

*Young British Muslims. Identity, Culture, Politics and the Media.* By Nahid Afrose Kabir. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010. Pp. 240. ISBN 978-0-7486-4653-1. £22.99.

*Young British Muslims* provides the reader with detailed insights into the everyday lived experiences of young British Muslims aged between 15-30 years. This study that consists of seven chapters is based on extensive qualitative field research comprising in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with 216 male and female Muslims from diverse ethnic backgrounds and from a range of educational institutions in Britain such as schools, colleges, youth centres, and mosque communities. The interviews were conducted in Bradford, Cardiff, Leeds, Leicester and London in 2008.

The study's strength lies in its ethnographic sections that are very well sourced and that illustrate the experiences of Muslims from a wide range of religious and ethnic communities. It examines the identities of young British Muslims in terms of their migration, gender, socio-economic, cultural, and educational as well as the wider societal contexts. It further analyses the impact particular political and social events such as Jack Straw's *niqab* debate and its media coverage have had on the identities of British Muslims as recalled and experienced by the interviewees themselves.

The first two chapters of the book give a general introduction to the identity debate in Britain and a brief overview of the history of Muslims in Britain. The third chapter "The Religious and Cultural Dilemma" engages with actual research findings. The author focuses on Muslim women's issues in relation to mosques' restrictions towards women in Britain as well as on the women's and their communities' attitudes towards marriage and female education. At the end of this chapter the author gives a very brief overview of youth issues in regard to literacy and numeracy, drugs and music. The author was able to gather a large amount of research material particularly relating to gender issues. These research findings are, however, presented in a descriptive manner giving a broad outline of the various women's experiences and their different religious affiliations without embedding these experiences concretely and in more detail in their specific religious, political and social contexts.

Through the numerous interview materials that the author has gathered she is able to support arguments of cultural theorists such as Stuart Hall who argues that identities are not static but rather porous and in a constant process of being consciously or unconsciously formed and (re)constructed. The author demonstrates how different factors such as terrorist attacks, the UK's political involvement in the Middle East or the "Muhammad-cartoons" have influenced and impacted on Muslims' identities in Britain. The 216 interviewees support the author's argument that the media's derogatory representation of Islam and Muslims in Britain has an impact on the understanding of their identities and of their position in the wider British society.

In the chapter "Is the Media Biased Against Muslims?" the author analyses the representation of Muslims in the British print media. She examines the press rhetoric and photographic imagery used and then analyses the interviewees' patterns of responses to that representation. The author gives examples of eight newspapers which published articles on Islam and Muslims on three anniversaries of the 7/7 London bombings and comes to the

conclusion that, although the majority of newspapers distinguish between “good” and “bad” Muslims, they still promote fear and suspicion and employ an “us-and-them” rhetoric.

In Chapter Six, the author covers the *niqab* debate which was first initiated in 2006 by the then British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw in Lancashire and later continued with an incident that occurred in the same year with a 24-year old Muslim of Gujarati-Indian background, Aisha Azmi, who was dismissed from her work as a bilingual support worker at the Headfield Church of England Primary School in the Yorkshire town of Dewsbury. Both incidents caused political as well as wider social reactions. Jack Straw asked women who wear the face veil to remove it when visiting him in his MP surgery as he believes it to be a “[...] visible statement of separation and of difference” (p. 145). Azmi was suspended from her work at the primary school as she refused to remove her face veil in the classroom. Both incidents generated a huge debate among politicians in Britain with the Prime Minister of the time, Tony Blair, admitting that the face veil is a “mark of separation” (p. 145) and would stultify social relations. The author gives detailed examples of her interviewees’ responses to the *niqab* debate highlighting, in general, two points: first, that the debate strengthened the Muslims’ sense of their religious identity: more Muslim women began wearing the veil as a reaction and “a mark of protest” (p. 157). Second, it generated negative reactions and debates, particularly in the media, towards Muslims in Britain more generally.

In the chapter “Indignation about the Proposal to Include *SHARIAH* Law in Britain”, the author discusses the comments of the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan William, on accommodating parts of *shariah* law, particularly on family matters, within the British legal system, similarly to the orthodox Jewish courts that are already operating in Britain. She moves on to examine the reaction of the media and the wider society as well as the interviewees’ responses to the impact of the *shariah* law debate. The author argues that the *shariah* law debate affected negatively both the Muslim communities and the wider British society. The word *shariah* was equated with “Taliban-style ultra-conservative laws” (p. 196), particularly as regards *hudud* (punishments for crimes such as adultery, fornication, alcohol consumption) that can obviously not be implemented within the British legal system. By referring to such aspects of the traditional *shariah* law, the majority of media coverage on that topic facilitated, according to the author, the discursive “othering” of British Muslims.

The author concludes her book by supporting her argument made earlier that identities are in an unending process of change depending on people’s living conditions, work and educational opportunities and their length of stay in the host society (p. 200). The author highlights the importance of a bicultural identity in which particularly the younger generation of Muslims would preserve their parents’ ethnic cultural practices while at the same time adopting certain aspects of the British culture such as language, sports and music (pp. 199-218). According to the author, the young Muslims she interviewed generally identify with Britain and its broader set of values and manners (p. 217). However, this feeling of belonging changes according to the political and socio-economic situation of Islam and Muslims in and outside of Europe.

While the author maintains that Muslims should have “equal footing in both cultures” (p. 214), she does not take sufficient account of the complexity of identities that cannot be