The Generational Diversity of Religious Orientations of Muslims in Britain

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Introduction

According to Professor Humayun Ansari, 'religious affiliation intersects in many ways with age group, gender and specific circumstances of immigrant settlement experience in Britain' (Ansari: 2004: 4). Thus, it is inevitable that religious orientations will be diverse between different generational groups. In order to holistically approach the debate at hand, the methodological approach adopted in this analysis will accentuate the particular stark contrast between first generation British Muslims who tend to inform religion through a cultural lens, and second and subsequent British Muslims, who try to distinguish between religion and culture, thus leading to intergenerational contestations.

It is however, worth accentuating that cultural and religious orientations are not necessarily static contrasts. In reality, the two intersect in many ways, depending upon the context in which British Muslims find themselves in, thus these orientations are very much malleable. Indeed, this will be reflected in Professor Katherine Ewing's argument later on in the debate, relative to whether religion and culture can be separated and the consequences of such a configuration.

Concurrently, the ongoing debate between culture and religion has also created diverse positions adopted among second and subsequent generations of British Muslims, with regards to the broader debates of who exactly is representative of authentic Islam. Here, the debate will focus upon the concept of universal Islam as informed by, for instance, Salafism, Jihadism and even secularist orientations, which embodies its own challenges for the British Muslim community.

Divergent religious orientations between first generation and second/subsequent generations of British Muslims and consequent challenges

Professor Katherine Ewing quite rightly states that, 'the relationship between Islam and culture has implications for intergenerational relations' (Ewing: 2015: 211). Indeed, identity politics for first generation Muslim migrants was very much informed by 'communal-ethnic orientations' or 'country of origin orientations,' as described by Professor Sami Zubaida (Zubaida: 2003: 89-90). This was largely influenced by the chain of migration during the interwar years where Muslim migrants settled in the UK within the context of their ethnic communities. Consequently, they saw themselves first and foremost as, for instance, Bengalis or Indians. Given this strong focus upon cultural rhetoric, it was inevitable then that religious orientations included cultural pre-eminences. In fact, Dr Sadek Hamid specifically argues that 'for most first-generation British Muslims, Islam was an aspect of their ethnic identities, and faith adherence was more to do with participating in communal life and less about personal religiosity' (Hamid: 2016: 8). For instance, South Asian migrants brought with them the Deobandi and Barelvi Islamic movements in an attempt to defend their 'traditional mystic practices' in the UK (Riaz: 2008: 91). An example of this is found in Dr Daniel DeHanas' analysis, who describes how 'first generation Bangladeshis have brought Sufi-influenced Barelvi forms of

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Islam from rural Bangladesh, [consequently] the Bengali culture and Muslim religious functions of the mosque [became] closely intertwined in rituals and community gatherings' (DeHanas: 2013: 78). Overall then, amongst first generation British Muslim, religion was very much informed by cultural expression.

In sharp contrast, second and subsequent generations of British Muslims have been emphasising upon the need to create a distinction between religious and cultural orientations, resulting from their inability to associate themselves to the culturally informed religious practices of their parents. Instead, for young British Muslims, there has been a growing desire to establish a purified, universally oriented Islamic identity, in other words, a religious orientation towards Ummah (Muslim community) nationalism. This is not surprising when we adopt Professor Katherine Ewing's framework, in that for second and subsequent generations of British Muslims, rhetoric's such as *Islam is not a culture'* is a 'speech act necessary to negotiate Muslim identity in a post 9/11 world [alongside] working out specific orientations to both Islam and what they consider to be the secular' (Ewing: 2015: 203). Overall, second and subsequent generations have been using the distinctions between religion and culture to establish a universally oriented Islamic identity, or religious orientation towards Ummah nationalism, one that can be adopted within the context of the wider British community.

However, these diverse religious orientations have created challenges for the British Muslim community, as evident in the intergenerational tensions relative to the depiction of authentic Islam. This debate is largely prominent when adopting a gendered lens, as young Muslim women argue that culturally informed Islam often serves to reinforce patriarchal ascendancy. Dr Raana Bokhari describes how 'Bihishti Zewar, an early 20th century Islamic theological text written in Urdu for women in India, is used over a century later in Leicester today by a historically migratory post-colonial Gujarati community (Bokhari: 2013: 55). However, young British Muslims, such as Saleema, find segments of the Bihishti Zewar as 'not following the Sunnah' especially in relation to 'women's freedom of movement' given that 'theology and law' are not considered 'objectively,' and essentially, 'it is not practical to live today 'according to the Indian subculture 100 years ago' (Saleema: 2005; Bokhari: 2013: 63-64). Instead, by distinguishing between Islam and culture, they are able to underline how 'patriarchal oppressive traits are alien to original and pure Islam of the Quran and the Prophet' (Zubaida: 2003: 92). Simultaneously, first generation British Muslims who have attempted to preserve Islam through the context of cultural-ethnic influence, are often faced with the challenge of being told that their practices are not authentically Islamic. Thus, 'they have had problems with the new generation who, even when religious, tend towards new forms of religiosity, distinct from their parents' (Ibid: 90).

Indeed, to further contextualise the significance of the challenges prompted by these divergent religious orientations, we can turn to confrontations found relative to Islamic education in the UK. Political scientist Peter Mandaville highlights that 'the older generation tended to rely on imams and muftis trained and brought over from their countries of origin' which consequently informed religious services (Mandaville: 2007: 227). However, such culturally-informed practices have been greatly denounced by second and subsequent generations. For instance, many foreign imams are unable to speak English and thus, are unable to effectively communicate with young British Muslims. Indeed, Mandaville describes how 'young Muslim in the UK in recent years have felt strongly alienated from what they perceive as mosque leaderships out of touch with what it means to be British and Muslim today' (Ibid). In contrast, the younger generation have instead, favoured a form of Islamic education that is based purely upon the 'written word' – and complimentary to their hybrid identifications. Such contestations are reflective today in the debate between, for instance, first generation South Asian Muslims who seek to inform Islamic teachings through Sufism, against that of the East London Mosque that has been promoting a 'de-cultured Islam,' thus leading to 'frequent clashes with Bengali traditionalists and secularists' (DeHanas: 2013: 78-79). Essentially, the debate upon religion orientations here is reflective on the wider debate in regards to ensuring that Islam can be reproduced within the context of wider British society.

On the contrary, from an anthropological position, as informed by Professor Ewing, one can question the extent to which it is possible to ensure that religion is distinct from cultural influences, which is another challenge in itself, which has been facing the young British Muslim community. Indeed, whilst rhetoric among young Muslims emphasised upon a desire to separate Islam and culture, the reality accentuates the difficult question of who and how one decides the depiction of authentic Islam. Whilst Ewing does acknowledge the malleability between religion and culture, she also questions the extent to which the two can be disconnected, arguing that 'cultural, traditional

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practices' *inevitably* 'inform many Muslim communities' (Ewing: 2015: 209). Concurrently, she also interestingly contends that even during attempts to align Islam with British national identity is in itself culturally informed, as 'secularity [embodied within the West] is also a culture within itself' (Ibid: 221).

Overall, intergenerational differences have indeed, resulted from the variances in religious orientations between the first generation and second/third generations of British Muslims. Thus, in the next section of our analysis, we will see how 'the assertion that Islam is not a culture can be deployed in [different ways] among Muslims about correct Islamic practices' (Ewing: 2015: 217).

Divergent religious orientations among second and subsequent generations and consequent challenges

In order to allow for in-depth analysis upon the question of divergent religious orientations and consequent challenges that result, it is paramount to acknowledge that such confrontations exist not only in the realm of inter-generational differences, but also *among* young British Muslims synchronously. As political scientist Olivier Roy describes, 'the individualisation of religious practices' in the West has 'led to various forms of religiosity, from liberal Islam to neo-fundamentalism,' thus resulting in a divergence of religious orientations, that have created challenges of its own. (Roy: 2004: 149).

Radical political Islamic orientations tend to have a particular impact upon those that Professor Zubaida terms dissenters, 'the alienated youth, [who are] disenchanted from both their parents' social and cultural styles [alongside] the society into which they have been socialised by education and general orientations' (Zubaida: 2007: 92-93). Such groups are indeed, identifiable in Britain, as evident with Hizb-Ut-Tahrir, a transnational Islamist movement that 'built its British profile [through providing] an ideological alternative to the inward-looking politics of the older generation' whilst simultaneously functioning as a 'vehicle to discrimination and exclusion' (Hamid: 2007: 150). Essentially, radical Islam is seen as a reference point for a universally oriented religious identity for those particularly out of touch with their cultural and national identifications. However, of course, such a stance is a challenge for the British Muslim community, for first generation and second generation British Muslims alike. For instance, radicalisation has become a growing concern for parents, as Muslim parents such as Mohammed Zabar have had 'strong concerns about events at his daughter's school' particularly the 'anti-American, anti-western propaganda [used in] assemblies' (Gilligan: 2014). Thus, the variances of religious orientations found amongst young British Muslims, especially political orientations towards political Islam, clearly embodies challenges of its own.

In contrast, there are those who, instead, adopt religious orientations towards Salafism. Salafism places particular emphasis upon the purification of Islam. Similarly, they are differentiated from radical Islam in that they do not believe in political violence, or political involvement more broadly. Indeed, this position is very much influential among young British Muslims as it is relevant to their desire to purify Islam from the cultural-ethnic affiliations of their parents. Indeed, Roy proclaims that 'Salafism provides youths with a rationale not to listen to their parents about what Islam is, as the Islam of first generation migrants has been mixed with local customs and false beliefs' (Roy: 2004: 165). However, Salafist practices are not without challenges of its own. Sociologist Samir Amghar highlights how 'predicative Salafis oppose all forms of political participation for Muslim populations in Europe, [arguing] that such participation would be contrary to Islam' (Amghar: 2007: 44). Indeed, this has been problematic for young British Muslims who are religiously oriented towards universal Islam, but are simultaneously politically oriented the politics of their countries of residence.

Synchronously, Dr. Hamid describes how we are 'witnessing a polarisation among young Muslims, broadly divided between those who are becoming more committed to their faith [as assessed above] but also those who gravitate to Western secular liberal identities' (Hamid: 2007:156). Interestingly, 'these findings are not surprising when we consider 'the secularising thrust of modern societies, [liberating] most younger generations from religious authorities, communal and family control' (Zubaida: 2003: 94). Accordingly, 'the great majority of Muslims in the West are lax in their religious observance or are entirely secular' (Ibid). Indeed, such secularist orientations amongst young British Muslims have been problematic for parents whom, as mentioned, did not lay claim to a British national identity and

therefore find it challenging to comprehend why their children are lax not only in their religious orientations, but also their cultural-ethnic orientations. Similarly, coming to terms with one's' secularist orientations is also difficult for second and subsequent generations of British Muslims whom tend to be perceived as the migrant 'other,' and are thus often excluded from British society. Instead, they are inevitably associated with their ethnic and religious orientations, thus leading to further difficulties in coming to terms with one's religious orientations, within the context of hybrid identification.

Synthesis approach – identity and negotiation

Resultantly, second and subsequent generations of British Muslims have been utilising this idea of identity and negotiation to come to terms with their religious orientations within the context of their wider hybrid identifications. Michela Franceschelli describes the concept of negotiation 'as a process of reconciling and bringing back to unity different and multiple dimensions of identity from religious to national, ethnic and gender, [through which] a sense of belonging is constructed' (Franceschelli: 2013: 85). Essentially, this process of identity and negotiation is significant to our debate in that it allows one to be diverse in their religious orientations in ways that does not necessarily pose a challenge, not only to their relationships with their parents and/or grandparents, but also in relation to their other identifications. In terms of religious orientations then, this group of individuals, whom are termed 'accommodationists' by Professor Zubaida, seek to use the distinction between Islam and culture as an *integration strategy.* They 'seek out a universal and original Islam based on scriptures, law and theology, and subject to rationalisation and adaptation to modern life' (Zubaida: 2003: 91). Thus, by adopting such a universal position on Islam, this allows second and subsequent generations 'to seek accommodation to the society and culture in which they live and in which they have been raised, by considering Islam to be part of a plural, multicultural society' thus avoiding confrontations that can stem from inter-generational differences, and amongst second and subsequent generations simultaneously. (Ibid: 92).

Conclusion

Overall, this analysis has exemplified that Muslims in the West exhibit a divergence of religious orientations which has consequently led to challenges within the British Muslim community. As highlighted by the various literature discussed above, common themes that have been crucial towards the divergence of religion orientations amongst the different generations of British Muslims, and the consequent challenges that develop as a result include the debate between culture and religion, and consequently, the challenges of constructing 'authentic Islam.'

In addition, this discussion has also shown that identifications should not be essentialised processes, and in reality, religious orientations among different generations of British Muslims, particularly of second and third generations, are a constant process of negotiation, very much influenced by the context in which we find ourselves in. It is this 'elastic orthodoxy' that allows British Muslims to overcome challenges that may result from their religious orientations, whether a result of inter-generational differences, or between generations (DeHanas: 2013: 82).

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