# Voices of Young Muslims Building a society free of Islamophobia

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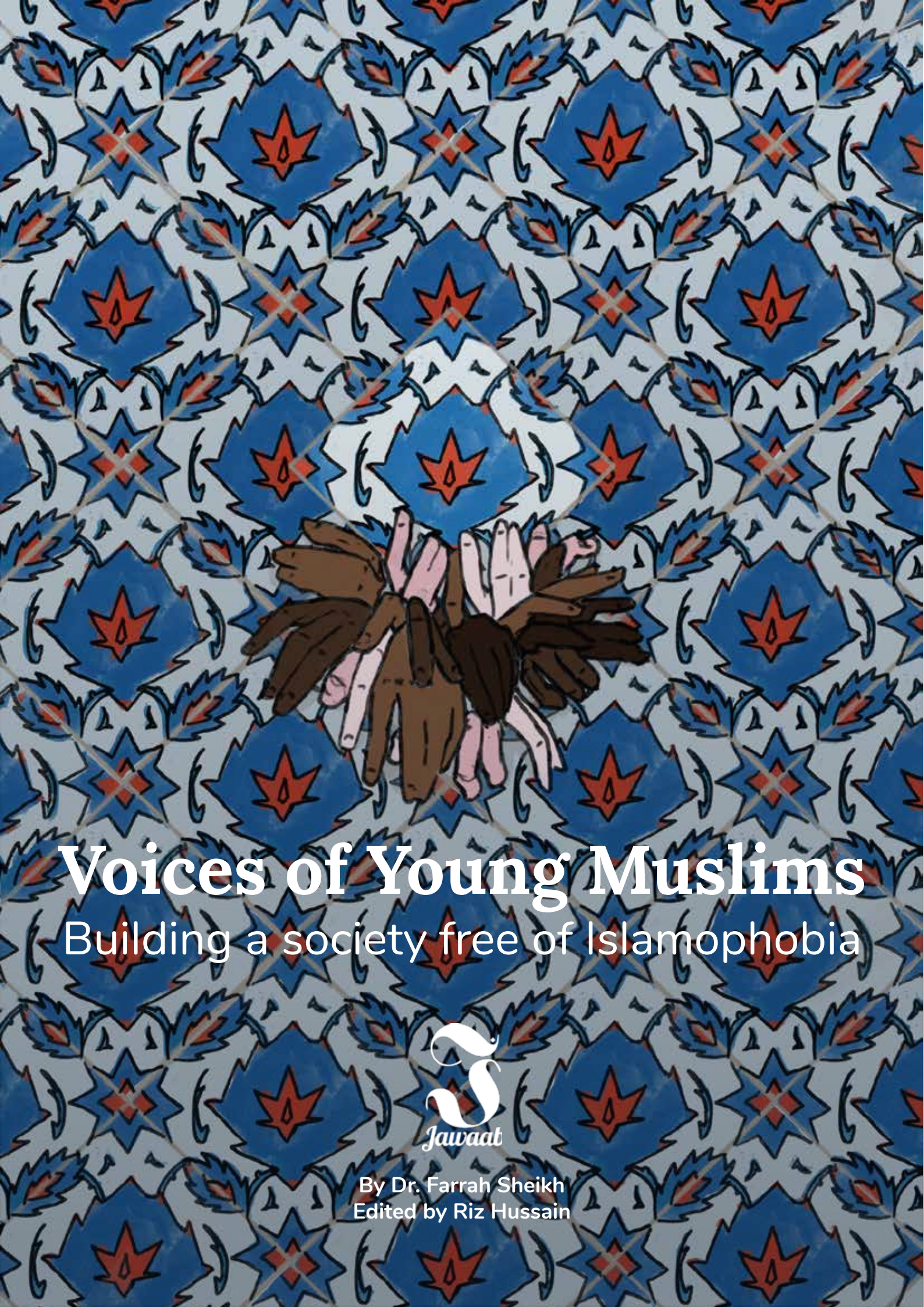

# Voices of Young Muslims

## Building a society free of Islamophobia

Jawaab

By Dr. Farrah Sheikh
Edited by Riz Hussain

# About us

Jawaab is a charity that works with young Muslims. Our purpose is to build the power of young Muslims. We do this by creating spaces for expression and digital resources, and running leadership programmes.

Jawaab has three main goals:

Influence young people, organisations and decision makers through insights
Educate - Muslim communities on key issues
Empower- build the agency of young Muslims to win change

*You can find out more about Jawaab's work at jawaab.org.uk*


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# About the Author

Dr. Farrah Sheikh is a scholar-activist. Farrah earned her PhD from SOAS, University of London where she worked as a Nohoudh Scholar at the Centre of Islamic Studies. Farrah specialises in issues around Muslim minority life including; identity, exclusion, and integration through a postcolonial, feminist lens. She is passionate about elevating the diversity of Muslim narratives, supporting young people, centring their voices in debates, and tackling wider societal issues that affect Muslim lives in the everyday. Farrah thanks Jawaab's director, Riz Hussain for his editorial direction for this report. *Visit www.farrahsheikh.co.uk to find out more about Farrah's work.*

# Acknowledgements

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# Contents



# Foreword

My first experience of what is now referred to as 'Islamophobia' was as a teenager working in my father's corner shop. It had been just under a year since the July 7 2005 bombings on London's transport network, and the war in Iraq had been ramped up as the threat of terror reached a new high. A regular customer had come to buy his newspaper, pack of bacon and a carton of cigarettes. As I was bagging up his things, he watched the small television hung on the ceiling - at a BBC News report about another spate of terror-related arrests of mainly young, Muslim men of South Asian origin. "Get 'em outta here, the lot of them" he shouted. The other customers in the queue, both white, English men who had frequented our store everyday since it opened, cheered him on. "Send them all back!" one of them said. "They don't belong here anyway". It was the first time I had truly felt alien in the country that I was born in and was a citizen of. It was also the first time that I recognised myself, distinctly, as a Muslim in Britain, rather than the other way around.

Jawaab's Voices of Young Muslims: Building a Society free of Islamophobia is a detailed, highly comprehensive report on how this kind of anti-Muslim sentiment has grown since the 2005 London terror attack. Over half of the report's respondents say they've experienced instances of direct physical, verbal or emotional abuse in a public setting, on account of their religious identity. It's not just the scale of Islamophobic abuse that's increased, but also the settings in which anti-Muslim attitudes and sentiment is becoming more commonplace; In schools, where curricula is increasingly influenced by the Prevent programme's counter-extremism guidelines, to workplaces where Muslim women in particular, are finding themselves having to visibly reduce their religious identities in order to climb up the career ladder - or even get a job at all. In many of the case studies outlined in this report, Muslims living in Britain today end up having to make a choice between their religious and national identity - a dichotomy that becomes more pronounced and holds higher, more oppressive demands whenever negative stories about Muslims appear in the press, or in the aftermath of a terrorist attack.

This report is useful in advancing our understanding of what 'Islamophobia' actually is in 2018. Beyond instances of direct hate crime and blatant acts of discrimination, this report shows how anti-Muslim ideas and sentiments are disseminated from public institutions and into daily discourse, resulting in a large number of British Muslims feeling uncertain or insecure about their identities. It shows how 'Islamophobia' isn't just an issue related to religious discrimination, but rather has become a racialised category - one in which Muslims living in poorer areas in the country, and who face discrimination within Muslim communities themselves, often end up bearing the largest  portion of the brunt when it comes to Islamophobic abuse.

Ultimately, this report shows that while Islamophobia has, as Baroness Sayeeda Warsi said in 2011, had “passed the dinner table test” in modern Britain. But, the way we understand it remains simplistic, and has become outdated. Forming policy that can truly reduce Islamophobic abuse requires more than just an increase in social media monitoring, or more action by police departments. It means understanding how Islamophobia affects different layers of society in ways that aren’t immediately visible, from young, impressionable Muslim men, to those Muslims who face other forms of discrimination (ie. disabilities, non-hetero sexualities), and often are neglected when policy makers attempt to homogenise the British Muslim experience.

It is worth noting that this report has been published just weeks after the murder conviction of Darren Osborne, who, in 2017, rammed a van into a group of Muslims leaving a North London Mosque. Islamophobia is alive and well in Britain, and its consequences, if left untreated, are lethal. This report is a welcome contribution to a much needed conversation on the realities of anti-Muslim abuse in modern Britain, and will be crucial for anyone serious about tackling it sincerely.

**Hussein Kesvani**
*Journalist and  Author of “Follow me, brother: Inside the Muslim social web” (Hurst, 2019)*

# Executive Summary

**Our report, Voices of Young Muslims: Building a Society free of Islamophobia captures an important moment in the story of Muslims in Britain today. It is a story of discrimination, fear, identity and above all - resilience.**

As part of Jawaab's leadership training initiatives, we trained a group of volunteer researchers who went back into their communities to collect the stories we are sharing in this report. Our research set out to explore questions around our place in society as Muslims - and as young people part of the next generation who will take Britain forward.

Our core research questions included:
How do young Muslims formulate their identities?
How do young Muslims experience Islamophobia?
What are the impact of politics and media on Muslim identities?
What are the pressures on young Muslims today?
What is the gender impact on issues of politics and identity for Muslim women?
How have things changed for Muslims across generations?

**What did we find?**

Our report presents a thematic analysis of qualitative data. This means we structured our report around common themes that emerged from our case studies and interviews. These include: Islamophobia, Muslim Women, Young Muslim Identity and Muslim Generational Changes.

Islamophobia: is multi-layered, operating at several levels of society. It manifests indirectly through negative stereotyping and attitudes expressed towards Muslims. However, Islamophobia also operates across British institutions. Formally recognising Islamophobia will help to provide security to a beleaguered and targeted Muslim community.

Muslim Women: Visibly Muslim women still struggle to find acceptance in society. Many Muslim women are actively changing their style to appear 'less Muslim' to avoid Islamophobia. Two of our female interviewees felt they needed to take off their headscarves altogether.

Young Muslim Identity: Muslim identities are complex, and young Muslims have multiple locations of belonging. 'British Muslim' discourse homogenises the diversity of Muslim identities. We are concerned that processes of racialisation will result in a new type of Muslim: one that is readily identifiable, easily governed, yet, unprotected against Islamophobia.



Muslim Generational Changes: Young Muslims perceive themselves as more willing to challenge Islamophobia and racism compared to their elders. Their ability to challenge discrimination is rooted in a sense that Britain is their home compared to their elders, who felt more insecure about their position in society.

## We also found:

61% reported personal experiences of Islamophobia or knew someone who had experienced it.

60% of our participants reported feeling pressure to hide or downplay their Muslim identities. Mostly at work or at airports.

43% of our participants reported feeling conflicted in their identities. Acts of Muslim-perpetrated violence, wanting to fit in, feeling unwanted, and evolving relationships with Islam were the main sources of conflict.

55% said they identified at least partially as British.

19% said they did not feel part of any British identity.

# Summary of Recommendations

**1.** The narratives around British Muslim identity must change from one of homogeneity to heterogeneity. All government policy initiatives should specifically avoid initiatives that aim to homogenise Muslim communities or project the view that Islam as foreign religion without roots in British cultures.

**2.** We need specific community and government initiatives which educate wider society on the diversity of Muslim identities through art and culture. We are concerned that processes of racialisation and a security agenda seek to re-engineer Britain's Muslims into a new type of Muslim: one that is readily identifiable, easily governed yet unprotected against specific forms of anti-Muslim prejudice.

**3.** The government should prioritise compulsory teaching of colonial history and migration in the National Curriculum. At the same time, community initiatives that explore the complexities of colonial history, and its impact on different groups should also be funded as part of a wider, joined-up integration strategy.

**4.** Islamophobia is real, dangerous and discriminatory. It needs to be formally recognised in the law as a matter of urgency.

**5.** The media are well-placed to shape better perceptions of Muslims. The media needs to strike a better balance between positive and negative media stories related to Muslims and Islam. Positive stories related to the arts, culture and philanthropy can help reshape negative stereotypes that undermine a sense of Muslim belonging to British society.

**6.** The creation of media and advocacy programmes specifically aimed at tackling anti-Muslim prejudice. This includes religious and cultural literacy training for journalists and media professionals.

**7.** The recommendations of the Leveson Inquiry should be extended to Islamophobic media content, with press regulators intervening when there is evidence of Islamophobic reporting and misrepresentation.



**8.** The government should commit funds away from counter-terrorism agendas for local communities to run media and advocacy training programmes specifically for Muslim women. Disproportionately affected by Islamophobia, this will help to empower Muslim women with the necessary verbal, writing and advocacy skills to curate their own unique stories, moving past limiting stereotypes.

**9.** The media must play their part in dispelling myths about Muslim women by prioritising Muslim women spokespersons, especially Muslim women from underrepresented Black, and LGBTQI communities when seeking Muslim contributions to public debates.

**10.** We need an integration strategy aimed at reducing socio-economic penalties associated with a Muslim identity with clear, measurable outcomes for standards of health, housing, employment, discrimination and educational attainment.

**11.** The Prevent programme must be subjected to a full, independent root-and-branch review. The government should publish figures for number of people referred, and passed through the secretive Channel programme. This data must be aggregated by ethnic and religious identity as well as the reasons for their referral in the first place, and whether or not they were deemed to pose a serious threat to Britain's national security. This will help hold government claims about 'Muslim extremism' to account.

**12.** The public and private sectors must work together to end Islamophobia, especially gendered forms of Islamophobia that targets Muslim women. We would like to see a joined-up approach across sectors that results in public commitments to a zero tolerance policy towards Islamophobia, and violence against women. This should be incorporated in policies and diversity statements. The policy must be reinforced through training programmes designed to educate all public and private sector workers on issues of race equality, power, privilege, religious, and cultural literacy as part of company induction processes to tackle these issues head on.

**13.** Targeted careers advice packages should be available in schools, universities and Job Centres to support Muslim women's aspirations.

# Preface

For centuries ideas of race have been used to divide people. Usually constructed as the good and the bad, the superior and inferior, the intelligent and stupid. Processes of racialisation have also marked Muslims, identifying some as 'good' and others as 'bad' through binary, Islamophobic discourses found in government policy, the media and on our streets.

Jawaab's work is important because Islamophobia lends itself to violence, marginalisation, exploitation and feelings of powerlessness. It impacts people. It impacts us all as our civil liberties are stripped down in the name of security, our working conditions worsen as Muslims struggle to find employment, our streets become less safe because of Islamophobic hate crime.

There is a lot of discussion about security but it almost always focuses on Muslims. This discourse goes something like this: we need protection from Islamist terrorism. We need to monitor Muslim men who are supposedly vulnerable to Islamist extremism. We need Muslim women, especially mothers to keep an eye on their sons. Just in case.

No doubt that countering all forms of extremism should be a government priority, it is their job to keep all of us safe. However, this dangerous discourse has helped to shape a highly charged, Islamophobic atmosphere, where Muslims are vilified, attacked, and even killed.

Take Makram Ali, a 51 year old man was murdered by a white terrorist who ploughed his van into worshippers outside Finsbury Park Mosque in Ramadan 2017. Or the case of Muhsin Ahmad, an 81 year old grandfather kicked to death by two white men, as he walked to prayers at a mosque in Rotherham in August 2016. Similarly, Mohammed Saleem, an 82 year old man, was stabbed to death by a neo-Nazi as he walked home from the mosque in 2013. Then there was Resham Khan and her cousin, Jameel Muhktar who had acid thrown at them by a white man in East London. The attack left Jameel in an induced coma and ruined Resham's dreams of becoming a model. The list is endless, documenting the way Muslim lives are shaped, and sometimes brought to an untimely end by the horrors of Islamophobia.

**What is Jawaab doing about Islamophobia?**

Here, at Jawaab, we're aiming to build the power of young Muslims. We work with young Muslims aged 18-35, who tend to be from working class backgrounds.

To us, it's important that Muslims feel empowered enough to work through their experiences of Islamophobia in our safe spaces. We want young Muslims to feel confident enough to use the skills they learn in our creative training programme to challenge Islamophobia wherever they see it manifest. Through our leadership initiatives, we want young Muslims to be able to raise their voices as equals in society.

This report is one the many ways that Jawaab is tackling Islamophobia head on. Our themes: Islamophobia, Identity, Muslim Women and Intergenerational Issues are based on a set of research questions that emerged from Jawaab's Islamophobia 2016-17 workshop series.

Our findings and recommendations are completely shaped by young Muslim voices who bravely shared their experiences with us for this important, and timely work. Our report tackles fixed ideas of 'British Muslim' identity, and shows how these ideas are perceived as a tool of oppression by the young Muslims it seeks to identify.

The key message of our report is the urgent need to break dangerous, securitised Islamophobic narratives that shape and influence Muslim lives in Britain. These narratives do not take into account the complex ways that Muslims belong to Britain, Islam and their communities.

The cycle of Islamophobia and homogenisation of Muslim identities needs to end. Instead, we need a new narrative. One that appreciates the diversity, complexity and nuances of Muslim identities shaped by young Muslim voices.  This report is our small  contribution to a much bigger struggle.

We firmly believe that Muslim aspirations and identities should be built on the foundations of equality, fairness and dignity.

**Riz Hussain  &  Dr. Farrah Sheikh**
**Director  Researcher**

# Introduction

**Muslims in the UK - An Overview**

**How did we get here?**

The Muslim presence in the UK is rooted in Britain's historical endeavours across the globe. Commerce, the slave trade, colonisation, the occasional conversion to Islam, and exchange with Muslim cultures of Europe cemented a long history of interaction between Muslims and Britain.

We're usually told Muslims came to the UK as as result of the mass migration. Taking place after Britain called on the Commonwealth nations to supply it with labour, after the destruction caused by World War Two. There is certainly truth in this narrative but the story of Muslims and Britain is far more complex.

In the South Asian Muslim context, large groups of Bengali, Pakistani and Indian men immigrated to the UK albeit for very different reasons. For many Pakistanis and Indians, the horrors of the British-administered partition of South Asia into India and Pakistan were still fresh. Approximately 2 million lives were lost in one of the largest mass migrations that has ever taken place to date.[1] People on both sides of the new borders were understandably fearful for the future. A number of men migrated to the UK in the 1950s, filling the UK's need for cheap factory labour.

However, a lesser known fact in the Pakistani context is that mass migration to the UK mainly took place after the construction of the Mangla Dam[2] in the 1960s. Construction of the dam submerged some 250 villages in the Mirpur district, displacing over 100,000 people, who lost their homes and farmlands, with no way of recovering their livelihoods.

A significant number of men from the towns of Mirpur and Dadyal were given work permits by the Government of Pakistan to work in Britain. They were mostly allocated work in the factories of Northern England. This formed the beginning of the Pakistani-Kashmiri community in the mill towns of Bradford, Lancashire, Yorkshire and other cities, rooted in their displacement from Mirpur.

The history of Bengali immigration to the UK is very different to that of Indians and Pakistanis. There are records of Bengalis working in London from as early as 1873 as many were employed by the East India Company to work on the imperial sea routes through Kolkata. Most of these Bengalis were from the Sylhet region of East Bengal.[3] These early sea routes established connections between particular parts of East Bengal (now Bangladesh) and specific areas of East London.[4] In making these connections, Bengali sailors set up networks that were useful in later phases of migration.[5]

The 1950s and 1960s saw an increase in Bengali migration to Britain as the country sought to fill labour shortages, working mostly in restaurants and textiles in East London. Significantly, the 1971 liberation struggle that saw the birth of an independent Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) away from West Pakistan also impacted migration patterns.

As Britain passed immigration legislation making it difficult to travel between Britain and the subcontinent, a different migration pattern emerged as families chose to reunify in Britain, making the country their permanent home.

Collectively, the stories of Asian Muslims are quite well-documented in British narratives, however, the same cannot be said for other communities, particularly those identifying as Black Muslims. Almost 10% of all Muslims in England and Wales identify as Black. Despite a sizeable percentage of Black Muslims in Britain, we still lack nuanced data for this racial census category. Narrow racial categories used in British official documentation sometimes contributes to the confusion around minority communities as it often fails to account for multiple identities and belongings. We know little about the stories, struggles and experiences of Black Muslims, many of whom are of Kenyan or Nigerian origin[6] and have very different trajectories to Asians.

Future work in this areas must also take Somalis into account, some of whom identify as Arab and others as Black on the census. According to the 2011 census, the third largest Muslim ethnic group are Somalis with a population of 100,000.

Somalis have had presence in Britain since the nineteenth century as they worked on British ships or as merchants. Early Somali immigrants settled in Cardiff, Liverpool and London. However, as a result of the 1919 Cardiff Race Riots, Somalis, along with Arab residents had to be evacuated, sent back to their countries. The 1930s saw the growth of another Somali presence in Sheffield and South Wales to take on difficult, laborious jobs in the steel industry.

A much larger Somali presence in the UK can be traced to the 1980s and 1990s as people sought safety from civil war in Somalia. The current Somali population in Britain is a result of this violence as refugees were mostly women and children who lost their male family members/partners to war. This marked a change in Somali settlement from single, male sailors and labourers to that of refugee communities.[7]

The story of Muslims in Britain is interlinked with colonisation, imperialist violence and liberation

struggles. For example, 1972 saw Idi Amin expel 60,000 Asians from Uganda, and a significant number were eventually permitted to settle in Britain.[8] Approximately 8000 Bosniaks reside in London after their families sought refuge from the horrors of ethnic cleansing of Bosnian Muslims that took place in 1992-1995. The Afghan presence in the UK is one of the many devastating results of the Soviet Invasion, the Taliban and more recently, the War on Terror.[9]

There is also a history of White English folks converting to Islam, Abdullah Quilliam being a particularly interesting case study. Born in 1856 in Liverpool, he famously converted to Islam whilst on a trip to Morocco. Upon his return, Quilliam established the Liverpool Muslim Institute in 1889. After a long period of disuse, Quilliam's mosque reopened in 2014. It serves as a reminder that Islam can, and is embraced by people from all walks of life. Far from being alien to these shores, through Britain's history of colonisation, imperialism, labour needs and conversion, Muslims are, and have always been an important part of Britain's story.

**What about Muslims now?**

The events of 9/11 and 7/7 are watershed moments for Muslims as the spotlight was placed firmly on their lives, loyalties and identities. Britain saw the launch of the Prevent programme in 2005, designed to counter extremism. The programme has faced intense criticism for its mono-focus on Muslims, particularly young Muslim men. A security lens has been established in this post 9/11 context where existing long-standing issues around youth identities, education, belonging, societal integration, and inequality have been reframed through the lens of extremism in the case of Britain's Muslim populations.

This lens has serious consequences for Muslims, especially young Muslims navigating multiple identities in an overtly hostile and Islamophobic environment. The 2011 census shows Muslims now comprise 4.8% of the population in England and Wales. Additionally, there are 77,000 Muslims in Scotland and 3,800 in Northern Ireland. Just under half were born in the UK. We are no longer just talking about migrant populations, who believed they would one day go back to their home countries. This discussion has moved on and is much wider. It now includes British-born and/or British-raised Muslims who speak English as a first language, have gone through British education systems and are very much attuned to life in here. This has new implications for what it means to feel 'at home', and the barriers to belonging.

It must also be stressed that we are no longer just talking about South Asian Muslim migrants. The Muslim presence is highly diverse. Despite attempts to construct a homogenised British Muslim identity through media and political discourse, the statistics point to a group of very diverse people as 68% of Muslims are of Asian or Asian British descent (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi), 10% are from Black ethnic groups, 8% from White ethnic groups and 6% from Arab ethnic groups. These statistics fail to account for the deeper nuance that exists within many of these racial census categories, especially in the case of Black, and Arab Muslims.

Despite the diversity that exists amongst Muslim communities, they are concentrated in many of the same parts of the country where their ancestors first put down roots. 76% live in Greater London, the West Midlands, the North West and Yorkshire and Humberside. Social issues related to unemployment, poor housing, poverty and struggles at work continue to hamper progress in Muslim communities.

It is important to note that just under half of all Muslims in England and Wales (1.22 million) still live in the 10% most deprived local authority districts in England. Based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation Measure, only 1.7% (46,000) of Muslims live in the 10% least deprived, local authority districts in England. According to the 2011 Census, 50% of Muslim households live in poverty compared to 20% of the overall population.[10]

According to the 2011 census, less than 20% of Muslim adults are in full-time employment compared to 34.9% of overall population and only 6% are hired in managerial, administrative, and professional jobs compared to 10% of the overall population. More recent data reveals that Muslims experience the highest levels of disadvantage in the labour market with a 12.8% unemployment rate in 2015.[11] The level of disadvantage is higher for Muslim women, who are 71% more likely to be unemployed compared to white Christian women with the same education level and language abilities.[12] Both Muslim men and women experience the greatest pay gaps compared to Christian men and women, at 16.5% and 22.4% respectively.[13]

Muslim communities in Britain tend to be on the younger side. The Muslim Council of Britain predicts that there will be approximately 300,000 Muslim teenagers by 2021. At the moment, 8.1% of Muslims are in fact, school-aged children (5 to 15.) This figure is significant when we consider the huge social mobility challenges that Muslims face at every stage of their lives. As highlighted by the Social Mobility Commission, despite doing well in education, young Muslims are held back at every stage of their lives, affecting their ability to reach their full potential.[14] Young Muslims struggle to access the labour market. TUC (2017) suggests Muslims, along with other BME groups are more likely to be low-paid, temporary or zero-hour contract work.[15]

**How we conducted our study**

We trained a team of volunteer researchers to conduct semi-structured interviews and collect case studies within their own communities. In total, 42 Muslims were interviewed between July -

October 2017.  We interviewed at least 20 (including 5 visibly Muslim) women and 13 men who responded to online and offline calls for participants.

As Muslims are not a homogenous group, our sample is formed of participants hailing from a range of social and ethnic backgrounds. It is recognised that the sample cannot be fully representative of the spectrum of Muslim life in the UK. Our participants were from Black, Asian (East and South), White and Mixed heritage backgrounds, who has experienced the majority of their lives in Britain, and spoke English as one of their primary languages. Our participants were from a range of gender, sexual and sectarian backgrounds, illustrating the complexities of a homogenous 'British Muslim' identity.

Our research questions included:

How do young Muslims formulate their identities?
How do young Muslims experience Islamophobia?
What are the impact of politics and media on Muslim identities?
What are the pressures on young Muslims today?
What is the gender impact on issues of politics and identity for Muslim women?
How have things changed for Muslims across generations?

*Note: At the request of our participants, we have completely anonymised our data. We have not used real or pseudo names in our report to keep our participants non-identifiable.*

### The Jawaab Perspective

**What did we find?**

- 61% reported personal experiences of Islamophobia or knew someone who had experienced it.
- 60% of our participants reported feeling pressure to hide or downplay their Muslim identities. Mostly at work or at airports.
- 43% of our participants reported feeling conflicted in their identities. Acts of Muslim-perpetrated violence, wanting to fit in, feeling unwanted, and evolving relationships with Islam were the main sources of conflict.
- Visibly Muslim women struggle to find acceptance in society. Two women in our sample felt they needed to take off their headscarves in order to become less visible in public.
- 55% said they identified at least partially as British.
- 19% said they did not feel part of any British identity.



# Islamophobia

Islamophobia is a serious societal issue that affects everyone in Britain in different ways. For Muslims, to suffer Islamophobia is to experience discrimination at every level of society. This means to be viewed with suspicion as their lives are examined through a counter-terrorism lens, to experience hate crime and exclusion at work, school or university. It means to experience everyday microaggressions as people make terrorist and bomb jokes, and to have a constant negative presence in the media - all based on faith identity.

It is important to note that despite the focus on Muslims, Islamophobia also affects non-Muslims, especially Sikhs and bearded men.[16] Sian (2017) documents that ways in which Sikhs are often mistaken for Muslims, and are subjected to similar abuse as a result of the racialised security lens applied after the events of 9/11. A sense of Islamophobia sows distrust, encouraging a culture of fear of Muslims to flourish. Clearly, this has negative implications for integration as people, and communities grow further apart from each other.

There are intense debates over what it means to be Islamophobic, and how Islamophobia should be defined. Attempts to legislate against Islamophobia by recognising it as a form of racism in the law are often met with resistance. This resistance tends to be formed of two main arguments: criticism of Islam should not be considered Islamophobic and that Islamophobia is not a form of racism because Muslims are not a race.[17]

We present our view on Islamophobia based on our interviews with Muslims. We argue that Islamophobia needs urgent attention and should be treated as other forms of discrimination like anti-semitism and homophobia.

**What is Islamophobia?**

The Runnymede Trust defines Islamophobia as ".. any distinction, exclusion or restriction towards, or preference against, Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslims) that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life." (Runnymede, 2017)

Despite repeated calls for recognition, the British government is yet to adopt a formal definition of Islamophobia.[18] However, Islamophobia is recognised as a hate crime under the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006. Additionally, the Equalities Act 2010 extends protection against religious or racially motivated discrimination, covering some acts of Islamophobia by proxy.



**Is Britain racist and hateful?**

The statistics clearly show that Britain has a serious issue with religious and racial hate crimes. According to Home Office figures, hate crimes related to race and religion are on the rise, and a sharp increase was recorded around the time of the EU Referendum (aka Brexit vote) and the attack on Westminster Bridge on 22 March 2017.

In 2016/17, 78% (62,685) of all hate crimes reported were racially motivated. 7% (5,949) were religious hate crimes and overall, crimes related to race hate are up by 27% since the 2016-17 reporting period and crimes related to religion are up by 35%.[19] At the same time, prosecution levels for all types of hate crime dropped.[20] The same figures revealed hate crimes targeting mosques were on the rise with 110 attacks recorded compared to 47 in the same recording period in 2016.[21]

The level of prosecution for racially or religiously aggravated crimes are very low. 18% of race/ religion hate crimes are related to public fear, alarm, or distress. 22% of these offences resulted in a charge or summons outcome for assault and 11% for criminal damage. Very few resulted in a guilty verdict and conviction. For example, between 2007-2011, only 6 cases for religiously aggravated offences resulted in prosecution.[22]

The lack of recognition for Islamophobia is deeply concerning. It is clear that prosecutions for religiously aggravated hate crimes are very low. This is hardly likely to inspire confidence in the justice system and feeds into the wider reality of Muslims feeling targeted and left unprotected. Questions must be raised as to whether hate crime processes are being used as a way of reducing a much more toxic truth: that Britain is becoming an increasingly racist, violent and society.

# The Grassroots Perspective: Experiences of Islamophobia

We asked each of our participants if they had ever experienced Islamophobia or knew of someone who had. 61% reported stories of Islamophobia on public transport, airports, at school and even on their doorsteps.

Others pointed to the general atmosphere in Britain where they felt an Islamophobic culture had been instilled in the institutional and social life of Britain. These are stories of Islamophobia from the everyday lives of our Muslim participants.

"It was a very busy train, and I was standing. A lady was taking up two seats with her bag. I asked her if she could make space and she said: 'No, it's not for your kind.' I said: 'excuse me?' Then I said: 'If you do not move the bag yourself, I will move it somewhere you will not like!' That was the first time I experienced Islamophobia. Sometimes people will defend you, fight for you and speak for you. Although, are we mentally ready and prepared for these things though? When it happens, you don't know what to do or say."

"I count schools when I'm talking about Islamophobia. If there's a higher proportion of Muslim people in a given area, how do schools treat kids? How are people policed? How are people housed? Look at the Trojan horse situation in Birmingham, which we found out was completely wrong afterwards. It's all Islamophobia."

"There was a time when my Mum was walking through the estate. She came home and said that some white men hanging around in the area threw things at her. I pin that down as Islamophobia because she wears hijab and abaya."

"Someone called us terrorists when we were on the bus home. He said: 'If I was the headteacher of your school, I would put you all together and blow you guys up.' I get comments like: 'I should do what Hitler did to people like you!' Or people say: 'you dirty Paki!' Even though I don't look Pakistani. I'm like, 'what?!'

"Islamophobia is how the police interact with people in the community. It's how Muslims are housed, many working class people including Muslims are seen as expendable. These people are seen as lesser humans in general."



"Our old front door used to be white. I remember waking up one morning and there was mud all it. Another time, we had a massive rock thrown through our living room window. Then, another morning, we woke up and found bits of bacon across our fence. Obviously it was a council house, my parents couldn't do anything about it. We complained but the council didn't do much. We called the police, they noted it down as vandalism even though it was a hate crime! It was Islamophobic with the bacon, and the other instances were definitely racist. When the police didn't do anything about it, we had to deal with it ourselves"

"I have a beard for two purposes: number one is primarily for my religion, two: I also consider it a fashion thing! I see the way people look at me on the underground. I know exactly what they are thinking, as if I am about to press some sort of button. Little do they know that I am just any other guy, in any other situation, going to any other place to work. Maybe one of the funniest guys they'd ever meet had they only stopped to talk to me."

"There was a lot of racism and Islamophobia in my primary school. It was hard, I thought there was something wrong with me for being Muslim. It wasn't just students that made me feel bad, teachers did too. They would force us to pray the Christian way, and they were very forceful with their religion. The teachers made it very clear that they didn't like me."

"There is just this constant fear. I take the train a lot. There was a girl who got pushed into a train so I constantly want to stay away from the platform edge. That girl could have been anyone of us."

"I got off the plane from Morocco. Immigration were stopping people 'randomly' but obviously they were stopping people who looked Moroccan and Muslim. I got stopped. I've travelled all over the EU but they don't stamp your passport so I only have Moroccan stamps. The immigration woman was like: 'you travel a lot to Morocco, is there a reason?' I told her my family are there and I visit them often. She said: 'well to me it looks like you travel every few months.' I said: 'I just explained that I go and see my family!' Then she asked if I'm seeing anyone and what I do for a living. At this point, I was very blunt and said I work for military services in local government. Suddenly, she let me go but if I were to say something else, like maybe I work as an assistant or something, I think she would have questioned me even more!"

# The Jawaab Perspective: Tackling Islamophobia

Our case studies show Islamophobia is multi-layered and operates at several levels of society. Our participants used words like: racism, discrimination, anti-Muslim, and anti-Islam to define Islamophobia.

Islamophobia can be broken down into anti-Muslim prejudice through direct acts of racism, xenophobia, violence, exclusion and discrimination. It manifests indirectly through the negative perceptions and attitudes expressed towards Muslims, hampering their everyday lives. However, Islamophobia also operates across British institutions particularly through the problematic Prevent programme and unchecked media coverage. At the heart of the discourse lays an ambivalence towards Muslims - they are actively discriminated against in the workplace, at school, in the streets and by the State.

Islamophobia is quickly becoming entrenched across society and is an issue that requires our urgent attention. It is important to understand that recognising Islamophobia as a specific form of discrimination does not mean that Islam can no longer be criticised. Discussions and debate are part and parcel of a healthy society.

At the same time it must be also recognised that racist/ hate speech directed at minorities undermines their individual and legal lifestyle choices. Using freedom of speech in such a negative way challenges the notion that all people enjoy equality in a liberal and democratic society. We recognise that Britain has a long history of tackling other forms of discrimination and Britain's Muslims are no different in their need of protection from Islamophobia. Refusing to acknowledge the problem will not make it go away.

We believe formally recognising Islamophobia will help to provide security to a beleaguered and targeted Muslim community. It will go some way to reassure Muslims in Britain that the State is serious about their inclusion, protection and representation in mainstream society. Right now, Islamophobia is allowed to flourish, pushing many Muslims, especially young Muslims and Muslim women to the fringes of society simply on the basis of their faith identity.

Instead, we see arguments against recognising Islamophobia based on discredited notions of race that link people's racial identities to physical attributes and their perceived country of origin. This does not take into the account the very real and dangerous experiences of cultural, religious and xenophobic discrimination that Muslims face on a daily basis.  Whilst it is accurate to note

that Muslims in Britain do not form a single ethnic group, as Tyrer (2013) also points out, the argument that Muslims lack any form of raciality is disingenuous because there are many commonalities in the ways that Islamophobia is expressed and experienced that results in discriminatory behaviours.

The obfuscation between race and religion and how people should be recognised in mainstream discourse sidesteps the issue of Islamophobia. It mobilises arguments that Muslims in Britain cannot experience racism because of their faith identity. However, as we have seen with our research, this is far from the truth.

Instead, our research raises wider questions about the ways in which we define racism, and how people want to be recognised in society. As British conceptions of race and racism are still predominantly linked to skin colour, it does not factor in racisms based on the cultures, traditions and religions that are often part and parcel of belonging to a particular ethnic background. It is not always possible for Muslims in Britain, especially in the case of Black Muslims to pick apart race and religion when defining themselves. The diversity of Muslim identities is at least partly rooted in the diversity of a person's ethnic heritage, and deserves the respect of being recognised as worthy of protection.



# Muslim Women: Gendered Islamophobia

Islamophobia affects Muslim women, especially those who are visibly Muslim through their dress choices in specific ways. This is reflected in the deeper culture of misogyny and sexism that runs through British society. It is well known that women tend to be paid lower salaries, are promoted to positions of power less often than their male counterparts, are affected by negative attitudes, and experience an overall sense of inequality in Britain.

Sexism, patriachal attitudes and a wider sense of misogyny also permeates Islamophobic discrimination experienced by Muslim women. It affects them at work with many struggling to break glass ceilings perceived to exist because of their faith identity. Other Muslim women find it difficult to find a job, and are disproportionately attacked on the streets - simply because of their faith.

Depending on the intersection of ethnicity, faith and class, many Muslim women experience double or even triple penalties in society related to their religious, ethnic or socioeconomic backgrounds.[23] Penalties are particularly severe for Black Muslim women, who often experience a combination of racism, Islamophobia and sexism.[24]

**Muslim Women at work**

29% of Muslim women aged 16 to 24 are employed compared to half the overall population.[25] However, it is Black Muslims who experience the widest labour market penalties.[26] Joseph Rowntree (2014) found that Somali women have a labour market inactivity rate of 87% compared to 65% for Pakistani women.[27] Whilst participation in the labour market is dependent on migration status, language abilities and the generation you belong to, it also raises serious questions over anti-Black attitudes that are discriminating against Black Muslim women, who experience both ethnic and religious penalties when searching for a job.

There are reports of illegalities in recruitment processes, with Muslim women asked questions related to childcare, marriage prospects during job interviews.[28] Further evidence suggests that a person's name can affect the outcome of an application.[29]

Additionally, many Muslim women wearing cultural or religious clothing feel scrutinised in job interviews. The London Development Agency (2008) found 50% of their sample who wore headscarves felt religious discrimination blocked opportunities to progress at work. 18% of their sample were able to find jobs once they took off their headscarves and/or face veils.

**On the streets**

Muslim women also experience high levels of Islamophobic hate crimes. According to Tell Mama, 56% of all victims of Islamophobia (in person or on the street) were Muslim women. The majority of perpetrators were white men (69%). This Islamophobic abuse also had misogynistic undertones as the perpetrators referred to the victim's gender and religious identity in the attack. Tell Mama also states that Muslim women who wear face veils experience particularly aggressive violence.[30] This contributes to a wider sense of insecurity as Muslim women, particularly those who are visibly Muslims think twice about their safety on the streets as they conduct their everyday activities.

**Stereotypes and negative attitudes**

It is important to note that there is no universal 'Muslim Woman' experience. As part of our research, we interviewed Muslim women from all walks of life. Some wore headscarves, and were 'visibly' Muslims and others were not. However, even though Muslim women are a heterogenous set of people, they still share a common story of discrimination that is often shaped by violence.

There is a distinct lack of appreciation for the diverse ways in which Muslim women choose to live their lives, express their faith, and build their identities. Instead, Muslim women experience negative stereotypes that portray them as weak, submissive and subject to male control. Muslim women are also perceived to lack English skills. In reality, only 22% of Muslim women across England either speak poor English or cannot speak the language at all.[31] Furthermore, despite Muslim women's low participation in the labour market, analysis of the 2011 Census by the MCB shows that in comparison to 2001 the number of Muslims in full-time education has increased from 20.6% in 2001 to 24% in 2011. In some local authority areas Muslim women's participation in higher education is now higher than that of Muslim men.[32]

All of this points to specific, gendered forms of Islamophobia. Patriarchal attitudes framed through an established orientalist lens contributes to a negative environment for Muslim women. This lens views Muslim women as mysterious "others", not quite human, not quite as equal as the rest of society. As we have seen, negative attitudes are only one part of the problem. Muslim women are subjected to violence, racism and discrimination as part of a wider anti-Islam backlash that we are witnessing in Britain.



# The Grassroots Perspective: Amplifying Muslim Women Voices

We asked a number of Muslim women to talk about their experiences of Islamophobia, society and identity to get insight into the specific challenges that they face. Our case studies revealed that Muslim women are still struggling with stereotypes that paint them as submissive, weak and subject to male control.

There are issues with wearing the hijab with some of our respondents feeling the need to take it off because of discrimination in society. There is a lingering perception that Muslim women who wear the headscarf are forced to do so, and some of our female respondents reported altering their hijab styles to appear 'less Muslim' when travelling abroad or attending job interviews.

We found that Muslim women were hyper-aware of the negativity that shaped perceptions of their lives and choices, which in turn, affected their life chances. These are some of their stories.

"Being a South Asian Muslim woman comes with its own tropes and stereotypes. I think people usually assume I'm timid, meek, and fragile. It's when I open my mouth that people sit back down and know to stay in their lane."

"I have a lot of hijab-wearing friends, and they've had a lot issues. Whether it's the job market or people talking down to them, they often feel like they're not smart enough."

"Some of the sharpest women I know, are hijab-wearing Muslim women. A lot of my hijab-wearing Muslim women friends experience a lot of micro-aggressive and passive-aggressive comments. People will crack jokes like: "I hope you don't have a bomb underneath that!"

"I'm confident in my identity but there's times when you get sort of less confident. If someone was to hire you, you'd feel conscious if you'd go dressed visibly Muslim. Even though I don't think I've taken the scarf off for that reason, I do think of wearing trousers instead of a skirt."

"I worry when I am going to the airport. About two years ago I went to Belgium and because of all of the stuff that was going on, I started to make adjustments. I started to wear a turban, I wore jeans to sort of move away from the stereotypes

of a Muslim. It's sad but at that point, I felt it was the best thing so I don't get that heat."

"I've felt excluded. When you're young all you're trying to do is belong, be accepted. It's difficult as it is. It's difficult being not white. Then you're not white, and you're a Muslim and female. I'm not saying it's not hard for Muslim men but it's even harder for Muslim women."

"It's not nice when people are reading newspapers full of stuff about terrorist attacks on the train, and they are all peering at you over the paper. Or they don't want sit next to you. Have you ever felt that?! Sitting on a train and having everybody staring at you? There is so much anxiety and paranoia. It's difficult as it is rushing to work in the morning and then imagine this added thing just because you're dressed as a Muslim woman."

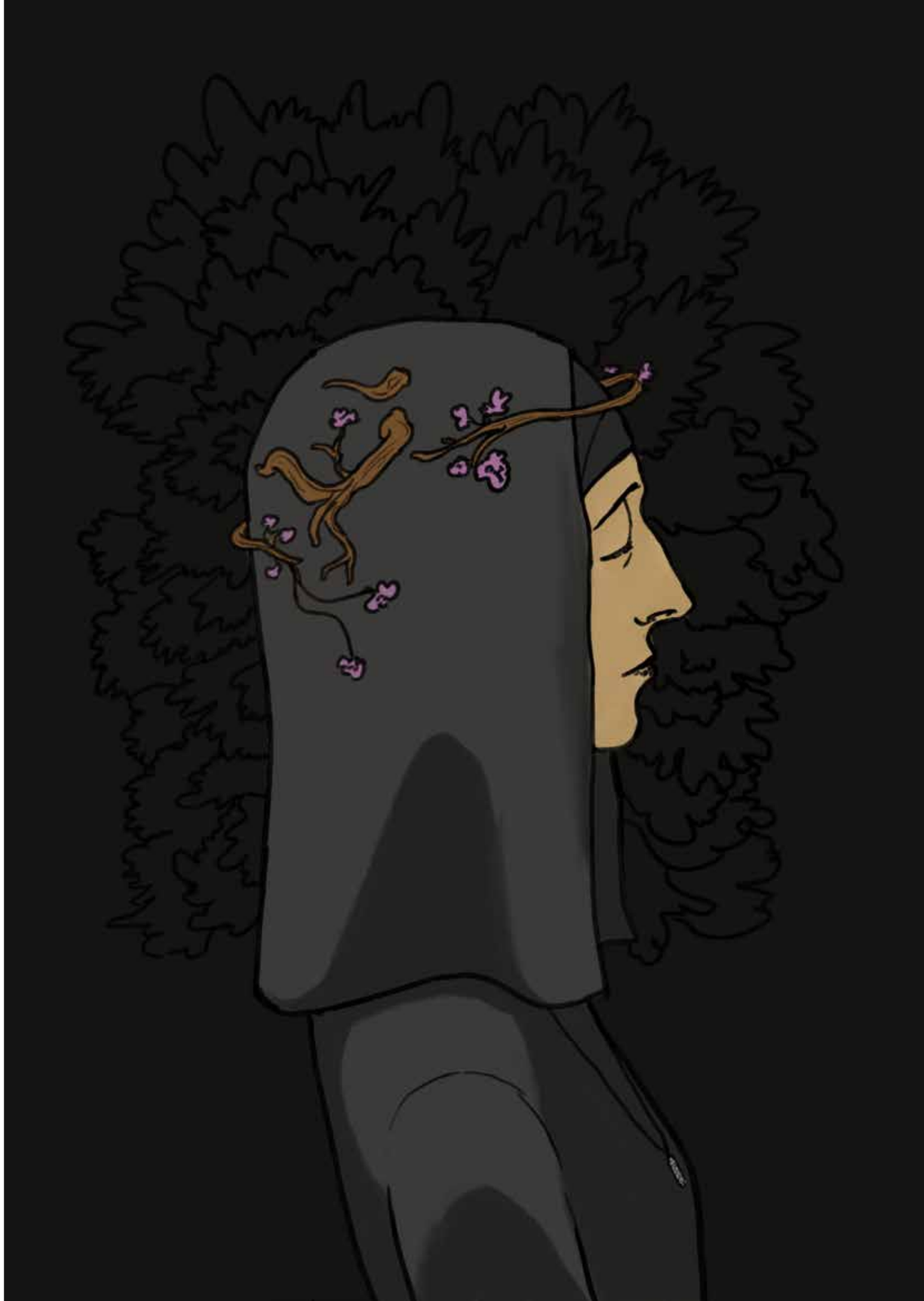
"In a Manchester protest, people were shouting at me, calling me a 'Paki' and 'terrorist'.  I had guys come up to me and say: 'excuse me miss, can I put something through your letterbox?' I've had to cope with guys that actually came up to me to hit me and someone else stopped them. You get used to it but you shouldn't have to get used to it!"

"Imagine someone coming up to you and saying: 'can I ask you a question, why is it that girls go off to Syria?' I was really annoyed but I kept calm and answered the question. I thought, do I turn and say to her, 'How the hell should I know, I've never done it!'"

"When I was younger, I would keep my head down. I have a lot of memories of being racially abused. I had eggs thrown at me a lot and it hurts! I was just a teenager and this happened on the streets. Once this guy asked me about my scarf: 'Do you have a bomb in there?' In the past, I wouldn't challenge it but now I definitely do!"

"I think Islam has given me strength in a way I don't think I can explain. If I could give it to everybody or show them how empowering it is, I would. It's just like how some people say hijab is oppressive, and in my workplace which is predominantly white, they always ask me about it. They are surprised that I didn't wear the hijab at college and that it wasn't forced upon me."





# The Jawaab Perspective: Dismantling Patriarchy

Muslim women's lives are affected by violence, stress, structural barriers and a general lack of support for their aspirations. Media and political discourse helps to shape negative stereotypes and attitudes towards Muslim women. These include portraying Muslim women as submissive, controlled by their families, forced to wear headscarves, that they are economically inactive, and under-productive members of society.

Muslim women's economic inactivity is often attributed to family pressures rather than the wider realities, which sees a total lack of systemic support for Muslim women's aspirations. It is true that some Muslim women report different parental expectations for boys and girls. On the one hand, the Social Mobility Commission (2017) found this difference in expectations, along with a lack of role models, and traditional gender roles sometimes reinforced in private schools, all affected Muslim women's economic activities. On the other hand, the fact that there are higher numbers of Muslim women at university in particular local authority areas suggests that 'traditional' family expectations may not necessarily be holding Muslim women back as much as we think.

Patriarchal attitudes are important factors to consider when talking about women. Misogyny is rife across society, and compounds Muslim women's lives in a number of ways. As we have seen, Muslim women experience street violence and structural barriers to their full participation in society, despite wanting to play their part.

It is important to note that Muslim women's lives are affected by attitudes outside of Muslim communities as well as within them. For example, the LDA (2008) found that people believe Muslim men and Muslim families hold women back, forbidding them from working. However, the same report also documents that the majority of Muslim women in their sample had family support for their career ambitions.

There is evidence that misogynistic attitudes towards women inside Muslim communities are changing.  For example,  Reynolds and Birdwell (2015)'s found that 50% of Muslims aged 55 or older agreed with the statement: "a husband's job is to earn money, a wife's job is to look after the home and family." However when the same statement was put to younger Muslims, aged 16-24, over half disagreed. A small percentage (24%) of British-born Muslim women aged 16-24 agreed a wife should remain in the domestic sphere.

Perhaps most importantly, there is little evidence that supports the stereotypes associated with



struggle to thrive despite doing well at school and university.  These factors must be taken into consideration when examining Muslim women's life chances.

Specific forms of gendered Islamophobia needs to be tackled head on through better employment processes (for example, compulsory name-blind applications), better cultural and religious literacy in the workplace, faith and ethnic-based data monitoring. We need to see the aspirations of Muslim women supported at every level of society through education programmes, Job Centres, mentoring and targeted careers advice. As 18% of Muslim women are looking after home and family, we also need to see better conditions that support women who want to return to work. Arrangements for childcare, team activities during daytime working hours, and helping women wishing to return to work  after raising children update their skills through targeted training programmes can facilitate a smoother transition into work.

It is clear that there is more work to be done to level the playing field for Muslim women. The government has a responsibility to ensure the welfare and equal life chances for all of its citizens, and this obviously includes Muslim women. More needs to be done to instill a culture of support rather than dismissing Muslim women's issues as a result of their so-called 'traditional' cultures.

# Young Muslim Identity

Identity is complex. Far from being a fixed way of being, identity is in a constant state of evolution. It is a fluid concept that changes as a person goes through different life stages and contexts.

The ever-changing conversations on Muslim and British Muslim identities are a good reflection of the way language is used to describe people. In the past, Muslims were analysed through the language of race and ethnicity.

Racialisation of Muslim identities has resulted in an 'imagined community' of 'British Muslims.'[33] A key part of this process is to promote the notion that Muslims are homogeneous. Portrayed as people who hold the same beliefs across ethnic, gender, class and sectarian differences, the 'British Muslim' label erases the diversity that makes Britain's Muslim communities so unique.

We don't often discuss the power dynamics of adhering to a British Muslim identity. In our assessment, an imbalance of power relations exists in the British Muslim label. It prioritises British-born or non-dissenting Muslims over those who challenge or born elsewhere.

This has implications for vulnerable and undocumented Muslims as well as the pioneer generation of Muslims born in the ex-colonies. The 'British Muslim' label is problematic for a number of reasons, the most obvious being that it further segments a group of people that are already very diverse, and often fragmented. The label is supposed to be a way for Muslims to publicly assert their belonging to Britain. However, the majority population continues to question Muslim loyalties across the country.

Attitudinal research measuring non-Muslim opinions of their Muslim compatriots reveals cause for concern. The evidence shows that non-Muslims are hardening their attitudes towards Muslims, as a result, communities are drifting apart. For example, a CAABU/YouGov poll conducted in 2017, showed 55% of Britons agree that Arabs and Muslims should be racially profiled for security reasons.[34] Similarly, Hope not Hate found that 52% of their English respondents agree that Islam poses a serious threat to Western civilisation.[35]

Measuring the scale of racial prejudice in Britain, NatcCen (2017) found that 70% of respondents thought 'most White British people' would mind if a close relative married a Muslim. 44% said they would mind themselves.[36]

YouGov (2016) found 77% felt that face veils should be banned in schools. 67% believed that negative attitudes towards Muslims are harming society. Out of this percentage, 37% expressed concern about these negative attitudes.[37]

Despite 'British Muslim' being a popular way to identify young Muslims, it is important to understand that Britain does not yet formally recognise British Muslim identity. You cannot tick a 'British Muslim' box on any official forms, which still only collects outdated race-based data. The result is that Muslims are being described in media and political discourse by an identity label that is not formally recognised, monitored, or protected beyond the limits of hate crime.

We believe expressing British Muslim identity satisfies government concerns that a person can be Muslim and British at the same time without committing it to do more to protect, and recognise the real challenges that come with expressing a public Muslim identity. In this way, Muslim identities - 'British Muslim' or otherwise, are highly politicised, shaped by external factors.

The media plays an important role not only in shaping perceptions of Muslims, but also the ways in which Muslims feel they have to respond. Many Muslims feel their identities are being attacked, and that they are expected to apologise for crimes that they did not commit simply because they share a faith identity with the perpetrator.

Negative coverage impacts the way Muslims relate to society. It makes them feel targeted, unwanted and under pressure.

# The Grassroots Perspective: Talking ‘British Muslim’

We asked our participants a series of questions related to their identities. We asked whether they felt part of British national identity, how they felt about politics, what they remembered about the news, and if they ever felt conflicted about who they were. Here, we share stories from our respondents as they worked through questions of identity.

## Being British Muslim

“When is it normal for me to say I am British/English now? After 5 generations, do I still have to tick that I am British-Asian? I always question that when I fill it at an application form. When do you become British? When do you stop saying you’re British-Asian?”

“I will always be part of British national identity because no one’s ever going to take the fact that even before I’m born here, that people in my country of origin like most people of colour in this country: our forefathers and grandfathers, grandparents, parents - they paid the price to build the wealth of this country through slavery and colonisation. I will always be part of a fabric of this country.”

“I used to feel British but not anymore. I feel like Britain has practically outcast its Muslim communities based on the actions of a few. We’re constantly under scrutiny. We have to apologise for, and explain things we haven’t done. British values have changed as I’ve grown up. I accept some of those values. But others… like why are we trying to bring democracy to wherever else in the world? It doesn’t make sense. I don’t understand where Britain is going or what its following.”

“I know I’m British but that’s just a nationality for me. I identify with being Somali more than I identify with being British because that’s where my family are from. I would say my roots sort of outweigh my nationality. I wouldn’t say I felt conflicted but due to recent events, I would say it’s more of a rise of tension between the Muslim world and western politics. I don’t feel like Britain is entirely my home now even though I grew up here. But then again, if I was to go back to the motherland, Somalia, is that even like entirely my home? I feel that conflict there - where would I go if things were to happen?!”



“The way teachers speak to you and the way they make comments about your cultural clothes affects you when you’re young. I don’t feel part of British national identity anymore. I don’t consider myself British because I don’t like to take on an identity or take pride in what is based around an empire, and a flag, which I believe is the cause of destruction for my people.”

“The more I learn about my history, and British history, the more I understand being British. What about the people that fought in World War Two? What about the migrants that came over? We started all over again, came to this country, built it up, and you’ve got dogs that you commemorate and not us!  I feel like saying, ‘what Britain?’ The Britain that migrants helped to build? British society is all of us. I think I’ve understood what I feel being British is. And it is that I don’t need to change anything about myself.”

“I’ve never felt conflicted but equally I don’t really know what being British is. I feel English, but there are things that Irish, Scottish and Welsh do that I don’t do. For example, I don’t have an Irish, or Scottish accent, and I don’t speak Welsh. I don’t identify with any of that. Obviously each country has its nuances, which I don’t identify with. So, I feel English.”

“I’m British. It is the country that I’m from. I don’t think there’s anything the British has done that’s amazing. Nothing at all. Given our power, there’s so much more we could do that would make me proud”

“On forms, I’ve actually ticked English, because I’ve reached a point where I can say: ‘I’m English.’ But I’ve been told not to do that by interviewers because they need my ethnicity for diversity reasons. So I’ve had to tick ‘British Bengali’ or ‘British Bangladeshi.’ A lot of people have told me that they can’t accept me as English. A lot of English people have said this to me So, now, I’m actually confused. I don’t know what an English person is, or a what a British person is.”

“You know I love London so much, and because I love this city,  I want it to be part of my identity.. So I want to be British in the sense of London. But no, I don’t feel anything for Britain sometimes. I’m not British enough, I’m not Iranian enough. I’m not queer enough. I’m not straight enough. I’m not Muslim enough. I’m not secular enough. Should I carry on listing or we just have to accept that existing categories of identity aren’t good enough?”

“I have more attachment to London. As a stock answer when someone asks where I’m from I will say British-Pakistani. It’s not really what I mean though. We’re the beneficiaries of war, of capitalism. I’ve always felt disdain towards the way Britishness is represented by media commentators or politicians. Britishness is so harsh. There is so much arrogance associated with it!”

“I have never felt conflicted in my identity, I do feel very British. It’s only recently where I’ve actually felt I’m an ‘Other.’ That, I’m not included just because of what you hear on the news! It’s attacking your religion, your identity!”

“I am absolutely British. I love fish and chips, I love tea, I love everything that’s English. And I hate the French...”

“If being British means we vilify certain groups, discriminate, and we create pockets of society that are constantly underdogs, then no - I don’t have a British national identity. But I still need someone to explain to me what being British means.”

“My passport is a British passport. I am very much part and parcel of society. I’ve always been told I give off very British traits like beating around the bush or being reserved in certain settings. I feel like I am British and I feel like I am not because I also remember the relationship that Britain had with the subcontinent, and why I’m here.”

“When I go to countryside schools for work, I definitely do not feel like I am part of society because when I go in, I see how they look at me with disgust. I can sense from their body language that I am not wanted. I experience an intense, immense amount of jealousy. Things like: ‘How did these people make it? They speak really good English, they’re better qualified than we are.’ We still face all these barriers in society, we still have glass ceilings. Asians struggle to go beyond middle or low management. So it just makes me think, if we are part and parcel of society, why is there still a glass ceiling? Why is there still this sort of low-level, insidious, sort of implicit racism that I have to experience?”



## Identity shaped by media and politics

"I went on an aid convoy to North Africa. I started to realise things were not black and white like you see in the media, it's not all East vs West! I saw a lot of Arabs that were racist towards Asians, and were divided amongst themselves. I was stuck at borders. I saw white people come from embassies, and as soon as their faces would show, borders would open. Just like that. I realised I needed to go back to where I came from. I realised there are a lot of people in Britain who are from outside of London, who only see certain parts of the media. Just like a lot of young Muslims just see certain parts of the media and that think there's something else out there. But we have the most power in this country."

"Things changed after 9/11. A sense of belonging in this country was really difficult. Holding on to your religion was really difficult."

"Brexit made me feel less politically active. The older generations or those in certain regions in the UK have ruined it for me. It shows you there is a flaw in the system somewhere and in society itself."

"The media portrays and reports what people think of us. As a Pakistani, we're supposedly all pedophiles, suppressive towards our women, and that's where Islam comes in. They see us mostly as violent, backward, and oppressive. They see us as second class citizens, we're not on the same level. You don't have to hear it from other people, just look at the newspapers!"

"I guess with me being Somali, I think a lot people believe that we are intolerant; you know the whole pirate thing as well. I guess a lot of people think of Somalia as a failed state, that we are lawless people that can't integrate into a society. That is what the media thinks of my people"

"I think before 9/11 Muslims and Islam were not really in the media. After 9/11, you hear negative things. You certainly hear negative stories about Muslims in some sections of populist media."

"For so many people, their only reference is what the media is showing them. When they come across a Muslim that doesn't fit the image that's portrayed by the media, they're a bit like: 'Ha! Are you sure you're a Muslim?' I'm like: 'Yes! I have my halal meat to prove it!'



# The Jawaab Perspective: Ripping off the 'British Muslim' Label

As we can see from the experiences of our participants, there are many issues with the 'British Muslim' label. As Islamophobia continues to be unrecognised and unchecked across many levels of society, this form of identification cannot accurately capture the complexities of racist and Islamophobic discrimination impacting young Muslims, particularly women on a daily basis.

By denying Islamophobia the recognition it deserves, society is denying that a specific, anti-Muslim form of discrimination exists. It affects Muslims and those who are mistaken to be Muslims like Sikhs. As our case studies show, the British Muslim identity label is multi-layered and complex, however at the same time, it is also completely Anglocentric. Marginalising the experiences of Muslims in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, all of whom interact with their Muslim identities in different ways.

We believe that the British Muslim label prioritises Muslims of British-birth. Establishing a hierarchy of national-religious belonging, this label risks marginalising several vulnerable Muslim groups; including refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. Significantly, it also risks marginalising the older generation of Muslims who helped to build Britain in the first place. We must not reach a state where we are further dividing society along racial, religious and birthplace lines.

We recognise that the casual use of 'British Muslim' as an identity label may be helpful for Muslims wishing to express their belonging through their national, rather than ethnic identities. However, a highly securitised government agenda encourages the use of the British Muslim label without considering the many other ways that Muslims identify themselves.

The focus on Muslim homogeneity takes away the opportunity to understand how race, ethnicity, class, and gender affiliations operate under the British Muslim label. These are important intersections of belonging and have an impact on the ways in which Muslims interact with society.

Instead, we are witnessing a period of social re-engineering of the Muslim community through processes of racialisation and homogenisation through a security lens. We are concerned with the overall outcome of these damaging processes, resulting in a new type of Muslim: one that is readily identifiable, easily governed, yet, unprotected against Islamophobia.

The majority of our respondents identified as Britons. This belonging was expressed in different ways. For some, to be British was to hold citizenship - their national identity. For others, being

British was to accept that their ancestors were British subjects, and as a result of colonisation, helped to build the Britain that we enjoy today.

Some Muslims argued that they were British but not in the way the government defined Britishness. Instead of assimilating into a set of generic values, these Muslims preferred to re-fashion what it means to be British so that it fit better with their other identities and beliefs. All of this suggests that belonging to Britain is not as simple as ticking the right box on a form, or ascribing to a uniform set of values. Instead, the simple act of belonging is as complex as the idea of Britishness itself.

Many of our participants who did not express belonging to British national identity expressed confusion over what it actually means to be British. In part, this is because Britishness is fast becoming associated with nativism, populist politics and increased nationalism. This prioritises whiteness over others, especially salient after the Brexit vote. It is becoming difficult for some Muslims to comprehend what they are supposed to fit into when it is becoming increasingly obvious that society is rejecting them on basis of their faith.

Others who rejected any sense of Britishness beyond their passports did so out of rejection of British foreign policy. Britain's long-standing history of racism, denial of the horrors that came with its colonial rule in the past, including Britain's significant role in the slave trade all formed some of the reasons for rejecting Britishness beyond their passport.

Discussions of Britishness are Anglocentric and exclusionary. Britain is a euphemism for England, and yet there is little space for England's Muslims to identify as English in the same way as there are Scottish, Northern Irish and Welsh Muslims. It is of note that some of our respondents identify privately as English but are actively discouraged from identifying themselves as English on official forms in order to monitor the number of non-White people accessing employment and services. This raises the question of whether a non-White, English Muslim can exist in multi-ethnic Britain? It shows the limits of 'British Muslim' identity  as Muslims are not always free to identify in ways that they choose.



# Muslim Generational Changes: Post 9/11 – what's changed?

We asked our participants to reflect on their experiences of growing up in Britain compared to their parents and elder generations. Here, we explore some of the key issues uncovered in our interviews including social mobility, society and racism.

"I think we face more subtle racism whereas they faced outright racism. The older generation were also more shy in the face of racism because they believed they were not meant to be here. But, we're like: 'No, we have as much right as you do, and we're going to fight against it.'"

"My dad first came to study in the UK. He got married to my mum and then she came over in about 1977-1978. It's incredibly different now from what she experienced. She was regularly abused and experience racism."

"I think a lot of internalised racism comes to play when you move all the way to the UK. You're suddenly in a place where you don't speak as well as people around you."

"My dad came in his early 20s and mum came when she was about 15. I would say it was very difficult for them. They moved from a war-torn country, had to adapt, start a new life and learn the language. I was born here - I have friends. It's different, this is my home."

"My grandfather came here then my father. The difference for them compared to me is like the difference between night and day. They did not have freedom purely because of the colour of their skin."

"My eldest brother's generation, who is like 40 now, had to go through areas where they really had to fight for themselves whenever there was racial intolerance. There weren't many minority circles at all."

"My parents grew up totally differently to me. For the elders, it was more based on survival and tradition. I have been given opportunities like going to university or having a chance to break out of tradition. I can think about Islam, life, family or belief systems in ways that challenge, and contradict."

“The way our generation articulates identity is totally different. Let me say, the elder generation ‘knew their place’ whilst ours question that place, challenging it. For example, I asked my Aunt if she had experienced Islamophobia.  She was like: ‘Oh no, not much happened. Then she’s said:‘ Oh just stuff happened every now and then’. When I pushed her to elaborate, she told me about men who threw stink bombs at her in the market, and swore at them in the street.. I think for her to say that was a ‘small thing’ shows how immigrants felt less empowered. They accepted it whilst our generation can maybe feel more empowered to challenge it.”

“My father would talk about the kind of racism that he faced when he was growing up in Bradford because it was predominantly white. The kind of experiences he had were really shocking.”

“For them it was more to do with cultural identity and figuring out where you fit in as a brown person around English people. With our post 9/11 generation, it is less to do with the culture and more to do with how we fit in as Muslims. So if you’re Muslim, you’ll see Muslim groups made up of different ethnic backgrounds whereas with my parents generation would have stuck to their own.”

“There were teddy boys who were a group of racist white people who broke my Dad’s jaw in a fight. Later, he started to dress differently, in his cultural clothes. People saw his group, him and 4 or 5 brothers who were Pakistani, and they thought that they could push him around. I think my Dad quickly realised that in order to not be pushed around, he had to fight his way through until people knew not to mess with his family.”

“I think for Dad it was very difficult because he came at a time when there was a lot of racism towards immigrants. There were areas within the town that you just didn’t enter as a brown person. There were hours of the day where he didn’t leave the house.  They often hung out with people who were also immigrants because they understood each other, and they felt like they could support one another. Up until very recently, I didn’t really have many fears. But until very, very recently, Dad was still of the opinion that you don’t leave the house at certain time. And you don’t go into certain neighborhoods where there aren’t other Asian people.”



# The Jawaab Perspective: Re-engineering Young Muslims through a Security Lens

As attitudes and experiences change over time, it is important to pause in order to reflect on the differences between generations, and to see how those changes affect Muslim identities today.

Most of our respondents were born in Britain and had a strong concept of Britain being a place they called home. As our interviews reveal, the idea of 'home' or birthplace is very important in shaping belonging and identity. Growing up in Britain, going to school, engaging with British institutions and systems, having the opportunity to pursue higher education and a range of careers, speaking English as a first language are important differences between the generations.

It is well documented that older generations believed that they would return to their home countries once they had earned enough money. The 'myth of return'[38] played an important role in the way older generations chose to live and organise themselves. It is an important marker of intergenerational difference that had implications for identity-making. In seeing themselves as temporary migrants, the older generations tended not venture too far outside of their communities where in the absence of state support, and in the face of violent racism,  they set up informal support systems for themselves.

The lack of state support for better integration is an important part of the story of the elder generation of Muslims, and ethnic minority communities more generally. A distinct part of the Muslim, and wider ethnic minority experience was direct and overt racial discrimination, especially when attempting to access services, such as housing or employment.

A number of laws were passed as a result of racism directed at new arrivals, who had immigrated from the former British colonial territories in order to build the infrastructure of this country, work in its factories, and start a new life in what many viewed as the 'motherland' of the old British Empire. They were met with disdain, violence and treated as second-class citizens, impacted by policies designed to keep them away from the majority white population.[39]

Muslims, along with BME communities are often criticised for living in 'ghettoised' communities, who do not want to integrate with others. This argument often fails to take into account the very real history of violence and racism that was directed at these early Muslim and BME communities. It ignores the economic factors involved that narrowed life choices as the majority of the elder generation of Muslims came to Britain as low-paid workers, war refugees, or students. It fails to take into account the lack of social support outside of these so-called 'ghettoised' spaces for new migrants to interact with the wider community, learn English and how to navigate complicated British systems. Racist housing policies restricted the movement of ethnic minorities searching for housing resulting in many Muslim trapped in overcrowded, poor quality, run-down homes. Their choices were limited by local housing policies aimed at minimising the impact of immigration on white communities with similar attitudes displayed in the private housing sector.

These pioneering generations tended to work in lower-paid jobs, had low levels of educational attainment and lived in cramped, overcrowded conditions. In the absence of integration programmes that could have facilitated immigrants into their new lives, this elder generation of Muslims were left alone to navigate the complexities of British bureaucracy and the challenge of learning a new language, English in an unfamiliar setting.

Despite these difficult challenges, the resilience displayed in this generation is remarkable. In working hard to put down roots in this country, they also built the early foundations of the wider Muslim community we see today. The earlier generations opened up halal supermarkets and butcher shops, the South Asian curry houses that contribute £4bn to the British economy,[40] built mosques, established processes for Muslim burials and countless other structures that their children have become accustomed to over the years. They managed to build a strong foundation for the present Muslim community despite dealing with direct racism whether on the streets or at the workplace, and the challenges of getting accustomed to a new and unwelcoming society.

On the other hand, younger generations of Muslims face a different set of challenges. They are mostly native English speakers, acculturated in local cultures and, and able to confidently articulate themselves as both British and Muslim.

Instead, young Muslims find themselves under the microscope as their identities, social needs and life choices are analysed through the security lens established after 9/11. Growing up in a culture of Prevent-orientated community initiatives and frenzied media narratives has linked the fabric of Muslim life to wider political, and societal issues in Britain through the lens of counter-terrorism.

Anti-immigration rhetoric, problematising Muslim men and boys as potential terrorists to be feared, and Muslim women and girls as submissive, unable to police the behaviour of their men and boys, and susceptible to the glamour of becoming a 'jihadi bride' are all outcomes of a racialised and securitised reconceptualisation of Muslim identities. It is concerning that Muslim identities are now linked to and shaped by images, narratives and initiatives related to violence.

We are bombarded with images and stories of Muslim-perpetrated violence on our television screens, newspapers and across our social media feeds. Whilst it is right to cover these events,

the issue of unbalanced media coverage remains open for debate.  Imbalanced media coverage links Muslims to violence, and rarely features stories of positivity, arts or culture from the same places.

Despite Muslim-majority countries bearing the brunt of Islamist extremism, British media coverage continues to polarise, pitting Muslims against the West in their style of storytelling. This feeds the false narrative that there will be an inevitable ‘clash of civilisations’[41] between the two, working against the higher cause of social harmony. It is important to note that this violence is not only in narrative form. Islamophobic hate crimes are one of the very real-life outcomes of a society that is becoming increasingly hostile of Muslims. There is violence depicted on our screens, and experienced on our streets with little evidence of the authorities taking the situation seriously. This puts younger Muslim generations under immense pressure as they grapple with the daily stresses of life with the added burden of feeling like they need to prove themselves as ‘good British Muslims’[42] in order to appease the majority of society.

This generation faces Islamophobia at every level of society as their attitudes, belonging, dress, lifestyle choices and beliefs are monitored and analysed by experts, who say they are interested in helping Muslims become more ‘comfortably’ British. This lofty aspiration comes without the necessary and difficult work of recognising Muslim identities and Islamophobia. It also comes without meeting the social integration needs of young Muslims, who, like many other ethnic minority communities are struggling to find meaningful and secure work, and experience high levels of deprivation across the country.

It is clear that whether through dissent, assimilation or acceptance, most Muslims are expressing some level of belonging to Britain. However, it is not clear whether Britain accepts its Muslims, and this is a serious concern for the future health of our society. Instead, the energy and resources spent on socially engineering Muslim youth into ‘comfortable British Muslims’, should be channeled into tackling deprivation issues and Islamophobia that have very real-life consequences for Muslims in their everyday lives, and this includes the ways in which they articulate their identities.



# Aspirations for a hopeful future

The story of Muslims in Britain a tale of disadvantage and violence. However, it doesn't need to be this way. We've come up with a list of recommendations that are based on the real-life experiences, struggles and aspirations of the Muslims we interviewed.

## What do Muslims hope for?

We asked our Muslim respondents to share their aspirations with us. We wanted to find out more about their hopes, their dreams and how they think we can make Britain a better place to live. We found young Muslims wanted better representation, to be understood on their own terms, better media and political narratives about their lives. Ultimately, young Muslims aspire to a future where they are treated with fairness, respect and dignity.

"For Muslims to never be scared of fearful. Not be persecuted because of misinformation or being misinformed by the news and media. To come out and openly practice every element of our faith as we do now."

"If people can open their eyes to the true principles of Islam, and how those core principles have been twisted, how they are being pushed through the highest levels of government, how new extremist ideologies are being funded, people could at least differentiate what is and what is NOT true Islam"

"I like to be positive. I want to continue being a good person. Also, I study animation to give more representation to the future generation. A lot of Muslim Asian girls think they can't play video games and do a lot of the things that I am doing. It's nice to see yourself in other places. I want to pursue this for the future generation to see that I am also a Muslim Asian girl and I went into this field.  In the future, I want to create a lot of animations about Islam to help educate people."

"We need to be out there. We need positive role models at every level: the creative field to politics. That's the only way we are going to be recognised. We're not so different. We are NOT what we are seen to be: terrorists and abnormal."

"I would really like moderates to take centre stage and become the ambassadors of Islam.  At the moment, if something happens the media always go to spokespeople from one extreme to the other. But most of us are in the middle of the spectrum. We're conditioned to explain ourselves."

"I don't want Muslims to be seen, I want us to be understood, and that's a huge difference.  My aspiration is when you say you're Muslim, you're understood in your own terms."

# Recommendations

**The overall narratives around British Muslim identity must change from one of homogeneity to heterogeneity. All government policy initiatives, and media stories should specifically avoid projecting the view that Islam is a foreign religion without roots in British cultures.** Encouraging Muslims to identify in homogenous ways detracts from the valuable diversity that already exists in Britain's Muslim communities.

**We need specific community and government initiatives which educate wider society on the diversity of Muslim identities through art and culture.** We are concerned that processes of racialisation and a security agenda seek to re-engineer Britain's Muslims into a new type of Muslim: one that is readily identifiable, easily governed yet unprotected against specific forms of anti-Muslim prejudice.

**The government should prioritise compulsory teaching of colonial history and migration in the National Curriculum.** In doing so, all Britons will learn how they can use the lessons of the past to shape a better, more inclusive future, shaping what it means to be British together. At the same time, community initiatives that explore the complexities of colonial history, and its impact on different groups should be funded as part of a wider, multi-layered integration strategy.

**Islamophobia is real, dangerous and discriminatory. It needs to be formally recognised in the law as a matter of urgency.** It is evident that a "Muslim penalty" exists across a spectrum of society from schools to the labour market. We need Islamophobia to be recognised in the same way as other forms of discrimination to reduce inequality, tackle disadvantage, and work towards better outcomes for Muslims, and all those perceived as Muslim. Decision-makers should not shy away from developing complex interventions to address complex issues.

**The media should strike a better balance between positive and negative media stories related to Muslims and Islam.** Positive stories related to the arts, culture and philanthropy can help reshape negative stereotypes that undermine a sense of Muslim belonging to British society. Persistent questioning over belonging, loyalties and whether one is 'British or Muslim' first undermines Muslim voices that are saying loudly, and clearly, that they call Britain home.

**The creation of industry media and advocacy programmes specifically aimed at tackling anti-Muslim prejudice.** This includes religious and cultural literacy training for journalists and media professionals in industry.

**The recommendations of the Leveson Inquiry should be extended to Islamophobic media content,** with press regulators intervening when there is evidence of Islamophobic reporting and misrepresentation.

**The government should commit funds away from counter-terrorism agendas for local communities to run media and advocacy training programmes specifically for Muslim women.** Disproportionately affected by Islamophobia, this will help to empower Muslim women with the necessary verbal, writing and advocacy skills to curate their own unique stories, moving past limiting stereotypes.

**The media must play their part in dispelling myths about Muslim women by prioritising Muslim women spokespersons,** especially Muslim women from underrepresented Black, and LGBTQI communities when seeking Muslim contributions to public debates.

**An integration strategy aimed at reducing socio-economic penalties associated with a Muslim identity with clear, measurable outcomes for standards of health, housing, employment, discrimination and educational attainment.** Our systems are broken and our attitudes towards Muslims urgently need to change. The government needs to refocus its efforts on integration away from its counter-terrorism strategies. This will go some way to healing the distrust of Muslims, working towards a better shared vision of Britain where everyone is treated with dignity, fairness and respect.

**Prevent must be subjected to a full, independent root-and-branch review. The government should publish anonymised figures for the number of people referred, and passed through the secretive Channel programme. This data must be aggregated by ethnic and religious identity. The reasons for the initial referral to the programme must be made clear, as well as whether the person was deemed to pose a serious threat to Britain's national security.** Evidence of Prevent's discriminatory nature is mounting, we question whether the programme is fit for purpose and whether it can be dismantled altogether.

**The public and private sectors must work together to end Islamophobia, especially gendered forms of Islamophobia that targets Muslim women.** We would like to see a joined-up approach across sectors that results in public commitments to a zero tolerance policy towards Islamophobia, and violence against women. This should be incorporated in policies and diversity statements. The policy must be reinforced through training programmes designed to educate all public and private sector workers on issues of race equality, power, privilege, religious, and cultural literacy as part of company induction processes to tackle these issues head on.



**Schools, universities and Job Centres should provide targeted careers advice packages to all disadvantaged groups including Muslim women, supporting their aspirations.** It is unacceptable that Muslim women have high levels of educational attainment but low participation in the labour market. Earlier interventions can lead to better outcomes.

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# Appendix

We based our semi-structured interviews on the following interview schedule:

Can you tell me a bit about yourself? Your family? Your work or study?

What type of accommodation have you spent most of your life in? (e.g.private/rented/social/owned)

Can you describe the neighbourhood you have lived in most of your life?

Which generation of your family came to Britain? What was it like for them and it is any different for you and in what way?

How was Islam introduced to you in your life as a child?

How did you feel about yourself as a Muslim when you were younger? How do you feel about yourself as a Muslim now? If you feel differently about yourself now why is that?

What have been the three biggest news events during your lifetime and how have these impacted you?

How has the current state of the world affected who you are?

What would you say is, from your perspective, the most commonly held perception about people of your culture, religion or identity? Why do you think people feel that way and how do you know people feel that way?

Have you ever felt excluded based on your religion, culture, ethnicity and in what ways?

Do you feel part of British national identity? Have you ever felt conflicted about your identity?

Have you ever felt pressure to hide parts of your identity? Can you describe those situations and why you think you felt that way?

What does Islamophobia mean to you?

Have you experienced Islamophobia? Is there one instance that stands out for you and why? If not, do you know someone who has experienced Islamophobia?

Do you have experiences of Islamophobia propagated through establishment organisations such as the media, government or police?

Are you interested in politics? (if answer “no” then follow up question: “Why not?” If answer “yes” then “how did you get politically active?”)

Have any of your experiences changed the way you feel about politics? Made you more active in politics or less?

Do you have any aspirations or visions of how Muslims and Islam can be seen in the future?


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