Islam, Muslims, and education in Britain: A one day symposium

Programme

Venue: Main Council Chamber, Main Building, Park Place, Cardiff University

Date: Monday January 15\textsuperscript{th}, 2018, 10am – 5pm

The place of Islam and Muslims within British education has been the focus of intense debate, as has the role of Islamic education and its institutions. Yet much of this work offers a macro-level discussion of complementary and conflicting ideological and normative claims. Increasingly there is a need to locate these debates in views “from the ground”.

This one-day symposium takes this as its core focus, asking what are the experiences of Muslims in education in Britain today? It is intended to move from the macro to the micro, exploring the everyday lived experiences of Muslim operating within various educational institutions in Britain. By sharing these narratives, it is hoped that this symposium can help nuance wider debate surrounding the experiences of Muslims in British educational contexts.

For enquiries please contact Matthew Vince and Haroon Sidat at: iuksymposium2017@cardiff.ac.uk

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Running Order

9:15 – 10:00: Registration
10:00 – 10:15: Opening statement, Matthew Vince and Haroon Sidat
10:15 - 11:45: PANEL 1, Islam, Muslims and schooling
11:45 – 12:00: Comfort break
12:00 – 12:45: PANEL 2, Islam, Muslims and Higher Education
12:45 – 13:45: Lunch
13:45 – 14:30: Keynote speaker, Dr Saeeda Shah
14:30 – 14:50: Comfort break
14:50 – 15:50: PANEL 3, Islam, Muslims and Islamic Education
15:50 – 16:50: PANEL 4, Islam, Muslims and teaching
16:50 – 17:00: Closing remarks
Keynote: Dr Saeeda Shah
https://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/education/people/saeeda-shah-1
Panel 1: Islam, Muslims and schooling

Religious diversity in faith schools: the case of Muslim students in Catholic and Anglican schools

Farid Panjwani, Sean Whittle, Jane Savill

Abstract omitted.

Stafallah: Muslim resistance observed in an Anglican Primary School

Tom Wilson

The paper discusses the lived experiences of Muslim pupils in a Church of England school context. It examines the variety of negotiating strategies employed by Muslim pupils who attended St Aidans, a Church of England voluntary controlled primary school between 2010 and 2012. First, the context of the school and the nature of the author’s two years ethnographic fieldwork in the primary school are explained. Second, the article elucidates the possible responses pupils might make, explaining the continuum from confrontational active resistance through passive resistance to active acceptance, as well as discussing the stances advocated by Muslim scholars for ‘translating’ Islam into everyday life. Third, it gives details of observed responses, including a discussion of the use of the Arabic term stafallah by pupils. Key areas of school life are discussed, including Religious Education, Collective Worship and the creative curriculum. Fourth, the article discusses the nature of observed Muslim resistance, in particular the question of whether it is primarily an individual or a group phenomenon before finally outlining possible responses from those leading such schools.

Living with perpetual suspicion: the experiences of Muslim pupils in Britain today

Anna Lockley-Scott

This research examines the experiences of Muslim pupils in British secondary schools since the introduction of the Counter-Terror and Security Act (2015). This study predominantly centres around the grounded theory question ‘What is going on here? (Corbin and Strauss,1998) and puts the Muslim pupil’s voice at the forefront through questionnaires and focus groups. What emerges is that pupils express a sense of perpetual anxiety. For many this is life-long as these pupils were born since 9/11. This anxiety includes a sense of being under suspicion, a sense of distrust of authority and a feeling of needing to self-censor their expression. Parents too express anxiety and encourage their children not to talk about religion at school. Although pupils may not explicitly know of the Prevent Strategy, they are aware that they can be reported for extremism, therefore they are wary. Areas of caution include asking for prayer space or discussing homosexuality. It is important to note that pupils do not feel school is the source of that feeling of suspicion, referring rather to media rhetoric, politics and the aftermath of terror attacks. However, school currently is not a place mediating or easing that anxiety.

Islam, education, and neoliberalism

Nigel Fancourt

This presentation will consider the effect of neoliberal policies on the place of Islam in England’s schools. Debates about the place of religion(s) in schools in England are between educational traditionalists and
educational progressives. These debates often mirror wider debates around the place of religions within the public sphere, in balancing the place of an established religion with increasing religious diversity; Islam has held a particularly significant place within them. However, these debates often ignore the rise in recent decades of a third policy voice – neoliberalism. Driven by an economic view of policy, manifest in international PISA rankings and big data analysis, this voice is heard in: the marketization of education; favouring industrial or employability skills; high stakes testing. This policy voice has different implications for, e.g. the establishment of new Muslim schools, for the representation of Islam in the curriculum, and for the experiences of Muslim pupils. Further, debates about the specific place of Islam in education have been played out in recent decades in the light of securitization, so that the broader neoliberal turn needs to be recognized but also problematized – whether seeing securitization as a form of traditionalism, or as a manifestation of neoliberalism.
Panel 2: Islam, Muslims, and Higher Education

A micro-analytic study of the identities-in-interaction of female Muslim students at a British University

Hanain Brohi

While Muslims have long been stigmatized as the ‘other’ in Western societies (Peucker, 2016), Muslim women have increasingly faced extensive levels of scrutiny where “every action is interpreted as pregnant with patriarchal meaning” (Carland, 2017: 16), resulting in a homogenised view of Muslim women. However, Kabir (2016) denotes that the identity of Muslim women is far more complex, and displayed through social interactions. Therefore, this study applies an emic perspective through an ethnomethodological approach, with the application of Conversation Analysis and Ethnography, to research the identities-in-interaction of female Muslim students at a British University.

Ten hours of video recordings of ‘Sister’s Circle’ meetings at a university’s Islamic society have been collected and transcribed for analysis. Preliminary analysis of the data demonstrates the use of storytelling to discuss religious issues and construct a collective identity of ‘us’ (Muslims) vs. ‘them’ (non-Muslims), highlighting their perception as the ‘other’ in society. Additionally, gender and culture are often used as resources to interactively contest cultural norms and societal stereotypes.

The linguistic perspective of this study broadens the foundation of research into Muslim women’s identity, which may also prove to be beneficial to universities when considering strategies to strengthen their equality and diversity policies.

“Prove you can write”: A Muslim academic’s account of higher education experience

Karim Mitha

Muslims comprise roughly 5% of the UK population. Nevertheless, they experience a number of structural and institutional disadvantages in education and employment (Modood, 2006). The situation is slightly different in Scotland where Muslims are highly educated, yet experience similar challenges in employment opportunities (Elshayyal, 2016). Bhopal (2016, 2017)’s seminal work on experiences of BME academics show that inequalities persist in opportunity due to racialised discourse, micro-aggressions, and attitudes of the “white academy”. Ramadan (2016) and Tyrer and Ahmad (2006) suggest that for Muslims in higher education, their experiences are often fraught with racism, Islamophobia, and lack of willingness on part of higher education institutions with perceptions of being “fobbed off”. This paper uses an auto-ethnographic perspective to outline the experiences and intersectional space that I, as a foreign, international, Muslim male, have encountered working in the UK higher education landscape. I seek to demonstrate that the positionality of a Muslim academic is laden with expectations from within the community, (“you are the first Muslim staff member we’ve seen”) to encountering biases from culture-blind colleagues (“prove you can write”) to navigating the student body itself (“it’s been said you’re trying to promote an agenda”). I aim to showcase that despite nominal attention towards race equality and equal opportunities, the larger social disadvantages experienced by Muslims in the broader education sector are also replicated in higher education, which has strong implications when considering the importance and power of representation.
Panel 3: Islam, Muslims, and Islamic Education

_Becoming an Alimah: Female students' experience of Ebrahim College, London_

Ibrahim Lawson

Much of the discussion around Islam, Muslims and education, Islamic education and its institutions is theoretical and normative. One aspect of this is that the people on the ground are viewed, by themselves and others, through the lens of ideologies about knowledge and power which prioritise the theoretical and make this the basis for normative claims about ‘objectivity’, ‘rationality’ and the desirability of ‘regulating and securing’, which Heidegger claims characterise the western colonial worldview. This now globalised worldview, ‘Enframing’, reduces human beings to a homogenous standing reserve of available resources for exploitation by macro-level social structures, including religion and education.

In contrast, what are the individual, lived experiences of female Muslim students of the Islamic Sciences at Ebrahim College, a mixed Muslim seminary in London? Building on previous research investigating Muslim school leaders and the aporetic tensions between culture, religion and citizenship*, this collaborative action research project aims at finding the authentic voice of these young women through the search for ‘long-levered’ questions, whose answering may help to nuance and shape the future of Muslims and Islamic education in the UK today.

_Halaqah: Traditional Dialogic Pedagogy for British Muslim Children in Uncertain Times_

Farah Ahmed

This paper reports the findings of an empirical study evaluating halaqah, a traditional Islamic oral pedagogy dating back to the Prophet Muhammad, which has been adapted, in order to contribute to developing a sustainable multicultural society in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain. Halaqah is daily practice in two independent British Muslim faith-schools. It aims to develop the agency and hybrid identities of Muslim children through providing a safe space to cumulatively explore challenging issues within an Islamic paradigm. A small-scale qualitative study explored children (aged 10-11 years) and young peoples’ (aged 15-19 years) views on their traditional Islamic beliefs and their contemporary lives, on personal autonomy and being Muslim, and whether halaqah has helped them navigate their identity as Muslims living in a secular society. Data from 3 hour-long halaqah sessions with each group of participants was subjected to both thematic and dialogic analyses, to evaluate children’s and young people’s views, and their capacity to engage in dialogue with each other, and with an imagined secular other. Emergent themes relating to autonomy in their traditional households and secular schools, in childhood and adulthood, independent and critical thinking, navigating authority and peer-pressure, and choosing to be Muslim, are presented and discussed.

_Tarbiyah as a community undertaking - Re-imagining supplementary Islamic education_

Mohammed Abdullah

Supplementary Islamic education undoubtedly has the largest impact on the transformation of Muslim societies in Britain. Three significant setbacks that the sector suffers from are:

Physical limitations: commitment, resourcing, and training of the stake holders (including parents).

The framework for devotional education of Muslim children is currently modelled on the secular modern paradigm of education which differs in its vision and objectives. Resulting in a misalignment of its objectives and outcomes.
The curriculum and methodology used in schools is rooted in classic practice rather than to address the educational and religious priorities based on children’s human development.

Reimagining SIE means to reassess children’s age appropriate educational needs based on research of the Qur’an’s educational paradigm of tarbiyah as a collective and holistic concept in conjunction with the social sciences.

A holistic upbringing that brings to bear the broader spectrum of their life experience, relies on the complementation of family life into children’s Islamic learning and harnesses the interplay of these factors to their experience of the wider world. Remembering that families too; parents in particular, are a significant and neglected stakeholder in the educational communities remit in working to achieve faithful and harmonious communities.
Panel 4: Islam, Muslims and teaching

*Muslim Headteachers’ Religion in their Professional Role – A Comparative Study in State Schools in England and Pakistan*

Asima Iqbal

This paper is based on a cross-national study conducted to compare Pakistani Muslim headteachers working in state schools in England and Pakistan. The primary focus of the research was to explore the role of religion in Muslim headteachers’ professional practice; how it influenced their leadership actions, the principles underlying these actions and the different sources from which the headteachers took guidance while leading their schools. This research considered various factors operating at the micro (personal), meso (institutional) and macro (national) levels, which influenced the way Muslim headteachers in both countries perceived religion in their leadership role.

The main participants of this research were Muslim headteachers of state-maintained schools in England and Pakistan. A qualitative approach was adopted using semi-structured interviews with the Muslim headteachers and focus group interviews with pupils and teachers in their schools. Key findings of the research revealed that the need to act professionally in a state school was somewhat similar between Muslim headteachers in both countries. However, the religion of the headteachers played out differently in the two countries. In England, the Muslim headteachers expressed their religion in a covert way while in Pakistan, the headteachers viewed religion as the primary source of guidance for their professional actions.

*The making and unmaking of safe spaces for Muslim teachers in an age of Prevent*

Shereen Fernandez

This paper will draw on four interviews conducted as part of an ESRC funded PhD research project looking at how teachers in London engage with the Prevent duty and the fundamental British values agenda. In this paper, I will explore how Muslim teachers are trying to create safe spaces for themselves despite their fears that the Prevent strategy is dismantling the very idea of a safe space in school. It is this rhetoric of Muslim teachers having to monitor students yet are being monitored themselves through the Prevent strategy that I want to explore in order to draw out the

I also want to examine the role of Islam and race in the school as a ‘safe space’ and how Islam in particular is managed in this space by these teachers and others. This idea of complexities of engaging with this strategy as Muslim educators and practitioners teaching and promoting ‘the right kind’ of Islam in schools is a recurring theme in my interviews and in particular, it is this idea of schools becoming ‘de facto theologians’, to borrow from Saba Mahmood (2006), that I want to explore further.

*Islamic Psychology and its relevance for Education*

Dawud Bone

Psychology has long been a major focus in educational research, typically with an emphasis on developmental psychology and how an understanding of this can help the teacher to optimise their pupils’ learning. This has been addressed by a number of Muslim scholars of the past however another important area of psychology has been largely neglected, namely psychology in the context of pastoral care.
Children in compulsory schooling are developing physically, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually and this must be considered when determining the best approach for discipline and support.

A body of research has developed on scrupulosity, a debilitating condition that is rooted in the child becoming overwhelmed with self-condemnation to the point that they despair of God’s Mercy. This was first observed in children belonging to strongly adherent Christian communities, but it is now being diagnosed in Muslim children.

In this paper we will examine the evidence for this and, if it is a genuine concern, how educators, whether teachers or parents, can avoid triggering such a condition. We will then go on to draw out some key principles of Islamic Psychology that educators can use to better facilitate the holistic development of the children in their care.
Venue and directions

Venue: Main Council Chamber, Main Building, Park Place, Cardiff University, CF10 3AT

Date: Monday January 15th, 2018, 10am – 5pm

The symposium is in the heart of Cardiff University at the Main Building. For accessibility information please go to the Council Chamber’s webpage: https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/visit/accessibility/cathays-park-campus/main-building

By Car

Cardiff is served by the M4 and is easily accessible from all parts of Britain. From the south west, take the M5 and from the south of England, follow major A roads to the M4.

From Scotland, the north of England and the Midlands, travel via the M50 to the M4. Travelling east on the M4. Leave the motorway at Junction 32, follow the A470, signposted City Centre, into the Cathays area of the city.

Travelling west on the M4. Leave the motorway at Junction 29, follow the A48(M)/A48, signposted Cardiff East and South, to the A470. Follow the A470, signposted City Centre, into the Cathays area of the city.

By Train

High speed inter-city trains provide frequent services between all major British cities. The Cardiff-London service, from London Paddington, runs at 30-minute intervals throughout the day.

Frequent services also connect Cardiff with Bristol, Birmingham, Southampton, Manchester, Liverpool and with many other cities and towns.

Cardiff is also served by regular coach services from towns and cities across the UK. From Cardiff Central Station there is a frequent train service which stops at Cathays Station, next to the Students’ Union.

Visit the National Rail Journey Planner website for further information.

By Bus

National: Megabus and National Express coaches to Cardiff all stop directly in front of the Students Union on Park Place. Local: The No 27 service leaves Hayes Bridge Road every 10 minutes (to Park Place), and the No 35 service leaves St Mary Street every 20 minutes throughout the day (to Senghennydd Road). Both are near Cardiff Central Station.
Accommodation

**Thistle Hotel, Park Place**
Lovely hotel, on the same road as the venue of the conference so only 2-5 minute walk. £70-90 price range.

**Park Plaza, Park Place**
http://www.parkplaza.com
4* hotel, very close to the venue - 2-5 minute walk. £90-110 price range.

**Travelodge Cardiff Queen Street/Central**
https://www.travelodge.co.uk/hotels/504/Cardiff-Central-Queen-Street-hotel
https://www.travelodge.co.uk/hotels/81/Cardiff-Central-hotel
Good, affordable hotels situated in the city centre – 5-10 minute walk. £40-£80.

**Beverley Hotel - Cathedral Road (B&B)**
http://www.thebeverleyhotelcardiff.co.uk/
Affordable rooms with a restaurant/pub below. £45-60 price range. 20 minute walk from venue, or two bus rides. There are quite a few other B&Bs on Cathedral Road should you be interested in looking around.

**River House Backpackers**
http://www.riverhousebackpackers.com/
Hostel accommodation, affordable dorm rooms with a small number of private rooms. 20 minute walk from the venue or a 5 minute walk and a 5 minute bus to the venue. £15-30 per night.