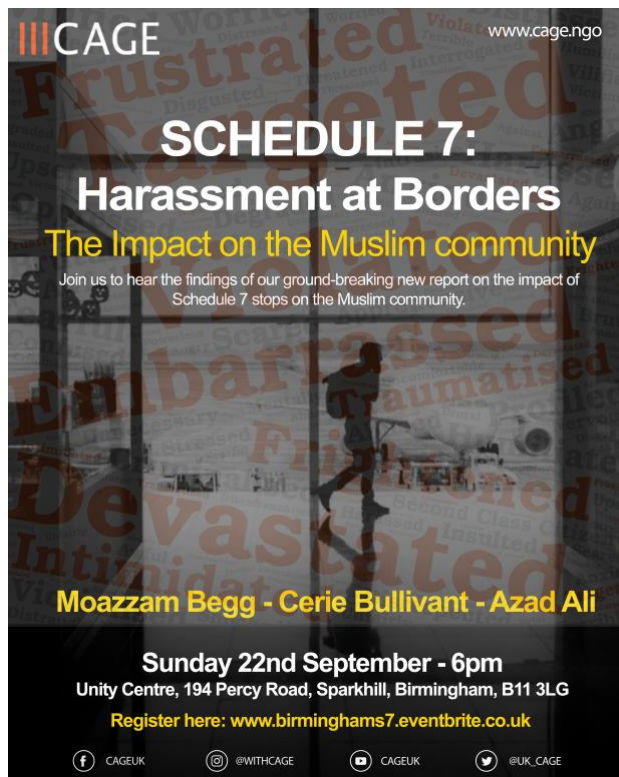

Plate 3: Leaflet advertising a CAGE event in Birmingham on counterterrorism legislation, Schedule 7

Plate 4: Leaflet advertising a CAGE event on UK government Prevent Duty in schools and civil society

eventbrite

Order no. 826925733

Separating Families - How Prevent Seeks Removal of Children (Birmingham)
Free Entry

SEPARATING FAMILIES
HOW PREVENT SEEKS THE REMOVAL OF CHILDREN
EXCLUSIVE LAUNCH OF A NEW REPORT BY CAGE

Birmingham, United Kingdom

Thursday, 11 October 2018 from 19:00 to 21:00 (BST)

Free Order
Order information
Order no. 826925733. Ordered by Ajmal Hussain on 19
September 2018 18:41

8269257331029876160001

Plate 5: E-ticket for CAGE event on UK government Prevent Duty in schools and civil society

The above event in October 2018 had a larger turnout than other events such as the launch of Asim Qureshi's book 'A Virtue of Disobedience' held in the summer of the same year. The focus this time was on the government's Prevent programme. It was held in an old municipal building, usually hired out by local organisations for 'community' related activities. The audience was mixed in terms of gender, ethnicity and even faith. The presenter began by summarising the findings and then went on to call for 'due process' and not agitation by stating that the Prevent programme was the problem. Muslims, and others affected by the incursion into their lives that the statutory duty element of Prevent mandated, merely wanted to be citizens, he stated. It was also not okay that the Prevent duty was now also 'happening to White Far Right too'. They were also citizens who deserve due rights it was claimed. This was the opening gambit, from which flowed a lively discussion.

During the Q&A, the first round of questions were from female attendees, all of whom had accents that suggested they might be from out of town. They happened to be Swedish/Yemeni, African/Asian and from northern England. One talked about parallels with Sweden and suggested 'taking this movement out into the public with a day of action', while also internal issues within the Muslim community around domestic abuse. This Swedish/Yemeni woman had moved to the area some months ago and came along to this event to make networks to begin political work, she stated.

The discussion came back to examples of state practices that are considered to be 'neoliberal management tick box exercises.' The space was then opened up for testimonies from the audience. People talked about their experiences with Prevent. One woman who was there with her child forcefully proclaimed: 'There's too many Citizen Khans involved in community organisations who are bread and butter for Prevent, they need to move on but they are just hanging on.' This was a rebuke to the way Prevent funding was spent, with people complaining that it helped prop-up or keep in existence certain community actors – the Citizen Khan, which is a play on the satirical show based on the outrageous antics of a so-called 'community leader' based in Birmingham. This prompted discussion more broadly about Muslim community and infrastructure. Some of the points people mentioned were:

> Mosques are not relevant, they are not talking about history, Palestine, jurisprudence. So that it's taught in an authentic way, and not in a vertical top down relationship with the state.

Policing is by consent - there is a strange belief in the state and belief that Muslims can have a relationship. "We shouldn't lose our rag with 'good Muslim' brothers, we should educate them.

The Sikh community banned West Midlands police from coming to their Gurdwaras, public events and *langars*. They refused to be targeted by Prevent. Muslims should do the same!

Someone in the audience queried whether this last comment was an attempt to show that Prevent is targeting all faiths so Muslims don't complain?

For the young Muslims I worked with it was important not to become immobilised or stripped of agency. This was pursued through careful manoeuvres, always watching over one's shoulder and being suspicious of new people one encountered, and who showed an interest in their lives other than them as Muslims under the radar.

Dropping out of college or university for a number of reasons pointed to how non-resilient some were, but also the absence of signposts and guidance. This is considered to play into their vulnerability to radicalisation. While some early literature/studies on radicalisation of Muslims suggested a 'conveyor belt' thesis whereby youth become disaffected by experiences of discrimination and intergenerational strife, respondents in this study fell short of suggesting a linear progression into radicalisation. They were willing to hypothesise on challenges Muslim youth faced growing up in a society that was non-Islamic:

...the western society nowadays obviously, it's a lot different. There's... it's a lot more open. There's no clear direction, I'd say. It's just anything goes. Post-modernism, you could say. It's just like anything goes. Anything and everything goes…There's no clear direction, no certain set of morals that there used to be. There used to be an unwritten code, obviously, norms and values that you used to have in society back in the day. Like, I'd say about seven, eight years ago, there was something there. But now, I think there's just nothing. There's no respect for morality or anything anymore. I think it's just been lost. And as a result, I think it's just chaos now. (Sayyid Qutb)

Here we see a lament for a lost set of values or morals that would be useful to anchor young people. The problem is defined as 'western', while the solution is believed to come from Islam:

I found that, you know, there is more satisfaction in me following my religion and obviously identifying more with my culture and adopting it. Because it's, it gives a proper clear direction. It's more clear-cut than, as opposed to obviously just following desires or whatever. It's just more satisfying. It gives me a sense of satisfaction and a feeling of responsibility and, you know... It does give me a direction that I need, so it does help a lot. (Sayyid Qutb)

Without more detailed knowledge about the social lives of this and similar respondents, which I gained through participation in a range of organised and fleeting events, one could assume that young Muslims exist in a conflicted state. Of course, the testimony that religion provides orientation and is an anti-dote to disaffection was a theme I encountered regularly while working within this milieu. Religion provided solace against the disjointing effects of growing up in a deprived area and where educational achievement and employment opportunities were not guaranteed. Being in this milieu, I observed how religion and the projection of a correct interpretation of it were laboured over. There were various social events such as the Friday night gatherings, the Saturday city centre walkabout and an impromptu barbeque held to bring young Muslim men together and to offer 'reminders' from the *deen* (religion). Social issues such as radicalisation were avoided, however.

Disappointments resulting from being treated differently or being let down when they would not expect to be, were common in a range of life moments. These young men had learned a way to deal with these through supressing anger, while being acutely aware of how it occurs around them.

I went to college for about two months, yeah. Then parents' evening came up, and my tutor said to me, my tutor said to me that, 'Parents' evening coming up, your parents are going to come, and I'm going to tell them straight everything. Or you can leave.' He said to me, 'Either leave the college, or I'm going to tell your parents everything.' I never used to go to the classes, one class a week. And I said to him, 'Safe man. I'm not here tomorrow. I'm quitting.' I never went back to college. […]That just shows you the teacher, he just said to me, 'Leave the college or I'm going to tell your parents everything.' Didn't even try and support me or nothing. So, I was doing engineering as well. So I just left it, at that young age – seventeen. (Abdullah)

I was introduced from the person that used to run that club to a higher performance centre for youngsters... […] So I went there, trained for a while. And obviously, that was where I felt a little hard-done-by. Because on three occasions, there were trials for county, and I wasn't kind of pushed in the right direction. I was kind of held back by the coach, in terms of favouritism for his own players. (Sayyid Qutb)

When discussing social and political issues that feature in discussions about Muslims (i.e., radicalisation, foreign policy, extremism, Islamophobia) I was often steered away from these topics and toward issues that mattered to my participants instead. Abu Yahya, for example, a Somali who been in the UK for over a decade now and who was an influencer on 'Muslim Street' along with Minnie, preferred to talk about *dawah*, his studies and interest in social and theological sciences. He had just returned from a year studying in Saudi Arabia and we talked in depth about the applicability of his overseas education to here. In our discussions he revealed a concern about secularism, atheism and other western liberal framings that impact life for Muslims in the UK. He did this with a view to engage with these discourses rather than oppose them. He challenged the 'grievance' narrative, which he suggested was paraded by groups such as ALM and Hizb ut Tahrir. Religion, for him functioned as an *enabling* force to engage with the UK cultural and political system.

I also came to learn about regular but disjointed and haphazard series of events ranging from impromptu meetings in cafes on the street, the Friday night gatherings, winter conferences held at the mosque, talks arranged by enthusiastic young people, overnight events held in Brixton and Luton as other major centres of Salafism. Basically, a series of efforts to educate and get educated on Islam. These also presented indirect benefits of networking, where new individuals (whose backgrounds were not always apparent) would command respect, because of their involvement in professional activities such as humanitarian work or medical and professional services. These appealed to young people with little or no human capital, because of the promise they represented of access into other worlds/opportunities.

Certainly, the individuals who held leadership roles relished these. Most were quite responsible when taking new or younger people under their wing. For example, they would arrange transport for them on Friday evenings, which usually meant arranging a lift home or a place to stay overnight in case public transport or a lift were not available. As a result, they garnered respect and in their company, people felt safe. It also provided kudos or cover for young men whose parents would be concerned about where they were and who they were associating with.

4. Key Findings

4.1 Radicalisation and non-radicalisation trajectories

During this research, I was struck by how little interest there was among people I worked with to engage in discussion about radicalisation. It was a non-conversation for a number of reasons, including fear of being overheard and suspected of being a jihadi sympathiser, or because of a feeling that the whole

discourse was 'bogus' or a conspiracy. This also suggested a sense of powerlessness against the forces that were considered to be determining of a negative discourse about Muslims. This disenchantment was confounded by the little confidence young Muslim's had that they could counter negative discourses of Muslims and radicalisation through means of protest, for example. Instead, radicalisation, was articulated by respondents as a contested issue or as merely a discourse at the very least, which bore little relevance to actual life in the milieu. It was not straight forwardly accepted or engaged with. There were always caveats, whether expressed as conspiracy theories or deep and often elaborate arguments involving conflicting political opinions and debate. This reflected a cynicism toward relations with organisations and individuals outside the milieu, which were believed to rely on taken for granted assumptions about Muslims and their propensity toward radicalisation:

> To be honest, I hear about radicalisation and I hear about extremism, but I never really come across it, to be honest. I never really come across it…So obviously, the media push out whatever they want to push out. And they portray Islam in whatever light they want to. And whenever they do portray Muslim people, Muslim communities, always in the more clandestine activities and the more illicit activities, and it's never anything good in the papers. (Dhul-Qarnain)

> Let's say, for example, there's sixteen thousand terrorists right now. There aren't of course, let's just say. I think it was two thousand. A number around that figure, 'If we took that into account – sixteen thousand terrorists, that will be only 0.001 percent of the Muslim population around the world. So why, you know, is it made to seem that, you know, radicalism is such a problem when it isn't?' It's not (…) walking around, blowing up places and doing these, all sorts of stuff. And they always say you know we should do more. Quite vague, you know, this word 'more'. It's quite elusive. What do you mean, 'more' as in what else can people do? I don't really see, you know, anyone putting solutions forward. They just know we should do more. But I'm not too sure what we can do as a community more than things... more than what's been done already. (Dhul-Qarnain)

This disposition, one of cynicism, also coloured discussion about uncontested facts such as knowledge of people who had gotten involved in jihadi activities and lost their lives in Syria or in 'home grown terror attacks'.

> It was, it was quite sad, because obviously you didn't expect that from someone like Rashid. But obviously, with a lot of people that go over, you never do usually expect it from them, which is quite saddening as well. It just highlights the bigger issue, that there's obviously other things going on, and that we as people need to kind of pick up on certain signs that are being shown by these individuals. (Sayyid Qutb)

> Interviewer: So was there much discussion around it?

> Respondent: Obviously it became a kind of taboo subject. Obviously, as you know, terrorism and Muslims have now unfortunately been linked together for quite some years, after the September eleven attacks, etc. So obviously there wasn't that much discussion. I think it was the kind of elephant in the room. Everyone knew obviously he'd gone off. I, I knew he'd gone, but I didn't know that he'd been killed or that he'd passed away, (…). That came as a shock to me. I found out a little later than the other guys, so... (Sayyid Qutb)

When there was engagement with the concept of radicalisation or associated terms such as extremism or fundamentalism, it was pursued in a rhetorical way; to broaden the discussion so that it was not only about the individual or their relation to religion but also about social, cultural and political issues.

It does annoy me. It really does get to me. It's, it really does make me angry, in a way, but obviously, I understand. I don't want to say I sympathise with them, but I understand what's kind of going on. These are people that may have a lack of understanding or knowledge when it comes to religion or society. And as a result, they see something, and something... obviously usually it's the bad things that are attractive the most, isn't it? (Sayyid Qutb)

I think for young people, you know, particularly like the council, it's not so much a matter of priorities so knife crime takes precedence over radicalisation etc. I just think that radicalisation itself isn't really... not so much not in our lexicon, but just not really a thing. (Ubayda)

But when it comes to the reason why radicalisation takes place, my personal opinion, like one of the things that builds the foundation for it is like... I don't know if you remember the war on terror on Iraq and Afghanistan, right. So under this war on terror, innocent people got killed by Americans. So a Muslim is going to feel pain for his fellow Muslim. A Muslim's not going to think about what the religion says sometimes, he will use his emotions. And then obviously, these attacks come with responses, right. So obviously, for a response to take place, then obviously this happens, for example, if EDL is going to come together, right, to take Muslims out of this country, want Muslims out of this country, that's going to form other groups that are going to retaliate towards the EDL. Know what I mean? And I feel like, when this happened, and the thing in Syria happened, I feel like this was a, this was something, a direction towards people trying to go to Syria and trying to, you know, fight and everything, thinking they're doing something good, when it's all extremism. Like Isis is not... I don't consider Isis to be a group which is bringing peace; they're bringing war, the more like destruction to the Muslims. And to people around, and to those who are not Muslims. They're killing innocent people. (Abu Hamza)

4.1.1 The ephemeral nature of radicalisation

Respondents in this study were often perplexed about why someone would want to engage in such acts. This echoes commentary related to people implicated in radicalisation who have been viewed as lost individuals or 'matter' who are brain washed, manipulated or inherently evil/twisted because of their belief in an extremist ideology, and who, then, join a so-called cause because of the freedom or resistance it offers from being a 'lost' or aggrieved Muslim.

Respondents' contested relationship to 'radicalisation' prompted me to think about the **ephemeral** nature of radicalisation (discourse) derived from people's perplexity toward taken for granted knowledge about who the radicalised were and where they were coming from. This was a response to the objectification often resulting from profiling. For example, the shift from being a 'good kid', 'from a nice family' is only able to be articulated by powers such as the media and the state who ascribe meaning and value to people's lives.

Like Rasheed[8] who went [to Syria]? Was it Rasheed? He was from Alum Rock. And he went, he joined Isis or something like that. We were talking about that...All I heard was like he went to Syria or something to join like an extremist group. He got brainwashed and that was it. I don't know him personally. So I don't know what he went through which led him to that, know what I mean? (Abu Hamza)

The ephemeral nature of radicalisation is exemplified by the challenges that a number of young people in my research professed, when trying to affect fellow young people they described as being 'in the zone'. By this they were implying that radicalised youth are not identifiable by their socio-economic and demographic profiles. Rather, they convey/express radicalised states of mind through repertoires of

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[8] This refers to a well-known and widely publicised case of a young man who travelled to Syria.

emotion, which in turn are cultivated through encounters with institutions and individuals. In this context, some of my participants bemoaned the inadequacy and bad intentions of official space such as that known as Prevent, not trusting it as 'value free.'

If radicalisation is disparate and diffuse, characterised by endogenous and exogenous factors, emic and etic, then, it is about grasping how these various – ephemeral as well as systemic/structural - forces might converge, and the times and spaces when they do. This echoes the 2018 CONTEST strategy, which recognises that 'there is no single factor at work' but that 'several factors might converge to create the conditions under which radicalisation can occur' (Home Office, 2018: 23, 32). For example, disenchanted with the way their lives currently were (Abdullah and Abu Levi), and by prevailing representations of Muslims/Islam, they sought to work out a way to *be* Muslim. Hence, they lived a doubleness – who they are (signified by their maternal religion) and who they're made out to be (masculinised religious extremists):

> So on one hand, you've got the religion; on the other hand, you've got all of this Western lifestyle. And it comes to a point where I think, usually always, they're always drawn back to the religious aspect. 'Cause obviously I think the situation, the gravity of the situation always does hit at the end, when they're involved in gang warfare or whatever it is they're involved in. And they think, 'You know what? Religion is something that's always been there, that gives you direction, that gives you that comfort, that cushion that you fall back on.' And again, obviously because they're youths, they just look towards whatever seems appealing to them, even within the religion unfortunately. So instead of following the full rulings and everything, etc., they follow those things that might be appealing to them from within the religion and leave everything... Pick and mix kind of identity and society. (Sayyid Qutb)

The 'pick and mix' alluded to above, signals the interpenetration of global events with local lives, and particularly the role of social media and other mediums for transmitting imagery from the war on terror and resistance to it by *mujahideen*. Urban youth culture has already been discussed in this way. For example Hebdige's (1987) 'cut 'n' mix' analogy and later Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic (1992) has been influential for understanding the appropriation of global influences in local cultures.

> I think a lot of people feel like foreign policy justifies it because that's […] he was waffling on about what's happened in Syria. And the reality is, even if foreign policy justifies it, go and become a politician and take it up with the politicians. Don't start killing people randomly in the street to kind of get back at people. (Abu Abdullah)

Radicalisation also becomes an ephemeral phenomenon, then, because of the way it is pursued. Radicalised youth could be said to exist akin to 'ghosts' – whereby we only learn about the individual after they have been apprehended or have left this world for another. Beyond ruminations on the desire for (things in) an afterlife, little is known about the socio-psychic life of the radicalised Muslim. Through exploration of the 'zone' as narrated by my research participants above, we can explore some of the affective and situational dimensions of radicalisation.

For example, the space of the street/milieu that the people I worked with operate in is an ontological one that carries the force to affect the conditions of young impressionable Muslims. Yet its role in their lives is largely unknown, or worse, seen as part of the problem. For example, the 'zone' is taken to be a naturalised area of crime, whose inhabitants maybe colloquially referred to as 'Zonard'. Dikec (2007) discusses such classificatory regimes in reference to spatial policy and policing of the banlieues in France, where the natural association is almost used to excuse the behaviour/doings of 'zonards', because it is considered an inherent condition.

The zone when employed in policy planning is used to designate something peripheral. It is even more marginal or extreme, in how my respondents talked about it. It is a state that is hard to penetrate,

ephemeral, like being possessed; when in the 'zone', the individual they knew had become hard to reach or influence through argument. Abu Abdullah illustrates this, talking about the so-called 'Manchester Bomber': 'the thing is, we couldn't talk to him, he was in the zone, he was too far gone already' (Abu Abdullah). When explaining this state, respondents also refer to it as one filled with emotion:

> From what I find, I think people that end up in the extreme ways, they sort of skipped the step that I took, sort of, the Salafi sort of. In between the sort of [mentions a big mosque on Muslim street] and [smaller mosque just off Muslim street] They'd skip that, and they'd end up in the emotional side, I'd say. If you look at the two girls in the media recently: Shamima Begum, and the one in particular I find interesting was the one in America. She was quite active on Twitter. She was quite active on Twitter, and I was reading some of her old tweets. And they sort of just run on emotion. They'd be almost groomed and blackmailed into be, 'Oh our brothers and sisters are dying in so-and-so, what are you doing?' And they'd go down the extreme route. (Abu Levi)

Other people I worked with also spoke about the challenges involved in engaging young people believed to be radicalised:

> So we'd just talk about topics, but we knew they were like misguided anyway; it's quite clear as to evidence. You know, it's not from religion that they were doing it anyway. (Abdullah)

This was often put down to 'a lack of knowledge' (as noted by Sayyid Qutb below) and thus best addressed by pointing those concerned towards 'real Islam' (see Jalil, below).

> Again, it comes down to a lack of knowledge. A lot of people, for example, will hear a hadith they heard yesterday and try and implement it today, without knowing everything behind it, the context in which it was used or... And they'll just fire refutations for no reason and... It's quite sad, unfortunately, but, you know... (Sayyid Qutb)

> [...] best way is to avoid trouble and tell them about what real Islam is about. I said, this... you need to, don't listen to the minority of the people, listen to what, listen to the majority. These are minority. Making Islam look bad. (Jalil)

However, for these respondents, knowledge was not to be found on internet and some were suspicious of prominent social media platforms:

> I just see it as a big waste of time, to be honest. There's always the idea that it can be used as a productive thing. And it can be used as a, something informative. But I never see it being used in that particular way, you know what I mean. Just really a way to peer into other people's lives and I don't know, just waffle on the internet really. (Dhul-Qarnain)

> I cut off social media when I became practising. It's just that it's really bad for your mental health. It's like, you just see, okay, so, obviously, all my friends are just taking selfies and this started, it started to make me dislike my friends, that they were vain and it made me vain. And it made me care about how I looked online and it, well, it was a time consumer. I didn't like what it was doing to, to me and to my mental health, so I cut off it. I kept Twitter because it's useful for my research. Being in this field, I can find out a lot of things on Twitter, but I don't even like going on there because it's addictive. It's like, you know, you keep scrolling, you keep scrolling and it's hard to stop. (Freda)

4.2 Structural factors

The young Muslims I worked with spent significant time in 'Muslim Street', mostly in-between other moments of their lives as students and employees. Thus, outside of the milieu, they came into contact

with institutions and organisations that helped shape their worldviews. Below I discuss some of these and the resultant affects generated.

Most of the people I worked with had attended further education college (although not always successfully). One participant who was active in *dawah* sought to go to college and university further from home where the student demographic was mixed. He shared instances of interactions where his faith was of interest to other students. The zeal with which he conveyed this story was almost as though this was part of his objective to attend college *there*; to provoke interest in Islam and Muslims so that he could, then, engage people in debates and discussion on things that were of interest to him.

Others reported negative experiences at college, which led them to change track but also to, then, do things that felt 'closer to home'. In one case, Hilal decided to read Islamic studies.

> So I had some issues at university, the equivalent and so on. So I end up dropping it, that university. And then I decided to take my Islamic studies more seriously. (Hilal)

Abu Abdullah reported a more positive experience of college whereby he was able to broker friendships as well as engage in campaigns to tackle anti-Muslim discourses:

> Interviewer: What was your experience like at college? Were you active then as well, in Islamic societies and things like that?
> Abu Abdullah: Not really, um it was more like football, have a laugh with the lads and that was that to be honest. It's not until I got to university when I decided I wanted to be a bit more active. I mean, second year of college did involve me having to be active because the prayer room was closed down in the college, so I had to do a bit of a campaign about that so […].
> Interviewer: was that also around the time when they were looking at banning *niqabs* and *hijabs*?
> Abu Abdullah: They banned it. But due to like outrage, they had to revoke their decision.

Experiences of school were also formative for the young people I worked with, in terms of shaping their relations with others.

> School was, our school was quite diverse, to be honest with you. You had Asians, you had blacks and, but predominantly my year was Asian and white people and a minority of black people. But there was like, but there's still racism present, even though it was a diverse school. Yeah, Asians didn't really like the white boys. White boys didn't really like the Asian boys. 'Cause most of the white boys were from [names a district]. So they had this mentality where anyone who was not white, it's, 'They're below us, they're beneath us.' And the Asian lads like, in my school, the majority of them were from [names a district]. [names a district] is a predominantly Pakistani, Asian area. So they had this mentality where the opposite – they don't like white people, the white people don't like Asian people. So... (Abu Hamza)

Dhul-Qarnain was of Somali origin and lived in an area near to 'Muslim Street' that was predominantly south Asian. In an interview he mentioned how at school he was on the receiving end of racism instigated by Pakistani children. He later went to an Islamic school where the experience was different:

> I remember, one of my earliest memories is at the age of four, I remember speaking to some kids in my class, and then they asked me what religion I believed in, right. And I said, 'I'm a Muslim.' And they said, 'You can't be Muslim, you're black. How can you be Muslim? […] ..but they only believed me when they saw my mother coming down with a scarf to collect me at the end of the school day. (Dhul-Qarnain)

I met Dhul-Qarnain a number of times at the Friday night gatherings. I noticed he would always be wearing a thobe and he stated that he was comfortable wearing Islamic attire as it enabled him to 'exist' as a

Muslim in a highly racialised environment. Being Muslim was the common ground he and other Somali and convert young men had with the established south Asian communities, yet their race (black) made them subject to racialised abuse. They recognised that it was important for them to affirm who they are in terms of religion if they were to get along living in a predominantly south Asian, albeit Muslim, area. Blackness was not so much celebrated by these young men, then, as it got them into trouble (i.e. racism from south Asians). This could also be seen as Islam offering them a 'way out' of the problems with racism by fellow Muslims. His life chances were severely affected by racism he experienced at school, which led to him being removed from class and put into special sessions with other kids who were made to do activities other than learning. He referred to this as being 'worked on'.

Experiencing racism from Pakistanis – their fellow Muslims – perplexed these youngsters and fed the narrative that Islam was mired by cultural fracturing. Dhul-Qarnain's experience of the Islamic school, where the majority was still south Asian Muslim, is an example of how religion can transcend culture or ethnicity. The Salafi young men who spent time on 'Muslim Street' believed that this is how religion should be and made it their mission therefore to differentiate themselves from the south Asian Islam of the earlier generation.

This debate about internal racism re-surfaced in the context of the Black Lives Matter protests (Summer 2020) which prompted discussions about south Asian racism toward blacks. This played out against a history of tensions between certain black and south Asian sin the city, prompted by a grievance toward south Asian owned businesses that served predominantly black areas. It was viewed as a fault line that could be exploited by those seeking to nurture victimhood narratives. However, the experiences of black convert Muslims also demonstrated that communing with south Asians provides a lifeline; for example, Isaac's brotherhood with fellow south Asian Muslims was a key resource that helped him keep from returning to prison.

Hence, Islam offered an escape from such experiences of 'otherness'. For some it was the identity, which became instrumentalised, for others the teachings and consequences of these helped them feel secure and protected.

While experiences of racism could somewhat be mitigated against through identifying with Islam, there was also the stigma associated with attending a Trojan Horse school or a school with Islamic ethos that brought with a different set of issues:

> Not really, not really. Because no-one's going to know, you know, came from THAT ISLAMIC SCHOOL. But even if they do, what you hear, what the media pushes out is not the same. Because there was an article in fact about how the school kids were forced to sit down on the floor and eat. But as we know, it was the Sunnah, and we didn't actually mind sitting on the floor and eating. We actually quite enjoyed sitting on the floor and eating. And when they brought tables, we actually preferred to sit down and eat, which they never let us do, funnily enough. But obviously media pushed it out as, 'School can't afford tables and forces kids to sit on the floor.' It was nothing like that, it was nothing like that." (Dhul-Qarnain)

This revealed a number of attitudes toward structural discrimination, which is the way many in the wider Muslim community interpreted the Trojan Horse affair. For them the issue was about addressing poor schooling in the inner city and the challenge that parents and community members faced when seeking to engage with school governance.

Experiences of racism/othering were filtered in relation to local dynamics, and not necessarily mediated by global factors such as ISIL propaganda, which exploited grievances Muslims may have toward their host societies. Dhul-Qarnain, for example, situated his experiences of racism in school as a consequence of local demographic dynamics, whereby the newest community was subjected to othering. He spoke about the increased visibility of new migrants from Eastern Europe who now attracted the attention of racists.

So, the experience of being racialised was not internalised, but made sense of in the context of local social change. This was symptomatic of how receptive these young men were to their environment, more so than to global geo-politics.

There was even an awareness that bordered on romanticising the virtues of the local, in the expectation that as the Somali community became more numerous things would get better:

> And well everyone has a Somali friend now; Somalis are quite well known and quite a big community now, so not many problems now. (Dhul-Qarnain)

And the incidence of Muslims and associated Islamic infrastructure made it desirable to stay in the city:

> No, 'cause you know, even though there was a lot, all of this, they appreciate the fact that it was a lot easier to practise their religion. 'Cause they, you know, every mosque, every corner there's a mosque. And it was very easy, very accessible. (Dhul-Qarnain)

The south Asian young men I worked with experienced discrimination in a similar way (at school, at the hands of police) and internalised differently:

> Yeah. I mean I've always like... because I was the only one that was from England, they used to call me names and stuff like that, right. 'You British this. You British that.' And when I come back from Pakistan to secondary school, it was like, they started using the P word, some of the white boys. 'You Paki. You're this. You're that.' I'm thinking like, 'What are you supposed to do? A country where I originated from, I experienced racism there. The country which I was born in, experience racism here. Like what is going on? (Abu Hamza)

> Although it's said that it's a 'random', inverted commas, random stop and search, obviously there is the underlying issue that it's always, the trend is still there, isn't it? There's that same trend: Asian, Muslim, beard. (Sayyid Qutb)

Despite being aware that they are discriminated against for being Muslim, they did not engage in knee-jerk responses. They looked to the bigger picture:

> But I mean, again, I understand that, because of the actions of a few individuals, now the whole of us are being labelled as terrorists or as a threat. So obviously, better to be safe than sorry. I mean, I haven't got an issue with it. If they want to stop and search me, I've got nothing to hide. I've not, I've not got any extreme views... (Sayyid Qutb)

> This is a mistake that a lot of white people are, you know, putting out there, saying that Muslim men grooming, Muslim men doing terrorism acts. Muslim men, you know, fighting in the street. You got to understand something – Islam does not teach us to do this. It's their own instincts, they want to do it themselves. So I said, 'If, you know...' I interact a lot with white people like that, and come across situations where they'll put something on the social media and I have to put a message back out there, and say, 'Hang on. Why is it that you're putting out Muslims? Muslims don't do this.' Then they'll say, 'Okay, let's meet up. Let's have a little talk about this. (Mo John)

4.3 Disengaged, disaffected youth

A popular explanation that forms part of the conveyor belt theory is that experiences of discrimination, family tensions and identity crisis – push young Muslims towards finding meaning and solace elsewhere and, that this often makes them susceptible to radicalisation. The milieu is certainly a space where something else can be encountered. It gives off a sense of comfort/home for those who may de disaffected. It does not however, provide all the answers or become a home away from home, nor does

the network (Spiceland group) become a surrogate family. It doesn't fill the void that an 'identity crisis' prompts in these minority ethnic youth. It may offer the promise of that, which if frustrated or not realised can lead to extreme circumstances (the case of Rashid). This incomplete or 'unpromise' was evident in how young men would often slip out of the network for periods and then return randomly (Abdullah, Mo John). Through time spent with some who did this, I got a sense of the frustrations and disappointments that led certain young men to turn away from the gatherings for different periods of time.

One youth worker I spoke with in the summer of 2018 who worked with young Muslims in an area adjacent to 'Muslim Street', offered his perspective on the issue of radicalisation. He suggested it was not a problem 'in his patch', because the area was predominantly south Asian and increasingly young Afghanis were a sizeable cohort attending his youth centre. He believed that the south Asian youth were prone to radicalisation a decade or so ago, when the war on terror was focused on the Taliban and Pakistan/Afghanistan were part of the theatre of war. He suggested that young south Asian men were drawn to the conflict because of the association with their mother countries. It was similar for Somali young men, who were believed to be more susceptible to radicalisation while there was on-going conflict with Al Shabaab in Somalia. Now, the situation was different, because the focus was on ISIS, Syria, Iraq and, therefore, he believed it was the Arab and Maghrebi young men who were more susceptible.

A number of young men challenged associations with troubled homelands or ethnic communities. Abu Abdullah was of Libyan ethnicity, his family having fled Libya 30 years ago because his father identified with a political view that was at odds with the regime, which he saw as being un-Islamic. I had met Abu Abdullah in early 2017 and had been on journeys between Manchester and Birmingham with him. These coincided with both of us returning from work or study in Manchester to homes in Birmingham. I interviewed him for this project in July 2018, over a year after the Manchester Arena attack. We had met a number of times before this to talk about the research, however. It was notable how after the Manchester attack he started to minimise his affinity with his parents' homeland; and even with the sizeable Libyan community in Manchester, despite being a well-known figure there due to being active in the student ISOC and being a volunteer Imam at the local mosque, he would play down his ethnicity.

How the young people deal with uncertainty and disappointment from plans or dreams that never materialised, was an interesting aspect of all the young people I encountered. The literature suggests that the profile of home grown radicals is the outcome of a life of disappointments, discrimination and under achievement to the point where seeking 'a way out' becomes the solution. In contrast, I observed and learned about how young people made lives through these constraints. How the network held them together and the different people, emotional and physical labour it was made up of. These amounted to an unrecognised, unstructured but often conscious programme to keep young men who were in their fold from adopting extreme positions on religion.

4.3.1 Victimhood and grievance

The Muslim psyche is shaped by experiences of local discrimination and global humiliation – the war on terror, Guantanamo Bay, the Satanic Verses fatwa, Danish cartoons, Charlie Hebdo – which combine to form public narratives and controversies (Gole, 2013) that Muslim life is lived in and through. On the street there are reminders of this in the form of graffiti that invokes remembrance of Gaza alongside God, the Palestine shop and a handful of popular eating places where I encountered a Guantanamo Bay returnee. My point is that memory of victimhood is well served here. Negotiating such memories becomes a facet of European Muslim identity (Tsagarousianou, 2017). Yet a 'radical contextualisation' (Keith, 2005: 109) of their lives in this area shows how complex their views are on matters where Muslims are assumed to be one-sided or monolithic. For example, deep cynicism toward decision making in democratic systems, coupled with their inability to affect change, led many to adopt a depressing or defeatist tone.

> Now what you see is that, again, tyranny of the majority, isn't it? No matter what you say, something... it's gonna happen anyway. So, you know, obviously what will happen, will

happen. There's no arguing against... there's nothing you can do to stop it or prevent it. (Sayyid Qutb)

Among the people I worked with, there was an acute awareness of their inability to change the status quo, in relation to the bio-political regime of profiling and policing Muslims. This should be viewed in relation to the apolitical nature of Salafist thought mentioned above, which disavows getting involved in democratic processes, because these are seen as man-made vs sharia as God given law. I observed two responses:

1. Engagement with the wider world to challenge the negativity associated with Islam/Muslims. Importantly, this never took the form of protests but through *'dawah'* activities. Hence, their disgruntlement with how Islam is represented and responded to is addressed through an active planned and sometimes staged engagement with the world to create a different impression of Muslims/Islam.
2. Embracing of sources of alternative information that help to satisfy a thirst to know and feel something better (internet, conspiracy theories, demagogues such as Anwar Awlaki). Often this took the form of being satisfied that the enemy is fallible or through invoking God's wrath through *dua* [prayer/wishes/asking from God] for the demise of aggression toward Muslims. At its most evocative, this would take the form of cursing the 'enemies of Islam'.

Minnie, who is a key influencer in the milieu elaborated on these points:

Interviewer: So do you think that, you know when they discourage people from voting, or they say it's *haram*, do you think that's like, has an impact on the young people?

Respondent: Yeah, because you're not involved in anything, are you? You're not involved in any part of how the society is run. You can't think... people can criticise or stand on the side lines, but that's not gonna change or improve, you know, your community around you. Whatever vision or goal you have, you have to, to participate in, you know, in the change. Or to get your voice across. And that's just the way it works. Anything generally you can't... you can't have a say in something if you don't get involved, if you don't get your hands dirty. You can stand on the side lines and talk, but that's not changing anything is it? That's not, you know, making any difference to society. That's what we need as Muslims. We're a minority here in this country. And also, we're facing discrimination, Islamophobia. So you know, we have to stand up for our rights and get representatives across that truly represent us. (Minnie)

One manifestation of this dilemma was young Muslims being deterred from talking about radicalisation:

Once obviously word had spread within the circle of friends that he [Rashid] had gone out [to Syria], it pretty much was like a taboo subject, like I said. It's just, everyone knows that it's there, but no one wants to discuss it or talk about it, because... Just a bit of a weird one, isn't it? You wouldn't expect it from Rashid anyway. So it's, I think it's the fact that it was quite sad and quite shocking to everyone that it was Rashid that went. And I think that was one of the reasons that no one wanted to talk about it, 'cause it did hit home for quite a few people. (Sayyid Qutb)

The disposition, of not being able to talk about such an important dynamic that coloured the Muslim community mixed with anti-Prevent sentiment, was not without consequences. When things are 'out of bounds 'or people experience exclusion - not dissimilar to the earlier generation for whom employment and statutory services such as council housing were a struggle to acquire – new ways to 'get around' are sought. This sometimes involves ascribing different meanings to conventional acts; so as to claim them. At other times, things are done under the radar or become clandestine activities such as the Friday night

gatherings, which were also a response to having no formal spaces provided to them by the mosques, for example. These give actions a meaning and language that derives from their social locatedness and is expressed in equally relevant/current repertoires of action.

At a protest held outside a primary school predominantly attended by Muslim children, and which was televised nationally, many of the vocal protestors expressed grievance toward the issue of teaching about same sex marriages in school, for example, yet behind this objection was a history of grievance fuelled by educational under achievement, unemployment in mainstream sectors of the economy or secure work and the over-policing of Muslim neighbourhoods. As one protestor chanted: 'this is an uprising it's not a protest'. Similarly, another person present who identified as a queer Muslim, told me that for her this was a protest against Islamophobia and not about homophobia, because the policy change was being pursued under the guise of the statutory Prevent duty, which overwhelmingly targeted Muslims.

Being apolitical, then, but not shying away from publicly expressing their religion, and not directly seeking to challenge public scepticism or hate toward Muslims/Islam through organised action, but through doing good actions, was a form of embodied morality.

> There's always gonna be that sort of hate or that negativity towards Islam as long as it's, you know, linked towards terrorism and, you know... It's always unfortunate, but, you know, I mean, there's not much you can do about it. I mean, action speaks louder than words. Obviously, you as a Muslim have more of an influence through your actions and what you do and what you say than just, you know, hiding behind closed doors and not doing anything. (Sayyid Qutb)

4.3.2 Role of Institutions

After the Manchester Arena attack in 2017, one participant, who had received attention from the media and security services in its aftermath, commented on what was at stake in the way the event had been handled:

> There's a lot of heat and interest, but it's just because it's a story. The problem with that is, I think, the concerning thing is that it's a year on and everyone seems to have just like moved on or just put paper over cracks. Like if you look back at […] it's a British thing, he was born in Britain that attacker, he was born in Britain, he was raised in Britain and, at twenty-two, he decides to blow up himself. For someone that is born and bred here, that shouldn't be the problem. (Abu Abdullah)

Here the respondent was calling for attention to being shifted from surface level issues such as the attacker's religion or orientation toward violent extremism, toward awareness of his socio/economic/cultural background and, importantly, the role of institutions/organisations whose responsibility it was to police and apprehend radicalised individuals:

> And the fact that no one knew or seen it coming, raises questions. How many more people are out there like that? I think the response for me has been kind of […] it's a shame. At first, the initial response which was arresting a lot of people, questioning so many people and then the police saying, "oh no he acted in a cell", and then, "no he was on his own", so that was like a bad performance by the police. And then the security services have not really done anything to kind of step up and a year, it's been over a year, a year and three months or a year and two months and there isn't any like sort of answers about how this happened, why it happened. And we're always prone to it happening again, so I think – for me – it kind of raises more questions than answers... (Abu Abdullah)

Criticism was levied at the way organisations who are responsible for policing radicalisation went about their business:

Interviewer: So, do you know any other brothers who were caught up in the raids and arrests and stuff like that.

Abu Abdullah: Yeah, I know a few, I know a few yeah.

Interviewer: In Manchester?

Abu Abdullah: Yeah, in Manchester yeah. Some were students I think yeah. That sort of follow up to that, he set a record for the longest – I think – arrests without no charge.

Interviewer: Really?

Abu Abdullah: I believe he set the first, second and third erm longest arrests without charge. So, I think his brother was fourteen days without charge, that was the longest because […].

Interviewer: But isn't there […]? Haven't they got the twenty-eight day rule is it? Twenty-eight days, remember Tony Blair […].

Abu Abdullah: What section seven? The terrorism one?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Abu Abdullah: But that's when you're charged. There was no charge.

Interviewer: So, do you know how them brothers felt afterwards?

Abu Abdullah: I know his brother and a year later he still can't even leave his house. Because people know or recognise his face because the police released his photo…I mean, imagine his brother recently had a baby and you can't even go to the hospital without people recognising you and stuff like that. So, it must be a horrible place to be caught up in.

Interviewer: Has there been any support for him, like from do you know anywhere? Like, within the community or? What was the response like within the local community, the Libyan community there?

Abu Abdullah: It was more like 'shhh. No one talk about it, no one speak about it, let's not expose ourselves to any more heat or any more like attention - media attention.' So, yeah man.

Interviewer: Were there any internal discussions about like – you know - *why* or *how* or anything like that?

Abu Abdullah: I don't think there was much discussion. It was more like let's just move on and I think everyone kind of just wanted to move on quickly. Like the Libyan community, the government, the police. Everyone just kind of wanted to like, let's bury this and move on.

There was an acute awareness of the impact on the lives of individuals and communities (i.e. Libyan diaspora in the UK) who were folded into media and state interest in the aftermath of the Manchester Attack. This was expressed in the detailed knowledge about detentions and the correct laws around this.

In a separate conversation I had with Abu Abdullah (not audio recorded but part of fieldwork) he described his efforts to work with the police and media so that the whole Libyan community was not negatively affected. This was the first time he had done anything like this and described how challenging it was being caught between a desire to help while containing the frustration brought on by the way he was received/treated by the media and police:

Abu Abdullah: Yeah, I was asked. I mean you fit the profile: similar age, Libyan, similar background, grew up in Manchester. So, a lot of people think maybe there's something in his

experience that's causing, that I might may or may have not gone through, but fortunately I haven't gone through anything like that.

Interviewer: So, did you take part in the interview, or in the documentary?

Abu Abdullah: No, no I didn't. I didn't want to be a part of that. But, again, do people focus on the differences or the similarities? Everyone wants to kind of […] they would never mention, "oh he's different in this", or his similar Libyan background – stuff like that. So, people just profile it to that… I like to look at the world and compare my problems with others. I mean there were people grieving, they'd lost kids. I was just getting pestered by a few reporters asking for interviews, so my concern wasn't as big as other peoples'

He also told me about the fatigue that sets in as a result of these conflicts.

On the other hand, in the milieu it was reported that a mosque where a young person had attended before going to Syria for jihad, had done some good work afterwards to deter other young people from becoming radicalised:

I think you either knew about it or you didn't. It was one of them ones. And the masjid, as itself, it doesn't take responsibility. And this is one of the reasons, I think what the masjid are doing now is good. They're getting more involved with the youth and doing projects and such. They're actually taking a lot more responsibility for the youth as an organisation, and they know it's their responsibility now. Because obviously, learning from the past mistakes and looking towards things that have happened now, they know it's much more important to... (Sayyid Qutb)

4.3.3 Political subjectivity/agency

Despite some overlap with the predicament of the earlier generation who migrated to Britain from the former colonies – the people I worked with did *not* want their futures or possibilities for creating a better world to be limited to reference points of old. This was a reference to procedures, tactics, methods and vocabularies used in struggles for gaining racial equality and when campaigning for anti-discrimination. A key difference was that the young Muslim men I worked with were not part of campaigns that included political and social activists from other traditions such as the left, as was common in anti-race campaigns. There existed a certain lament for identity or interest-based politics, expressed in how the demography of the city has changed such that Muslims and other racialised communities are no longer viewed as marginal. They considered proponents of identity politics to have now receded along with the marginal status of the minority identities they championed. The new reality of Muslims and Islam occupying centre stage in debates about failed multiculturalism and Britishness was an exaltation of this.

[referring to public campaigns on behalf of Muslims] ...they've lost a lot of meaning. I'm not saying there's no purpose behind them or there's no... There is definitely, but it's not as it was when people, you know, when maybe Muslims were a minority, people were more into engaging and discussing, have discussions. Now people just walk past…So, methods that were popular back in the days have changed now. Maybe they're not as popular now, because as time goes on, different methods of interaction need to be used. (Minnie)

[…] basically about the lost pages of us as, you know, of our African history and how they make it seem like the sum total of black people's contribution to the human story is Martin Luther King and a woman who refused to get up on a bus. When in fact there's so, so much more than that. (Dhul-Qarnain)

In place of the old, they prioritised enacting anti-race or activism through registers of piety (i.e., *dawah*, engagement, criticism) which enabled them to be loyal to their faith through avoiding free mixing, attending rallies during times that are inconvenient with family or religious commitments such as prayer

time, and generally observing good *adaab* [manners] by not getting involved in social strife. This was also something I witnessed when I met Shahid Butt at a Football Lads Alliance (FLA) protest in Birmingham city centre (24 March, 2018). Shahid Butt was a prominent de-radicalisation practitioner in the city. He also enjoyed a reputation as an authoritative figure in the community having close links to Moazzem Begg, in addition to his own experience of having been involved in the Bosnia jihad during the early 1990's. He was adamant that young Muslim men do not go into town for fear of getting caught up in trouble. Yet, he wanted to let the FLA know that Muslims in the city could defend themselves so went to town to be seen with a small group of 'hench' men.

Three women I interviewed were already engaged with a number of ethico-political projects - including Queer politics, anti-Islamophobia campaigns, refugee support/anti-race and community/education support.

> Yeah, so when I've gone to universities and done public speaking and students will be there and, you know, I will talk about nuances, and I will talk about my Muslim identity and my queer identity. But I will talk about the rise of the far right, and, you know, and I will reach out, especially to visibly Muslim men and women, or people who are non-binary, to say that actually, you know, we have to stick together. Like when I'm campaigning, those are the people I'm reaching out to. And I tell you, I've been so surprised at the end of events where one or two people will come up to me, a girl in a scarf, and sometimes I get, honestly, I'll get a bit nervous, 'cause I never know, 'cause sometimes I have had disagreements, only with men though. (Salma)

This approach is usually understood in terms of intersectionality, indicating a number of axes of struggle that combine with gender to produce a distinct experience of political subjectivity. Notable among the women I worked with was the presence of positive ethics, in comparison to anti-oppression claims.

> My mum lived there and my aunty, so my mum's sister and they were married to those two brothers. And then there was more of them, and they kind of like formed friendships with other people in similar situations. And to this day, my mum is, and my aunty, are still really good friends with like, I'd say, three other women who were in the same situation. Had come from the UK to marry guys who couldn't get into the UK and all the marriages have broken down. And all the guys were not very nice people, and all the women are really close. Some of them have remarried, some of them haven't, but they're all very, very strong independent women. (Freda)

These political positions do not necessarily come out of an Islamic orientation, as the women I interviewed displayed/professed different levels of religiosity. As Mahmood (2015) has claimed, pious Muslim women's agency should not be read in terms of its resistance to dominant norms, but 'in terms of ethical formation, particularly in its Foucauldian formulation' (Mahmood 2015: 32).

The women whom I interviewed did not necessarily eschew the promise encoded in liberal (normative) feminism – to be able to enjoy autonomy and recognition of a gendered self. They sought to go beyond this. Those freedoms that women win should not channel them into a distinct 'women-only' space, but it should enable them to affect social action and change in the realms identified above - anti-islamophobia, refugee support, and building community infrastructure. So, the queer Muslim utilised the momentum of the schools protest to draw attention to islamophobia among LGBT+ advocates/supporters. This way they are adding "other kinds of social and political projects and moral-ethical aspirations" (Mahmood, 2015: 149).

> For me, it is, you know, issues to do with gender, issues to do with access to mosques for women. There's all these things to consider, and I am conscious of them. So I feel like I'm critical... like I said, I'm critical of my own community. But at the same time, there's aspects I appreciate. You

can't just dislike something completely because there's a few things that are, that you have issues to sort of contend with.

Interviewer: What do you think about sort of the women's-only mosque that was proposed in Bradford?

I think that's great. I think that's great, absolutely. Because historically, I mean I don't really know historically, because I'm just talking about the UK context, there's not enough of a space for Muslim women to be able to express themselves religiously. So when you think of women Imams and that's meant to be radical – it's not, not really. They're just Imams that are women. (Afia)

So, informed by the Islamic ethic that outlines three-levels of action against oppression (confining to the heart a dislike of it, speaking out against it or taking action through corporeal efforts to affect change) women strategically employ their efforts. The sources of optimism and hope that drive such alternative subjectivities also take from their surrounds. In this case the dense ethnic infrastructure generated over time and through adversity in response to recession, unemployment (Hall, 2017). Hence, they draw from efforts and histories that are not only feminist but made through improvisations of earlier and emerging generations. Some examples of how women employed this approach include being active while appearing to be stuck within objectifying conditions, such as an Islamic school run by a Salafi organisation headed by men; or running distinct forms of support and care such as child care and offering clothes to women who are newly arrived in the city – rather than critiquing the structural forms of discrimination that accompany refugee women in the city; they espouse, through practice, a positive ethic of care.

4.3.4 Religion as the prism through which everything is seen/mediated

'It's a religious duty upon a Muslim to fight these people.' (Abu Yahya)

Plate 6: A dawah stall in the city centre. (Photo taken by author)

As mentioned above, for the people I worked with, *dawah* was their excuse or means to engage the world within and beyond the milieu (see Plate 6). Because this was an ethical act, the religious dictates or ideology that propelled their *dawah* activities also determined the limits of their interaction with the world around them:

> I'm a Muslim first, right. So some of our main ideals, if you don't share those ideals with someone, you can't really have a long-term relationship with them…Like for example, free mixing or maybe sleeping with women, or alcohol or pork. Loads of stuff, so let's say if you wanted to socialise or meet up somewhere, he might say, 'Let's go to the club.' And I'd say, you know, 'I can't do that.' I'd say, 'Let's go to the masjid.' You know, he can't do that. So it's just like, just that convenience, it's just difficult. (Dhul-Qarnain)

How they handled the challenge this sensibility presented to their integration was of interest to me, because much of the discourse about Muslims has at its heart the idea that Muslims are not committed to 'Fundamental British Values', and are, therefore, responsible for living 'parallel lives' thereby rendering them as problematic citizens. Yet alongside these limits, they are also spurred on by the perceived duty to 'invite', which brought them into contact with non-Muslims. The obligation (for some) to be 'out there' while also police their boundaries, became a point of considerable tension for some people I worked with. The label of 'active citizens' used to describe Muslim belonging/attachment to the nation can be misleading in light of this tension. Their activity was thus curtailed by the limits – self-imposed or idealised. In fact, many of the discussions between the men during gatherings or on WhatsApp, which I would describe as buoyant banter, were often about these 'dividing lines'. For the leaders within the group it was always about instituting the differences and letting people know about not crossing these. For many young men, it would be about getting clarity on these through discussing applicability and relevance of certain dictates in the contemporary moment.

For the people I worked with, religion was not a source of otherness. It was seen as a universal or natural phenomena shared across wider society. They saw Christianity as the default faith/marker of majority society and, because religion is meaningful for them, they imagined it to be of importance to others too. Their Muslimness, therefore, was not interpreted as a limiting factor, because other religions (namely Christianity) shared values that were important to Muslims too:

> But to be honest, lots of people already have a lot of that... a lot of those kind of values in them already. Because most people are from a Christian background, as far as I understand it, are not very practising. But they have these, you know, main fundamental values like there is a God, you know, stuff like that. So a lot of the values, you know, we share. Thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not this, you know. (Dhul-Qarnain)

In this sensibility, there is an appeal, then, to a common humanity, through which they bypass a sense of Muslim exceptionalism or otherness. This helps explain the confidence with which they appropriate a Muslim subject position. While they are hesitant talking about extremism/radicalisation, because they are Muslims and feared being folded into concerns about Islamist radicalisation, they were also happy to project their Muslimness. This is despite that being Muslim ordinarily and visibly could be a problem, which a number of respondents experienced through airport checks and stop and search on the street. So, here they do not identify with complaints from more radical Muslims such as Al Muhajiroun (ALM) and CAGE who argue that the state targets Muslims based on their beliefs, practices and comportment. In contrast to Hizb ut Tahrir or CAGE, their subjectivity is not one of victimhood. Both groups held events in the area during the course of my fieldwork, and none of the people I worked with attended.

4.3.5 Muslimness and mosques in the public eye

> Interviewer: what do you think about the government's response to that when they hold the individual responsible or they hold the religion responsible or they hold a particular group or a mosque responsible for that?

Respondent: Well, it's irresponsible. It's irresponsible to hold a mosque to, to implicate a mosque in that way, when most mosques do everything they can to root out extremism, to publicly denounce any kind of terrorism. Have, have you ever heard of a mosque saying, 'Oh, actually, yeah, that was quite a good move'? No. Every time something happens, they're flipping forced to come out, be the first people, they feel that, that, you know, the onus upon them to be the first people to come out with a statement saying, 'Actually, we don't believe in anything to do with this.' 'No-one thought you did.' (Freda)

All the people with whom I worked shared a concern about the way Islam is perceived in mainstream society. They expressed lament at the way certain mosques – as key institutions in society were perceived and what role they played. People wanted to see them as beyond just places for prayer. On the other hand, mosques were on the back foot since early scandals such as the Channel 4 'Undercover Mosque' Dispatches documentary in 2006 and also the alleged links between Aby Humza and Finsbury Park mosque and Shaykh Faisal in Brixton Mosque in the late 1990's and early 2000's. The respondent below while being active in Islamic student society organising was also a committed volunteer with a prominent mosque in 'Muslim Street' as well as in Manchester where he stood in for the *Imam* on the busy Friday prayer event at one of the mosques that were frequented by the Manchester bomber. This latter engagement with the mosque also brought him unwelcome publicity including from the police. Yet this did not dampen his enthusiasm for working/volunteering with mosques and relaying to me the value he believed them to have in society:

...you have a lot of people coming to mosque and, at the same time, a lot of people straying away even further from mosques and stuff like that. You have a lot of mosques opening, but a lot of Mosques that are failing - that are just existing just as prayer spaces rather than mosques. And when I say rather than mosques, I personally believe that mosques are institutes, that the Prophet when he built a mosque it was there for all of the community. And mosques should be a place like […] if you want to call it modern day food bank, when people who never had anything to eat, they would go there. When people overcooked, they would go to the mosque and just feed people. A mosque was a place where the prophets gathered for regular sermons, not just on Friday, but anytime there was a public announcement they would call people to mosque. That's kind of died out now and Mosques are just there to pray. So, I feel like if Mosques don't get with the program, kind of get a bit more active, start retaining people rather than like getting people to pray and leave, then some Mosques will rise but others won't. (Abu Abdullah)

Opportunities to show a more societal role played by mosques were sought:

Because the mosques are like, 'Oh you just do your *namaz* [prayer] and then after *namaz* you have to walk out of the mosque.' No, it's more than that – far more than that. Should be changed into more like a community, where the youth are given a space to take part. And not to be out there... and this is something the whole community, including the non-Muslims, we all have to work together. (Hilal)

Yet almost all of my respondents seemed unconcerned that a busy and bustling mosque might also attract the wrong kind of attention. In a climate where Muslims were viewed with suspicion and there have been scandals around minarets and the building of 'super mosques', which have given succour to anti-Muslim/Islam sentiments.

Despite this, my respondents were keen to mention good practice examples of how 'contact' with non-Muslims could help correct negative expressions.

So I guess trying to like tell people about that is, you know, it's not the same work, but it's kind of different work. Like I'll try and tell my neighbours about certain things within Islam

and they'll be very surprised. Maybe that is better and maybe it's 'cause of the way I look now. 'Cause I, I do want people to look at, people... the look of me and my husband with his beard and, and other Muslims and think good things and think positive things and maybe that's more important than, you know, turning up to the same demo fifteen years in a row and nothing's changing. (Freda)

One respondent brought attention to the role played by Muslim volunteers from mosques during the Grenfell Tower fire to animate his point that Muslims can play a role in wider society:

I mean after Grenfell, it's helped change peoples' perceptions – some peoples' perceptions. It's all about that contact. A Mosque needs to have that contact and the contact comes through the people. So, the Prophet's biggest form of like call to Islam and stuff like that, was that one to one, that physical *contact* sort of thing. It's not by killing and stuff like that. So, the Prophet established that. And as Muslims, they say about two, three million Muslims live in the UK. If, for example, every Muslim spoke to every person that he met, within a month you would reach all seventy million people that live in the UK on a conversational basis. But, a lot of people give a bad perception of Islam, or a bad image. First impressions count man. A lot of Muslims are not holding up what Islam teaches them. (Abu Abdullah)

Yet, the mosque as an official space also held a sanctimonious position for the young men who were religious. Subsequently, they placed considerable trust in certain scholars or *imams* whom they felt they could turn to for reliable education or information. It was almost instinctive to seek validation from a known imam or scholar on matters that intrigued them, or which were disputed among different people. As part of a conversation about a young Muslim male who was known to many in this milieu and had lost his life in Syria, allegedly while going to do jihad, I asked one young person how he sought out information and whether he worried about the reliability of sources:

It's... it's a good question, to be honest with you. I've never given it much thought. It's not a case of eat up everything that's given to you. It's just more of a case of, you know, you read certain things, and from what you've been taught as a youngster with regards to morals and values and even religious practices, if something doesn't sit quite right, I question it. I ask a few questions. I even talk to the imam, because I know him obviously quite well, as a teacher obviously. So we've got that good understanding, that relationship as well. (Sayyid Qutb)

4.4 Young people's own understandings of 'radicalisation'

The UK government's definition of extremism is: 'the vocal or active opposition to our fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also regard calls for the death of members of our armed forces as extremist.' [9] The vagueness of this definition, and in particular the focus on Fundamental British Values (FBV) has been criticised by practitioners, activists and sections within the Muslim community (Hussain & Meer, 2018).

4.4.1 Extremism - as an externally ascribed label

Among the people I worked with, there was an opinion that people labelled as 'extremists' (among Muslims the term *Wahabbi* was also considered to carry the same meaning) were also active in dismissing and challenging extremist currents within Islam. For them, this commitment was contrasted with the

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[9] See: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance/revised-prevent-duty-guidance-for-england-and-wales

media and certain nation states whose policies and rhetoric on Islamism worked to valorise the issue and stigmatise Muslims, while taking no action to address extremism:

> from ideological perspective, tackling this mentality, this *takfiri* mentality, Saudi is at the forefront. They're number one in the entire world. You go to Saudi, and there's been raids on campus from the university, with certain students who've had this type of mentality. They're very zero-tolerant on these kinds of things. The scholars that teach there, they talk about this all the time and talk against extremism all the time. We've been talking about extremism since before 9/11. Because all of this started in the West 9/11. Since before the US government was paying Osama bin Laden in the Afghan war, we knew about him, or the Saudis, the scholars did, anyway. (Abu Yahya)

In discussing the role of Islam in the lives of extremists, participants focused on the understanding possessed by them:

> ...they look like and they act like they're the perfect Muslims, like the best Muslims, in terms of their worship of Islam. But it's just a facade. He (Prophet) said the Koran, though they recite it, doesn't go past their throats, 'cause... meaning the understanding. (Abu Yahya)

I did not encounter consistent radical criticism of the state as racist or anti-Muslim. In this sense, there was *not* a clear resonance with or continuation of the activist/anti-race/discrimination politics that characterise Muslim responses to state action against radicalisation. Neither was the 'Muslim problem' seen as brand new considering that discussions of Muslims as a problem have been the norm before 9/11 and the war on terror. Earlier instances where Muslims had become politicised – 1989 Rushdie affair, first Gulf war, Palestinian Liberation Organisation, Bosnia, Yemen – were cited as key moments for the emergence of Muslim consciousness. Before this, they existed in benign form as the anthropological literature on south Asians having 'culture' as religion attested to (Benson, 1996). The sociological attention to Muslims increases with the narrative that they have 'problems' in which examples such as gangs, northern riots and religious fundamentalism are invoked (Alexander, 1998). Muslims, thus, come to occupy an objecthood similar to that of a racialised minority, except that anti-race traditions do not fully represent ethno-religious identity positions and policy has not recognised this predicament as a racialised one (Modood and Meer, 2009).

What was radical about the public assertion of Muslimness since the Rushdie affair does not disappear or attenuate, but transforms in light of new circumstances particularly of policing and racialisation. As racist attention morphs toward material and cultural manifestations of an 'other', or way of life perceived as seeking to the liberal secular order (Gole, 2013).

It is not that this modality of Muslimness can be delineated as something new due to its hypervisibility and exogenous presence on the landscape of race and ethnic relations in Multicultural Britain. Rather, it is in the complex of relations, histories, policies that produce them that they push out toward a radicalism that exceeds and appears to rupture the ground/landscape they sit on (Hussain 2022/in press). Hence, the call - when talking about radicalised youth – to be folded into the tradition and not be severed from it – 'they need more religion, not less'. Also, the enthusiasm to be involved to help remedy the situation but not under the guise of 'de-radicalisation'. Because radicalism, when talked about was considered as part of *their* tradition. What is going on in the shift can help attest to the politics of representation at play.

4.5 Social relationships

This section of the report considers the importance of significant others in the lives of young Muslims. Specifically, I discuss the moments when others become important and the types of influence, they come to have in the lives of the young people I worked with.

4.5.1 Relationship to Family

It was notable that a majority of my male respondents had a 'loosened' relationship with their families. In that they placed considerable trust (evident in how much time they spent with peers from the 'Spiceland' group, how they looked to each other for inspiration and opportunities) in the authority of the 'fixers', or people who would impart religious learning (Minnie, Abu Yahya, Abu Abdullah). These men would emphasise the restrictive, because it was considered to be mired in culture and tradition, nature of Islam that they inherited from their families. It was also apparent in how many were estranged from their families, because of their zealousness toward religion (evident in how they pursued Islamic studies and were committed to their peer group) compared to taking up 'secular' opportunities and ambitions.

> ...And it's only when we make a decision to choose for ourselves and to choose our career path and to choose what we want to do with our lives, that we can loosen the grip. (Dhul-Qarnain)

> [they] Don't really encourage people to go into anything specific, but they would encourage us to make our own decisions, so you don't have to regret them later in life. (Dhul-Qarnain)

This attachment to religion and subsequent estrangement from liberal values (sic Fundamental British Values) has been cited as instance of 'intergenerational conflict' being 'between two-cultures', where the earlier generations are seen as model migrants who integrated. Although these same divergences had been levied on south Asian communities, which Brah (2006) terms 'intergenerational difference'.

Agency is apparent, therefore, in moments when emphasis was placed on discovering new ground and loosening connections with the tradition rather than estranging oneself from it totally. A key instance to observe this when people I worked with regularly gave justifications from the religion for their acts and opinions (most commonly: avoiding *bida* [innovation]). What this leads to is a hermeneutical method for interpreting and acting. What becomes important in this situation are the resources individuals have to help them choose courses of action. They are limited to the teaching and brand/style of Islam that is available to them in and through this milieu. Of course, the efforts of Minnie and other head men were buttressed by the mosques or other organisations who would put on winter conferences or online lectures, for example that attracted significant numbers of young Muslims from all over the UK. Again, the young men would need to make sense of these in their own way. Without ability to question or critique, because of the didactic way learning was imparted in formal spaces.

In contrast, the young men who participated in gatherings and events, which were deliberately not referred to as 'study circles', because they were pitched as more interactive and participatory (through group exercises, for example) and less didactic (relative to mosque spaces), were encouraged to work on themselves in a 'self-help' type fashion:

> And one of the exercises we did was he told us to write our top three stresses in life, top three things that are worst in life. And he told us to write down things that we could do in the next six months to solve that. And then he made us draw a circle, within a circle. And then the inner circle was called the circle of concern. The outer circle was called the circle... Sorry, no. The inner circle was called the circle of influence; the outer circle was the circle of concern. So how it worked was: circle of influence was what we could control and change. And the circle of concern was all, everything we were concerned about, whether you could control them or not. What we couldn't control. So he was telling us to focus on the inner circle when we're controlling our lives. Because we're too focussed on what we can't control, we'd end up becoming distracted and end up doing nothing. And becoming reactive instead of proactive. (Dhul-Qarnain)

I observed the use of fun activities such as group quizzes during the Saturday afternoon meetings in a city centre coffee shop. The quizzes involved testing general knowledge about Islamic history. These methods

helped some young men to feel empowered through separating the self from the external/secular, which they were encouraged to consider as a realm they had little or no influence over. It was, thus, a hermeneutic focused on the self, albeit through group facilitation. This approach also resonated with the apolitical stance these Salafi young men had adopted. Although the justification for non-involvement in democratic politics was due to it being a non-Islamic/man made system. Nevertheless, they were discouraged from being concerned with things that were 'outside' (of Islam).

Being apolitical meant that they were mute on many issues that directly impacted the lives of Muslims and the representation and future of Islam. Despite this, I noticed among some participants a significant interest in current affairs, but not politics. This obviously leads one to think where, then, do those go who are Salafi but also interested in politics? Do they see a theatre of war as the only place Muslims can enact politics, which given that globally the dominant frame within which Islam appears is that of conflict and war? As millennials, they have been confronted with this reality through constant media and policy attention on Muslims and Islam. It would be easy for those with a limited worldview (because of education, life, and Salafism) to feel this way.

The political value inherent in their actions is not seen to be of consequence, because they do not want to be in the public gaze (given the stigma) and secondly, because theirs are local, mundane manoeuvres that happen in unplanned moments, and therefore, not perceived as political; a domain that is understood as something formal, named and happening in planned fashion (Prevent, for example). Although this division was not always clear-cut, there was some overlap at times for example a small number of my participants expressed sympathy with initiatives such as Tell MAMA; a government sponsored initiative to record incidences of hate experienced by Muslims.

Another example of a social conscience not expressed as being political was a recognition of restraints that were inherent in 'the system,' such as tuition fees and, therefore, the burden they felt on Muslims to find alternative ways to generate human capital:

> Now it's like they put, they put like... if you're trying to go to university, it's like, it's like chains on you financially. You have to put the chains on. And for the rest of your life, you have to pay off some debt. I heard like the average, I think the figure was like the average person takes out is 50k I think, by the time they leave uni. It's all the other loans they take out and stuff like that. That's a ridiculous amount and that's gonna weigh you down for the rest of your life. It's not something you want really. (Dhul-Qarnain)

> Interviewer: So where do you get like careers advice, things like that or you know...?

> Respondent: To be honest, just networking, going to events, places, talk to people. You always hear... you hear of things and then you check them out and then that's how I get a lot of my stuff, to be   honest….Yeah. Or I talk to, talk to people. Or people I know, know something. Know what I mean. That's why it's good to network and have good network of people – a wide variety of people so you can you know, *manoeuvre well*. (Dhul-Qarnain)

> Respondent: People are paid to help people. Because these days you've got to pay people as well. And then, to help people out, help them progress in their life, see what they need, yeah, and so forth. I do think it's government have got a part to play in terms of like tuition fees and so forth – people don't want to go into debt, and they should lower the tuition fees and they should bring the maintenance grant back. Because these have a big, massive impact on the lives of working-class people. More so than the rich people. (Minnie)

This openness and requirement to 'hustle' in the face of limitations to formal opportunities or mainstream institutions led the Muslim men I worked with to seek out alternative people who can intervene in shaping their life chances. In the case of Dhul-Qarnain, it led him to volunteering in humanitarian work for Syria, where he was exposed to some of the horrors of what was going on in a theatre of war. I was interested

in how he managed to keep a level head amidst the possibilities for becoming radicalised. The more charismatic brothers such as Minnie, Abu Abdullah and Abu Dhar were key here.

How the young people deal with uncertainty and disappointments was an interesting aspect of all lives I studied. The literature suggests that the profile of home grown radicals is the outcome of a life of disappointments, discrimination, under achievement to the point where seeking a way out becomes the solution. In contrast, I observed and learned about how they made lives through these constraints. How the milieu held them together and the different improvisations it enabled. These amounted to an unrecognised, unstructured but often conscious programme to keep young men who were in their fold from adopting extreme positions on religion.

4.5.2 Friendship and 'group think'

Abu Abdullah was a respected and learned individual. He was committed to pursuing knowledge about Islam and often performed Imam duties for Friday prayers, including at the Didsbury Mosque after it had come to the attention of the Counter Terrorism Unit and when many people were cautious about being associated with the place. He was enthusiastic and eager to help in Islamic oriented activities. He was also a good source of knowledge about internal dynamics within the 'Muslim Street' milieu, because of his connections with the several mosques and key individuals in the area. He spoke about the differences between mosques and how these often emerged out of petty squabbles:

> Some people don't like this scholar, some people don't like that scholar and it escalates to a situation where there's a few mosques around that have broken off from this mosque. For example, look how many Masjids we have about five minutes' walk from the Salafi Masjid, they were both the same mosque and they broke off over a scholar that these guys no longer wanted to invite. And the mosque I go to kind of looks bigger that it's not about the scholar or individual, it's about religion and religion is a very individual sort of thing. You can follow it, I mean regardless of what your creed or your Islamic theology is, you can come and pray at the Masjid. (Abu Abdullah)

It is often assumed that areas such as 'Muslim Street', because of the prominence of Muslims and associated infrastructure, are homogenous in terms of denomination and, therefore, the ethnic community that founded it. Yet, the quote above is an example of the heterogeneous nature of the area. Beyond this, however, what is interesting is that (a) majority Muslim areas such as this milieu are actually shot through with tensions and fractures, which, then (b) can lead to a splintering of interests. Occasionally, these result in the formation of new mosques or organisations when there are individuals with the required capital and clout to do so. At other times, this can lead to altruistically minded young people who are 'choosing' or navigating the Muslim scene, to become disillusioned and to the slip off the scene.

In the above quote, Abu Abdullah alludes to the individuality or agency inherent in practising religion where individuals have the power to choose a certain denomination and attend a preferred mosque. This is in contrast to much thinking about religion and Islam that are thought about in a communal and dogmatic sense, where compliance and observance are thought to be the correct state of the believer. This is more so the case with Salafist Islam, which is considered to be a particularly literalist and communal phenomenon centred around charismatic or venerated individuals often in the form of scholars/shaykhs. The reality on 'Muslim Street' is much different, with young people often drifting between different mosques and groups. Differences between groups become amplified and the basis of group hatred and even violence. Yet, when drilled down into, these differences are centred around small scale yet hugely significant issues such as 'creed' or '*aqida'*, which, then, is exploited to define who is in or out. This is also what helps differentiate the Salafist variety of Islam from more mainstream versions (who follow the *Hanifa madhab*, which is also largely considered the mainstream). The young people I worked with

considered the differentiation between Salafis on the basis on creed to be an important issue, and one which led to hardened attitudes among people choosing to identify with a particular mosque:

> They do differ on smaller branches and some people make it so deep to the fact that they split away from the Masjid and don't pray there. (Abu Abdullah)

These differences become the precursors to more hostile/extreme attitudes such as '*takfirism*', which is understood as dismissing others as apostates, something which all my respondents found problematic. What I found interesting was Abu Abdullah's reference to 'make it so deep', which when considered alongside comments by other respondents about young people whom they observed as becoming 'emotional', suggested an unhealthy or unhinged attachment to Islam. It also implicated the 'individual' or agency as something when left unchecked, could lead to explorations that go 'deep' and cause rupture.

4.5.3 Ambiguities

During the winter of 2018 as I had gotten familiar with the rhythm of goings-on in 'Muslim Street' I attended the winter conference at a prominent Salafi mosque and spent time with my respondents afterwards as it was a buoyant time against the backdrop of the festive season and holidays. A year later, in winter 2019, some of the young men were less interested in the conference season but were keen to be out and about. I was invited to meet a couple of young men known to Mo John. We would meet at a snooker club, which is where they liked to hangout in the evenings.

Away from the setting of 'Muslim Street', the Islamic infrastructure and gatherings of young men, I encountered a different side to the lives of these young Muslims. The snooker hall was a preferred hangout space because they could hire a private room and do what they wanted to, which sometimes involved smoking marijuana. There were gambling machines in the foyer and playing for money was a salient norm. I also gained exposure to new vernaculars of identity, particularly linguistic forms such as 'Say no more' (expressed in text messages as 'snm') as a verbal cue that accompanies 'I'll do anything for you'. In this space, religion is not a concern. It is not what connects or binds them.

4.6 Ideological and extra-ideological factors in radicalisation

The Muslim street milieu, with its many opportunities to interact with other Muslims, learn about Islam and consume an Islamic lifestyle, was an important space in which people I worked with made sense of their predicaments and worked out ways to deal with issues faced by them as Muslims in everyday life. Given that the Salafist Islam that almost all my respondents were attracted to is characterised by literalism, it was important to try to understand how this was incorporated in their lives, particularly since there were competing outlets and interpretations at hand. In this section, I discuss the importance of ideology and extra-ideological factors, in shaping their understanding as well as personal stances toward radicalisation.

4.6.1 Authenticity - the state, interpretations of Islam

> Islam didn't come from Saudi. Geographically, it came from Saudi Arabia. But in terms of the Saudi state, Islam didn't come from that. So my religion doesn't revolve around what Saudi Arabia does or what it doesn't do. (Abu Yahya)

> It just so happens that Saudi is teaching the closest version of Islamic orthodoxy, in terms of on a state level, that you'll find anywhere else around the world. And that was set up in part with the Saudi state. Muhammad... 'Cause there were three Saudi states: the first state, Muhammad bin Saud and Sheikh Muhammad Abdul-Wahhab. That's why they call us Wahhabis. (Abu Yahya)

If there is no overt call or ideology that encourages violence, then how is such a mind-set formed? For Wiktorowicz (2005) there is no seduction involved but *rational choice making* on behalf of the individual, who will already have gone through a lengthy process of ideological indoctrination to be admitted as a member of 'the group'.

> Most radical Islamic groups offer a nontangible spiritual incentive to attract participants: participation produces salvation on judgment day and entrance to Paradise in the hereafter. The difference among Islamic groups is over how the spiritual payoff should be pursued (that is, strategy). Each proffers its ideology as an "efficient" (and often exclusive) path to salvation, which serves as a heuristic device for indoctrinated activists to weigh the costs and benefits of certain actions and behaviours. (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 301)

According to such a view, all socialisation is inconsequential in shaping the mind-set, rather, a rational choice is made based on a cost-benefit analysis, weighing up wanting to be in this world or the hereafter. This interpretation leaves little or no room for considering the complex ways that ideas are grappled with in the 'Muslim Street' milieu. As a participant observer, I became attuned to the environment or atmosphere of arguments, fall outs and debates and how these often led to schisms and, therefore, new openings that positioned young men to being exploited:

> I think some people are genuine and sincere and they just want the best, and you get caught up on the wrong track. And if you get caught up in the arguments and debates and stuff like that - even though they may be sincere - eventually it becomes that's all you know, all you can talk about because you've invested so much into it. But other people kind of benefit from it. The fact that there's division, it creates an opportunity for me to be my own Shaykh, have my own Mosque, and people come to my mosque and stuff like that. (Abu Abdullah)

The fallout from this dynamic is the splintering of authority and subsequent emergence of news sites of legitimate Muslimness. These are less known vernaculars of Muslimness and have an allure among young people who are searching for edgy, non-conformist alternatives to the status quo. This has also led to an expanded 'market place of ideas' delivered by scholars from around the world. The young men I worked with welcomed knowledge and information from a range of sources or scholars who followed the Salafi creed. Mostly, I noticed that scholars who spoke Arabic and also a number of whom were African American were popular among the young people I worked with. These scholars projected a sense of authenticity by (1) communicating in Arabic, which was the language Islam is associated with, and (2) spoke in contemporary metaphors that resonated with this milieu (i.e. street, popular culture).

> There's always hearsay and, you know, this... It's almost like a hot topic of the week. For example, you might come in one week, discuss with your friends, and you already hear them discussing, you know, 'So-and-so said this recently in a lecture.' And, you know, 'Oh my God. What's he said?' But I think it kind of ebbs and flows. It's always like... sometimes it's here, sometimes it's not, you know. There's a time for this and a time for that, kind of thing. It's not always prevalent. (Sayyid Qutb)

The importance attached to being Muslim has already been noted; professed in a commitment to dawah and looking visibly Muslim. Even when this disposition becomes a source of conflict, i.e., among family and in college, it was not relegated to the form of privatised religion. This position mattered to the people I worked with, because they believed that under the guise of tackling extremism and radicalisation the government was out to foster a 'domesticated Islam', which ultimately for them would strip them of agency. This sentiment was particularly pronounced when talking about the role that Islam and Muslims might play in tackling radicalisation:

> If you look at it from that perspective (battling *khawarij*, Saudi response to extremists) Muslims have been battling this. We have the experience. So it doesn't really make sense that you don't consult Muslims on these kinds of things. (Abu Yahya)

I attended a community event just off 'Muslim Street', which was arranged by the local council as a 'consultation' event regarding the government's Prevent programme. It was attended by Minnie and a number of others from his close circle after I had sent info of this event to him suggesting he also pass onto his peers. Also, in attendance was Nabil, a newcomer to the Friday night gatherings but someone who was active in the de-radicalisation space in a town neighbouring Birmingham. Despite being a close confidante of Minnie, the latter was not aware that he would be attending. Upon seeing him at the event, Minnie was visibly perturbed. He said that there were people present whom he knew and has done so for a long time and was surprised that they were behaving 'cagey'. Minnie was also surprised to see how well versed Nabil was with such events, evident from him already knowing some of the council officers present. This event/episode demonstrated how divisive state relations can be, particularly when enacted in the framework of a policy programme such as Prevent, that is met with significant scepticism among many Muslims and anti-race activists. One elder Pakistani man in the audience interrupted to ask: "are we only gonna be talking about Muslims? What about Caucasians?" I observed here how divisive the Prevent programme was *within* the Muslim community too and not just between Muslims and the authorities.

4.6.2 Challenging otherness through contested narratives of universalisms

The tension and occasional anger exhibited and represented in my respondents and their practices that are viewed by mainstream society as 'out of place' are usually read as intergeneration conflict or threatening as in the talk about 'Eurabia', great replacement theories or seen as 'illiberal' in political contexts of secularism (De Koning, 2020). For my respondents theirs is a more intelligent endeavour. Expressed in their desire for debate and deliberation often conducted under the banner of *dawah* (which is not exempt from fears of a 'creeping Shariah'). Thus, I witnessed competing notions of universality in play; Eurocentric – often read as Christian/secular/atheist vs Muslim universality (for them the fact that Islam offered answers to all worldly dilemmas they faced). My interviews and fieldwork encounters were seen as a deconstruction of this universalism and almost always welcomed by my participants. I did at times feel on edge for fear of being dismissed as a spook, a Sufi, or worst *khawarij*. The fact that none of the people I worked with practised *takfirism* (dismissing people as apostate) helped me deal with the unease. I regularly pushed the boundaries of my positionality in this way.

The foundational ideas and concepts in the scholarship on Salafi jihadism were always absent or avoided in my discussions with young Muslims who sympathised or adopted the jihadi-cool persona. The spaces of consumption and the sociality these engendered were a key part of this 'side-stepping'. The way western foods such as burgers, steaks and deserts were consumed and commodified presented me with a human side to the young people I worked with. As well as piety and ideology, there was a lot of imaginations of solidarity, yet remarkably in a very local or national sense rather than international.

Islam is universal in the sense that it is an aspiration, for a desired state/situation that is yet to come, it is a horizon (Li, 2020) that the Muslims I worked with sought to make happen or achieve through their doings/dawah. As a message for all mankind, the universality of Islam was pursued through affecting and welcoming conversion to being Muslim. It was a way of harmonising themselves with their environment. It furthered their belonging and integration if only psychologically, given the level of social and political scepticism toward Muslims and Islam in the world.

As mentioned above, what young Muslims I worked with did in the name of Islam was revealed to be complexly entangled with earlier histories of minority presence in the face of structural discrimination and strained relations with the police. To navigate a hostile terrain, they built solidarities through makeshift ways that ended up rendering them suspicious. For example, the moral economies of Muslim brotherhood implicated them in pathologies about segregated lifestyles, ghettoisation and 'gangs'.

The construction of Muslims as 'other' is achieved through representations of them as inimical to western values. A key driver of this was the media, which many respondents complained about citing examples of images and discourses that positioned them as 'backward' or from another time and place, which some suggested might also serve to radicialise some. Thus, they saw this as an ideological[10] effort against Muslims and Islam. Again, government rhetoric was cited as examples of this: 'there is no single factor at work' but 'several factors might converge to create the conditions under which radicalisation can occur' through creating 'ideological openings' (Home Office 2018, p.23, 32).

In their efforts to challenge negative impressions of Muslims and Islam, Abu Yahya and others who were considered competent in Islamic knowledge sought to develop competency in learning and trying to master the English language so that they can engage in debates with people who are hostile to them. Toward the end of my fieldwork I learned that Abu Yahya had enrolled at a university in a neighbouring town to read for an undergraduate degree in English. This was as he mentioned to me in interview, part of his ambition to become an effective *daee* (person who invites to Islam).

In their *dawah*, which is a deliberative practice, they sought to challenge conventional wisdom on numerous issues relating to Islam. This included relating to headlines about Islam and Muslims, but also universal truths or taken for granted concepts. They saw this as a counter-ideological struggle, which afforded space to articulate things differently. For example, when talking about values such as family, community, freedom. They articulated a position on these that is coming from elsewhere. Not always dogma but experiences and feelings. Mostly this involved trying to strip conventional wisdom of its bias and blind spots. For example, how stereotypes about Asians/ethnics and Muslims are based on ideological premises. In their encounters with people they sought to influence, they avoided playing the victim card. Instead they approached encounters with anti-Muslim protagonists from the conviction that they needed to be informed. There *dawah*, therefore, was not proselytising of a conventional type where people are targeted because they are thought to need saving, but it was almost a profane desire to remove misunderstanding and get to a position of indifference. This became apparent when I observed how after *dawah* events they would fold into being like any other young people. There was no strategy or organisation and planning to their *dawah* efforts, and which were part of the social life of this group.

Abu Abdullah reflected on his efforts to raise awareness among fellow college students that the ban on wearing *niqab* (face covering) was ultimately about freedom rather than in terms of religious obligation. It wasn't necessarily about asserting a right to difference but to claiming a universal privilege. This also spoke about the desire to be assimilated within broader categories of citizenship and universal rights that flow from this.

> It's not hard to tell someone that… like people were passionate about it. Even though there was a lot of people that don't necessarily wear the hijab or the niqab. There were people that are a different gender that are not gonna wear the hijab or niqab, but they felt that was this kind of limiting someone's freedom. A sister that wants to wear it should be granted the right to wear it and that was the reason why people wanted to voice their discomfort at someone being threatened or being stripped away from the right to wear what they want. (Abu Abdullah)

He and others who could be considered 'head men' in the milieu, preferred appealing to emotional and psychic registers to generate affect toward their cause. This also involved dismissing orientalist or political interpretations of Jihad, and instead refer people to the foundational sources of Islam. Whereas the Orientalist accounts focused on *Ulema* (Imams, Mullahs) and texts for an explanation about lesser vs

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[10] Stuart Hall (1981) uses the term ideology to "refer to those images, concepts and premises which provide the frameworks through which we represent, interpret, understand and "make sense" of some aspect of social existence." "..ideologies do not consist of isolated and separate concepts, but in the articulation of different elements into a distinctive set or chain of meanings". (1981: 18)

higher Jihad or defensive vs offensive jihad, in contrast, the people I worked with favoured an approach that focused on the people involved in it. This, they believed could lead to an understanding of jihad as a personal experience, enhanced through membership of groups like theirs, rather than being something done in the name of a group. They also believed that narratives about war and heroism (apparent in talk about jihadi Islamism) emphasised values that gave little importance to religion where certain warrior like leaders were presented in heroic fashion. The lexicon associated with Islamism was pre-Islamic with its emphasis on knights and chivalry, ideas of brotherhood in arms, a community sutured by emotion and nostalgia. In this context, the Friday night gatherings were also ways to get people 'thinking' rather than 'feeling'. The encouragement of critique, dialogue, deliberation was all part of encouraging people to think otherwise about theology when it is abstracted into a fetishised image of Islam as violent or backward. Groups such as ISIS were dismissed as people who are committed to theology but through a fantastic, spectacular and instrumentalised use of violence and its imagery; jihad was not considered to be central to Islamic thought (Asad, 2007). Respondents would sway me toward actually how Islamic theology, discourse and praxis are mediated by complex, diverse, contradictory interests and contexts. For example, in the case of Rashid, or others who were believed to have encountered theology in problematic contexts, it was common to hear comments from my respondents such as 'he was too emotional, we couldn't talk to him' (Minnie); which highlights the affective imaginary experience of jihad by individuals during – in flux – moments of their lives.

Yet there was a flip side to this approach too. Among some young people I worked with for whom the affective draw of Islam was more salient, such as Mo John; the appeal of Anwar Awlaki was because 'he was the only one who was taking the side of Muslims while everyone was killing them' (Mo John). This was also why he drifted away from the Friday night gatherings for a year, because he felt it a space where nothing in the way of action was going on. By not allowing those conversations, the Friday night gatherings sought to affect alternative feelings and understanding of Islam among young people in attendance. In doing so, it also had the effect of driving the curious and vulnerable away. Yet it also remained an important refuge for those who stayed. In my discussions with Minnie about drivers of radicalisation, he would encourage me to not look for people's motivations or political stances toward violence but to consider their *capabilities* to engage in such action. These, he suggested, would be found in micro-social and peer group settings and moments. These were spaces of contingency and unpredictability rather than certainty and destiny.

If people get pushed toward radicalisation after experiencing grievances toward majority society, then, in the face of this, some professed engagement with people and ideas that were negative about Islam:

> Yeah, so it can be dangerous at times, don't get me wrong. There can be a lot of... there's a lot of threats to it as well. But I think, as a Muslim, you've got to be brave and courageous to go out there and deal with these things. (Mo John)

I have included this section to help group data about how candid research participants were in talking about being 'close to the action' or wanting to project closeness to the issue of radicalisation/extremism or to suggest proximity to issues that Muslims would be expected to be silent about. This was pertinent in the wake of the Manchester Arena bombing. For example, Abu Abdullah, of Libyan origin and who lived in Manchester was open about his Libyan roots and the fact that his family had been politically involved during the Gaddafi regime. However, following the attention he received for being an 'active Muslim' living in Manchester and of Libyan descent, he would later play down his links with Libya, preferring to identify as Arab.

A couple of establishments on Muslim street, which were popular among young people were run by a trio of middle-aged Muslim men who had been wrongly imprisoned in a Yemeni jail in the early 1990's on charges of radicalisation. Their stories were remarkable to emerging generations who had grown up in

the shade of the War on Terror, and were a reminder of the longer history of Muslims coming under the state radar:

> They had a situation a long time ago where they were mistakenly taken for terrorists. Mistakenly. But if you look at them now, they're free men. They never served time in prison. They came back to the UK easy. So if they were terrorists, then surely they would have been put in prison. And you know, if they were terrorists, they wouldn't be handling these successful businesses. They wouldn't be on the streets even. So would they? (Mo John)

These individuals now play a role in supporting young people through offering jobs to young Muslim men often at the request of their fathers who were acquaintances of the trio. I conducted a number of interviews and fieldwork meetings in these establishments and came to learn about the different young men and their motivations for working here.

> [I] worked in a place called [names place of work], which was a top place, top brothers around there. You know, they brought me up, as I say, in the two years I was working there, they taught me a lot about being respectful, you know, being mindful of others, you know. Talk with etiquettes… (Mo John)

> They're quite known. Because you know, you do good things in the community, you'll be known for that. You do bad things in the community, you'll be known for that. And *mash'Allah,* these brothers are known for good stuff they do. You know they're very silent about their work, but *alhamdulillah*, I can honestly say that, you know, they bring a lot of people together. (Mo John)

Radicalisation was viewed as a clandestine activity. Something that happens 'out there', somewhere and not in everyday time/space. This might have been a strategy of displacement, to stress their non-proximity to it.

5. Conclusions

The study of Islamist radicalisation is replete with a number of orthodoxies about the role played by religion as ideology or inspiration in the lives of people who have been involved in Islamist radicalisation as 'process' or as a pathological state of mind and being. In this study, I have attempted to investigate the way these different dynamics play out in young people's lives through focusing on a milieu – 'Muslim Street' – as a site that helps shape young people's response to both radicalising forces and factors. The milieu is a valuable site of sociality where many of the orthodoxies – be they religion, ethnicity, socio-economic realities, politics – are encountered.

Importantly young Muslims of a Salafi disposition assert their agency *through* different forms of engagement with these orthodoxies; not always in uncritical adoption of religion or aggrieved status of 'other', but also through critical dialogue with fellow Muslims as well as citizens. However, the politicised nature of discourse on Islamist radicalisation – a product of the significant media, governmental and subsequent security services attention to Muslims - limits the potential for safe engagement in discussions about radicalisation and extremism that may help prevent people going down that route.

Importantly, the street as a milieu was a contested site too, because of the gaze of the security services, the statutory neglect of minority ethnic areas, the subsequent 'ghetto' mentality of people who inhabit it and the hold of traditional religion – all these factors eschewed their personal investment in the area. This messy existence makes it difficult for young Muslims to structure themselves or put in place a structured programme of self-development, it was stated.

Yet, the importance given to activities of self-improvement, such as the Friday evening gatherings and *dawah* walkabouts, contrasts with young Muslims being merely disinterested vessels or consumers. While their engagement in formal politics is curtailed by the apolitical emphasis of Salafism, there is also a drive and desire for personal development or evolution that is also supposed to affect society at large. The resources to achieve this are mostly ideological[11] in the sense that they are limited to what the self can make of these. So the only orientation to something outside the self that the quest for individual betterment is attuned to is God. It, therefore, becomes important to consider how ideology is mediated. The sociality afforded by milieu was important in terms of spaces and times to experience this.

The research in this study suggests shifting the focus from young Muslims and their religion toward different 'thresholds' in their lives – shaped by the haphazard nature of family, work, education etc. This can be gleaned through the role of the street as a space of stability in the otherwise haphazard lives of the people I worked with.

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[11] Ideology is also described as 'God and His Apostle and the struggle in His cause', in the Translation of the Quran, by Muhammad Asad, 1980; 260).

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7. Appendices

Appendix 7.1: Socio-demographic data of respondents

Name (pseudonym)	Age	Education	Employment	Ethnicity	Gender	Religion	Religiosity	No. in household
Salma	34	n/k	Self employed	Mir Puri	F (Q)	Islam	Identifies mainly	
Mamsy	28	n/k	Not working (health)	Somali/Swedish	M	Islam	Practising	Living in hostel
Tullah	21	UG (doing)	PT employed	Afghan/London	M	Islam	Identifies only	Single parent
Rozina	16	Secondary	Not working	Bangladeshi	F	Islam	Identifies only	6 siblings
Abdullah	27	Secondary	FT employed	Mir Puri	M	Islam	Practising	Living with mother
Dhul-qarnain	23	Secondary	FT employed	Somali	M	Islam	Practising	Lives at Home
Abdul Raheem Ali	20	UG (doing)	PT employed	Mir Puri	M	Islam	Practising	6 siblings
Abu Abdulla	23	PG (doing)	PT employed	Arab (Libyan)	M	Islam	Practising	6 siblings
Mo John	19	Madrassah	Employed (precarious)	Mir Puri	M	Islam	Practising	House of 4, doesn't include father
Aby Yahya	23	UG (doing)	PT employed	Somali	M	Islam	Practising	5
Ismail	28	left secondary	Not employed	Afro Carribean (convert)	M	Islam	Practising	5 siblings, lives alone
Abu Levi	24	UG (doing)	PT employed	Mir Puri	M	Islam	Practising	5 siblings, mother is head of household

Hilal	21	college (completed)	PT employed	Pakistani/Chinese	M	Islam	Identifies mainly	Lives alone (7 siblings)
Jalil	24	Hafiz (reciter of Quran)	Not working	Somaliland	M	Islam	Practising	Lives in hostel (6 siblings living nearby)
Afia	26	PG (doing)	anti-racism activist/volunteer	Mir Puri	F	Islam	Practising	Lives with family
Freda	28	PG (doing)	PT employed	Pakistani	F	Islam	Practising	Married
Minnie	29	UG (completed)	street pastor	Mir Puri	M	Islam	Practising	Lives at home
Sayyid Qutb	20	UG (doing)	Works (self-employed) on the side	Mir Puri	M	Islam	Practising	Lives at home
Abu Hamza	22	UG (doing)	Not working (health)	Pakistani	M	Islam	Practising	Lives with mother who is separated