INSIDE OUT: Reflexivity and Methodology in Research with British Muslims
and Muslims in Britain Research Network Meet

ORGANISED BY THE ISLAM-UK CENTRE IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE MUSLIMS IN
BRITAIN RESEARCH NETWORK

CALL FOR DELEGATES

Where: Graduate Centre, Cardiff University Students Union, Park Place
When: Wednesday 10th September – 10:00am to 5:00pm

Researching issues ‘close to home’ is an increasingly prominent aspect of contemporary fieldwork and the complexity of (post)modern identities complicate traditional binaries of insider / outsider. The landscape of research with and about British Muslims has seen reconfigurations in recent years with an increasing number of British Muslims conducting qualitative fieldwork with communities of which they are also members.

Reflexivity has been proposed as one way in which to manage the challenging experience of conducting research on a topic or in an environment where one has a personal stake. Even ostensible ‘outsiders’ are expected to map the impact of their identity and biography upon the field. This conference proposes to gather researchers involved in such enquiry to explore these issues from a range of cross-disciplinary perspectives.

We are pleased to confirm that the conference will host Professor Ron Geaves who will deliver the keynote lecture entitled ‘The ‘death’ pangs of the insider/outside dichotomy in the study of religion.’

There will also be a range of papers presented exploring reflexivity and methodology in the study of British Muslims; please see the programme below for further information. If you have any questions or queries, please feel free to contact the organisers Riyaz Timol and Abdul-Azim Ahmed at reflexivity@cardiff.ac.uk.
### PROGRAMME AND ABSTRACTS

**10:00am** – Arrival, Registration and Tea/Coffee  
**10:30am** – Conference opened by Prof Sophie Gilliat-Ray, Cardiff University – Chair of MBRN  

**10:45am - 11:45am** – Panel 1 – Reflexivity in the Field  
CHAIR: Abdul-Azim Ahmed

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<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
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<td>Riyaz Timol – Cardiff University</td>
<td><strong>Walking the Ethnographic Tightrope: Fieldwork with the Tablighi Jama'at in Modern Britain</strong></td>
<td>The classical trajectory of ethnographic enquiry sees an alien ethnographer enter the generative habitus of another people to understand and relay it through a ‘secondary socialisation’ into their life world. During the course of this immersion, the ethnographer must take care not to ally his perspectives too closely with that of his participants’ or risk “going native”. The ‘primary socialisation’ of the indigenous researcher, on the other hand, has generated a habitus which converges with that of the people she wishes to study. This requires the cultivation of an analytic apparatus which renders the familiar as strange so as to allow the ethnographer to critically engage with the taken for granted realities of the setting. This is not inherently problematic. The end point of both indigenous and exogenous researchers is the same: the cultivation of a delicately balanced poise on the tightrope between strangeness and familiarity which allows sufficient physical proximity to the life worlds of the researched to plumb the depths of the esoteric meanings of their culture yet which maintains sufficient critical distance to allow a theoretical interrogation of that culture. The exogenous researcher focusses on the former; the indigenous the latter - each constructing a differing range of methodological apparatus to arrive at the same goal. This paper shares my practical experiences of ‘walking this tightrope’ during the course of doctoral fieldwork undertaken with the Muslim missionary group, the Tablighi Jama’at, in modern Britain.</td>
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| Chris Moses – University of Cambridge | **Researching Muslim civil society: Some reflections on ethnographic presence from the perspective of an institutional volunteer** | The issues of methodology and reflexivity in research with British Muslims are vast but intrinsically significant to understanding how academic knowledge is produced within this field, as argued by figures such as McLoughlin (2000), Werbner (2002), Gilliat-Ray (2005), Kalra (2006) and Bolognani (2007).

This paper aims to contribute to the conference themes by addressing four areas: (i) the multiple dimensions of researcher biography; (ii) the engagement between the nature of participation as institutional volunteering and fieldwork findings; (iii) the non-neutral presence of the ethnographer; and (iv) the implications of multiple fieldwork sites. It will draw upon my experiences as a PhD student in social anthropology of religion, undertaking case study-based fieldwork at Muslim civil society institutions in London to explore their engagement with multiple public spheres. Since August 2013 I have undertaken various roles within these organisations, akin to ‘a series of apprenticeships’ (Jenkins 1994), which has facilitated participation in and observation of marketing, public affairs, stakeholder management, research, course design, editing, fundraising, interfaith work and consultancy. Treating the conference as an opportunity to share perspectives on developing our understandings of reflexivity and also methodological best practice, I will put forward some modest conclusions pertaining to these experiences, acknowledging both my own reflexivity and the existing literature on research with British Muslims, or fieldwork praxis more generally, where relevant. At this stage, this analysis would likely comprise: the interpretations of researcher biography as contextually dependent; how a particular methodological approach to the field, i.e. here as an |
institutional volunteer working with on public sphere engagement, leads to a particular range of possibilities; how a researcher, who is not neutral but rather agentive, may have effects on what is researched; and, some of the benefits and disadvantages of multiple fieldsites in relation to research with British Muslims.

References:

Yahya Barry – Edinburgh University

**Fostering Stakeholdership in Research as an Approach for Mitigating Power Relations Dilemmas**

As part of a wider project looking at the influence dynamics between Islam and the European Far Right, my current research focuses on the reconfigurations of Muslim identity in response to these socio-political confrontations. I have had to consider a number of critical issues in designing my research model such as: the power relations between myself and my participants as well as some ethical and pragmatic factors influencing the study’s validity and reliability. These considerations led me towards adopting Participatory Action Research (PAR) as a foundational framework. Having conducted preliminary fieldwork in Edinburgh, I came to realize another tension besides the insider-outsider dialectic in engaging with the Muslim community. It regards the way that participants view the researcher as being “one of them”, and yet at the same time creates a sort of tension when they question what is in it for them.

This paper presents one of the strategies I have adopted in addressing this issue. It is through the fostering of present stakeholdership in the research project. The rationale follows PAR’s democratic commitment to break the barriers on who owns research and for whom it is conducted insofar as involving the participants in the research process and making them present stakeholders has the potential to generate data which the more conventional approaches would not. The paper presents the potentials, but also challenges in adopting this as a research strategy through a case presentation of one of my research participants’ portfolio. The paper presents how I have incorporated PAR in a 4-dimensional social change research model to mitigate the collateral tensions arising from the positioning and power relations dynamics between researcher and participant.

Asma Khan – Cardiff University

**Bridging Gaps: Some Practical Reflections on Building and Maintaining Good Fieldwork Relationships in Religious Settings**

By following some basic principles of good qualitative research practice researchers in the social sciences can build and enhance fieldwork relationships within religious settings in Britain. I will demonstrate how a well thought and carefully executed research plan can be complemented by a flexible, sensitive and reflective approach. Issues covered in this presentation will include conducting careful background research; developing a well thought out fieldwork plan and timetable and developing an awareness of the cultural norms of the ‘field’ in terms of appropriate dress and conduct. Relationships in the ‘field’ are nuanced and complex and can be managed in order to obtain rich data from research participants in a sensitive way. By sharing practical examples from research conducted as part of a project entitled ‘Social Cohesion and Civil Law: Marriage, Divorce and Religious Courts’ (conducted at Cardiff University between 2011 and 2012) I hope to demonstrate how this was made possible within sensitive religious settings. This project involved fieldwork which examined the workings of three religious courts: a Jewish Beth Din; a matrimonial tribunal of the Roman Catholic Church; and a Muslim “Shariah Council”.

11:45pm – 1:15pm
LUNCH: Update on Muslims in Britain Research Network by Dr Carl Morris and MBRN Roundtable
**Asma Mustafa – Oxford University**

*An insider-researcher on British Muslims: Access, trust and the social context*

Ethnic matching of researcher to participant in qualitative methodology has been discussed and challenged in literature, more often than not by outsiders working on different ethnic groups. Less attention has been given to how the social context affects research, even for minority researchers working within minority communities, such as Muslims. Considering the social climate and demographic realities, research on Islam and Muslims is likely to be highly relevant for the foreseeable future. This paper explores the biases, trust issues and credibility problems that arise when researching Muslims in Britain, from the perspective of a visibly Muslim female researcher. As an interviewer working on sensitive topics, on a guarded and conscious community in a highly politicised social context, I argue that insider researchers are similarly judged and assessed by respondents (whether secular or religious) as outsider researchers, not necessarily due to their identity, but due to the social context. This article is based upon qualitative interviews during doctoral research (including complementary visual methods) into the influence that identity (religious, ethnic and national) has on the political participation of second-generation British Muslims. The conclusion of this paper is that being an insider researcher has its advantages, but does not necessarily overcome methodological difficulties that arise from the social context. Ultimately, this paper maintains that debates on qualitative research material should not focus solely on the commonalities and differences between researcher and participant. There is more to the relationship than the interactions based on identities and their nuances. The social context (including global events, stereotyping and so on) has a resounding impact on the interactions between the interviewer and the researched parties. The bearing of the wider context cannot be controlled, but can be overcome through careful consideration, perseverance, sensitivity and quality time.

**Rev Tom Wilson – Liverpool Hope University**

*Researching Lived Islam as an Evangelical Anglican Minister: How truthful, how forthright and how static should I be?*

In this short paper, I will reflect on the three questions of my subtitle in the context of my main title. The paper begins with some biographical information, outlining the nature of my PhD fieldwork amongst Muslim pupils in an Anglican primary school, as well as my own faith position as an evangelical Anglican minister. The paper then engages with the questions of being truthful, forthright and static in turn. The issue of truthfulness relates to how honest a researcher should be about personal faith convictions when engaging with those of a very different perspective. The paper argues that researchers must be honest about their own views if they expect those they are working with to be honest about theirs. The second issue, of being forthright, is related to the first. A distinction is drawn between being truthful about one’s own beliefs and being forthright in sharing those beliefs. Examples for fieldwork, including discussion of belief about Christmas and Easter and experience of fasting during Ramadan are used to illustrate the point under discussion. The paper argues that while researchers must be truthful, there are times when they should not be forthright about their own beliefs. Third, the paper discusses the author’s experience of personal change during his fieldwork, explaining how his beliefs about Islam and practise of Christianity were altered as a result of his fieldwork.

**Alyaa Ebbiary – SOAS University of London**

‘My people’: Ambivalence and Loyalty for the Insider–Outsider

Doing anthropology ‘at home’ presents a special set of problems, arguably more so as ‘my people’ are Britain’s most scrutinised and newsworthy ethnic and religious minority. As a visibly identifiable Muslim, I am exposed to a different set of expectations by my interlocutors than an ‘outsider’ would be, and potentially more complicated to navigate. Being female adds a further complication to my public manner and self-fashioning ‘in the field’. As a real-life participant and professional observer of the British Muslim community, I cannot ‘go’ to the field, I am there already. Doing anthropological research among a community I consider myself a part - and am considered to be by the ‘majority’ - confuses several of anthropology’s old dichotomies. Problematising these dichotomies of field/home, insider/outsider and ethnographer/interlocutors, will shed light upon the dilemmas of the so-called ‘native anthropologist’. The typical trajectory from Outsider to Insider – through time-spent and friendship, has become for a growing minority like myself, reversed – through the process of anthropological training. Working with a place or a people that you have invested emotionally in, and that forms a part of your own memory and identity, throws up baggage that you may be unaware of; and have not necessarily unpacked as diligently as the anthropologist who studies an unequivocal Other. Addressing my own ambivalent relationship with the ‘British Muslim community’ – a relationship that swings from loyalty to cynicism - will no doubt colour my representational and interpretational decisions. Interrogating some of these ethnographic fieldwork dichotomies through the lens of the ambivalent insider/outside could help to broaden the scope of reflexive work.
How can British Muslim activists study British Muslim activism?

The paper explores methodological issues of reflexivity applied to the research question: how can British Muslim activists study British Muslim activism? The research question is extremely important for three main reasons. Firstly, British Muslim faith-based activism is alive and well: British Muslims are active citizens and faith inspires them in most cases. Secondly, there is a general sense of research-fatigue amongst British Muslims, and many feel under the scrutiny of an ‘outsider discourse’ that encourages obsessive attention to questions about extremism, and nourishes suspicion towards the their ‘Britishness’. Thirdly, the study of Western Muslim social activism challenges theorizing efforts. On the one hand, the neo-Orientalist approach essentialises Muslim activism through the monolithic use and application of the concept of ‘ideology’. On the other hand, post-Orientalism faces the difficult combination of ‘likeness Vs difference’: eager to ‘de-essentialize’ British Muslim activism, this approach tends to pre-emptively normalise it against secular parameters which neglect the ‘Islamic variable’.

Considerations about the insider/outsider debate are amplified in the paper by my personal identity and biography, and by the convergence of two research areas traditionally affected by the delicate emic/etic balance: the study of Islam and Muslims, and social movement theory.

The paper argues that the notion of reflexivity should be extended to incorporate the concept of ‘movement relevant theory’¹. Drawing from my personal experience with two British Muslim faith-based development organisations², I argue that the ‘insider’ movement-relevant approach has the potential to: 1) produce credible, accurate, and usable theory, as the engaged researcher has more of a stake in producing accurate findings than an outsider; and 2) to transcend the tensions which characterise the study of British Muslim activism in that it considers it as a ‘normal’ and beneficial part of wider British society, while simultaneously taking Islam seriously as a distinctive motivating factor.

References:

² A European Muslim with a strong interest in emancipatory activism.

Outside-Insider research: New ways of negotiating power in research relationships with British Muslim Youth

How far social scientists can speak 'in the name of Islam' (McLaughlin 2007, p.275) has become one of the main concerns in the field of British Muslim studies. Research participants' fear of misrepresentation of Islam (Spalek 2005) has become a major issue. There is, however, a lack of methodological innovation to address these concerns; the 'joint learning process with the participants and [its] theoretical outcome' (Svensson et al. 2007, p.234) has been neglected in particular.

My paper addresses the importance of 'embodied epistemology' (Keith Alexander 2008) in order to create more methodologically sound research designs. I discuss some intriguing aspects of my relationship as an 'outside-insider' (Belur 2014) with a young female Muslim post-graduate student at Cardiff University. In particular, I will focus on how my approach can be used as an interactive diary-interview method (Zimmerman and Weider 1977).

I argue that addressing some of the potential fears in research projects of socio-scientific representation of Islam requires us to go beyond formally established research practices and to develop more interactive research methods in co-operation with participants.

In conclusion, this paper will show that considering the dynamic of research relationships in detail (Howarth 2002) can become a key part of constructing empirically literate (Roseneil 1993) research strategies. This will ultimately help to transform theoretical reflexive thought into 'direct, practical use' (Finlay 2002, p.220) which helps adequately address questions of power, politics and representation in Muslim communities in the contemporary climate.

References:


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<td>Fatima Rajina</td>
<td>SOAS, University of London</td>
<td>Studying British Muslim: An insider's or outsider's methodology?</td>
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<td>Prof Oliver</td>
<td>Scharbrodt – University of</td>
<td>“The Shia Mile of London”</td>
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<td>Chester</td>
<td>Using a Spatial Methodology in Researching Shii Transnational Networks</td>
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<td>Azeecat Johnson</td>
<td>University of Sheffield</td>
<td>Black Bodies, White Audiences: The limitations of co-production of knowledge</td>
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This paper undertakes a critical analysis and evaluates the structures of knowledge and the epistemic racism in the current methods available to researchers who are 'insiders'. The paper's aim is firstly, to consider issues of access and trust in the context of the current political climate by 'insiders' who may be perceived with suspicion, secondly, to clarify the role of identity politics, and thirdly, to discuss the power dynamics within the subject-object-subject interaction. In this paper, I propose that an epistemic perspective from the 'insiders' subaltern locations can contribute significantly to the creation of a new method, which could go beyond the traditional, anthropological approach when researching issues 'close to home'. In so doing, I will analyse the history of the development of the methods to study the 'other' and suggest the ways in which the juxtaposition of the subject/object/method with tradition, belief and religion may impact on the research process.

This paper discusses how recent contributions of Kim Knott, Thomas A. Tweed and Manuel A. Vásquez to the development of a spatial methodology in the study of diasporic religions can be utilised in research on Shii communities in Britain and their transnational dimensions. Space is understood as dynamic and socially constructed, containing physical, social and discursive dimensions. According to Knott, spaces configure people, ideas or networks. Therefore, space is extended beyond its mere physical presence, both synchronically with other places and diachronically with periods of the past through transnational networks and their collective memories. Spaces are imbued with power relations defined by domination and subordination, authority and control and modes of resistance. Vásquez defines transnational religious networks as "social fields" to which individual actors have different access, which compete with each other and which provide meaning to their members through shared practices, discourses, symbols and rituals. Tweed provides a model to demonstrate the spatial concurrence of the physical, social and discursive dimensions that diasporic religious communities inhabit and produce and their transnational links. His distinction between three levels on which diasporic religions operate (locative, trans-locative and supra-locative) will be applied to transnational Shii networks.

The paper introduces a new research project on transnational Shii networks that operate between Britain and the Middle East. Intending to make wider methodological contributions to the study of Muslim diasporic communities in Britain and Europe, it also addresses a major lacuna in current research on Muslim minorities: the lack of research on the particular experiences of Shii Muslims.

This paper sets out to consider the limitations of current methods of co-production of knowledge when troubling academic audiences ability to consume further knowledge about and not with Black British Muslim Women. There is a substantial amount of research on the need to work across different sites of knowledge production as academic spaces, particularly elite academic spaces that have historically been inaccessible to Black Women specifically, and Women of Colour more generally. However, the solutions offered up within Participatory Action Research on how knowledge can be produced with rather than about previously objectified communities at times appears to co-opt knowledge and experiences that have already been examined by these communities in question. The question then for any academic self-identifying as part of some of the participants' communities is to ask what role should we play within this search for ways to share knowledge beyond the boundaries of academia, and how should the academic audiences who are likely to engage with our projects influence the information which is shared within academic spaces?

This paper will use the example of photographing Muslim Women to highlight the complexity of the role of the academic when participating in the hypervisibility of the 'veiled' Muslim Woman and problematizes the notion of the academic explorer capable of entering and reporting back on spaces to majority white audiences. Finally, I intend to focus on the responsibility of the academic when reporting back to academic spaces on knowledge shared amongst Muslim Women, particularly within the context of my own PhD thesis on clothing practices (and thus thinking through visual imagery).
3:30pm – 3:45pm – Break and Refreshments

3:45pm-4:30pm Prof Ron Geaves – Keynote Lecture: ‘The 'death' pangs of the insider/outsider dichotomy in the study of religion.’

4:30pm-4:45pm – Close and Thanks