Young Brummie and Muslim in the Problematised City: Investigating Identity and Belonging Among Muslim Youth in Birmingham, England

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Abstract

This article investigates how the identity and sense of belonging evident among young Muslims in Birmingham, England are effected by the city's 'problematisation'. To do so, this article presents the findings from new empirical data gathered from 125 participants aged between 18 and 25 all of whom identified as Muslim and were resident in Birmingham. Having contextualised the city's problematisation, British Muslim identity and the 'politics of belonging', this article adopts a threefold approach. First, in relation to how young Muslims in the city identify with it as something of an abstract entity, unproblematically identifying as 'Brummie'. Second, in relation to how young Muslims identify 'home' and belonging to the city's 'Muslim areas'. Third, in relation to the perceived risk of victimisation due to their Muslim identity in the multicultural spaces of the city centre. In conclusion, this article suggests that while the city's problematisation has little detrimental impact on young Muslim identity, the internalisation of that problematisation necessitates changes in the performance of Muslim identity.

Key words: Muslims, belonging, Muslim youth, Birmingham, home.

Introduction

Over the past decade and a half, the city of Birmingham in the United Kingdom (UK) has emerged as something of a 'problematised' city (Allen, 2017a). Central to Birmingham's 'problematisation' is its diverse and well established Muslim population, with claims Birmingham is a 'jihadi capital', or at risk of an 'Islamic takeover' in a number of the city's state schools. This was voiced by Steve Emerson - a so-called 'terrorism expert' - appearing on *Fox News* to claim that Birmingham was "totally Muslim…" before adding how the city was so dangerous that "…non-Muslims just simply do not go in" (Rawlinson, 2015). While Emerson's claims are farcical and without substantiation, Birmingham is home to the largest number of

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Muslims in the UK outside of the capital, London; recent estimates suggesting their number to be circa 301,000 or approximately 27 per cent of the city's total population (Miller & Rodger, 2019). This is significantly higher than the national average for England and Wales. According to the last national census in 2011, Muslims comprised 4.8 per cent of the total population of England and Wales (Office for National Statistics, nd). Asymmetrically distributed, the 27 per cent population in Birmingham is disproportionately high and therefore unlike most other towns and cities Even those that are nearby. Birmingham also has the youngest demographic of all the UK's and indeed Europe's major cities (Harris, 2019), a trend that is reflected in its Muslim communities too. Recent statistics suggest that more than half of the city's Muslims are aged 25 or under (ONS, nd).

Premised on the city's problematisation, this article investigates the effect and impact this has on notions of identity and belonging among Birmingham's young Muslims. For the purpose of this article, Brown's (2010) explanation of problematisation is preferred; namely, the processes that construct Muslims and Muslim identity as a dangerous and wholly homogenised internal 'Other'. In doing so, those same process of problematisation give credence to the view perception that Muslims present a real and tangible threat to 'us' and all that this is understood to entail. To investigate the city's problematisation on young Muslims' own notions of identity and belonging, this article presents new findings from a three-year programme of research. Undertaken in the city of Birmingham from 2016 through to 2019, the research investigated the experience of young Muslims in the city to understand if - and indeed how – the problematisation of the city's Muslim population shapes and informs their lived realities.

Engaging more than 100 young 'Brummie' Muslims – Brummie being a denomyn and colloquial term describing those born or living in the city – this article begins by critically engaging the problematisation of Birmingham through various events and occurrences involving Muslim communities. From here, the article provides an overview of the existing scholarly literature relating to Muslim identity, belonging and home, including how processes of problematisation detrimentally affect each. Combining these approaches, the article sets out new empirical data. It does so using a threefold approach. First, the empirical data investigates how young Muslims' identity relates to Birmingham as a seemingly abstract entity. Second, the data investigates how young Muslims identify and express a sense of belonging in relation to certain specific locations across the city, those interchangeably referred to as 'Muslim areas' and 'home'. Third, the empirical data investigates how young Muslims' identity effects their relationship with and behaviours in, Birmingham city centre: a space where perceptions of securitisation and victimisation co-exist. In conclusion, this article generates new knowledge about notions of identity and belonging experienced and expressed by young British Muslims in the context of the contemporary problematisation of the city of Birmingham.

Methods

The findings presented here draw upon empirical data gathered by the author as principal investigator of a three-year programme of research undertaken in the city of Birmingham from 2016 through to 2019. A wide-reaching programme of research investigating Birmingham's ethnically, religiously and culturally diverse Muslims, the research was designed as a means of generating new data that would not only improve understanding about the city's Muslims but so to elucidate the contemporary and future challenges facing them as citizens of the city more broadly. Structured thematically, the research investigated a number of key concepts including identity, belonging, cohesion, integration and security. Funded by the University of Birmingham, the programme engaged more than 500 participants from across the city of whom more than 450 identified as Muslim. As well as reaching out to a large and diverse number of Muslims resident in in the city, the programme also engaged political, religious and community representatives, institutional stakeholders including the police, local authority officials, those in the public sector including health and education, and representatives from the third and

charitable sectors.

While a range of different qualitative methods were utilised across the three-year programme, this article draws only on empirical data gathered from a series of focus groups that sought to specifically engage young Brummie Muslims. In total, this comprised data gathered from 125 participants: 72 of whom were male and 53 of whom were female. All of the participants necessarily lived in the city of Birmingham and were between 18 and 25 years of age. Importantly albeit somewhat obviously, all self-identified as being Muslim. The ethnicity of the participants was diverse and included those from Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Yemeni, Somali, Eritraen, Indian and White British heritages. Recruitment for the focus groups was necessarily non-probabilistic and necessarily purposive: recruiting participants via a range of different stakeholders including Muslim organisations, mosques and Islamic centres, community groups, third sector organisations and the author's own networks. The research was reviewed by the University of Birmingham Ethics Committee (SPSC:10004-17).

Context

Muslim Identity in the Contemporary British Setting

Since the early 1990s, a body of scholarly work has steadily emerged in relation to Muslim identity in the context of 'the West' and diasporic communities. While the constraints of this article do not afford a full exposition of what is now an extensive canon, a number of key themes specific to the contemporary British setting are set out below. The first relates to the early literature and the emergence of a public and subsequently political Muslim identity as a response to the tripartite categorisation of White, Black and Asian that characterised Britain's newfound diversity following mass migration in the 1950s and 1960s. Due to Muslims being invisibilised and excluded from a tripartite concerned with notions of 'race' as opposed religion (Modood, 1994), a number of analyses including Modood (1992; 1998), Werbner (2000), Peach (2005), Modood and Ahmad (2007), and Modood (2010) investigated the intersection of race and religion in relation to Muslim identity. A number of concurrent and indeed subsequent studies investigated the indeterminable effect of various 'political crises' on contemporary British Muslim identity (Ahmad & Evergeti, 2010). Beginning with the Satanic Verses affair in 1989 (Asad, 1990; Piscatori, 1990), other political crises seen to have effected British Muslim identity include the first Gulf War (Ahmad & Evergeti, 2010), the 9/11 and 7/7 terror attacks (Abbas, 2004; Archer, 2009), the 'war on terror' (Abbas, 2007; Vertigans, 2020), and the murder of Lee Rigby (Shaw, 2016) among others. More recently, discourses about 'grooming gangs' (Tufail, 2015; Tufail & Poynting, 2016; Allen, 2020) have been equally determinative. It is important to note that all have internal and external characteristics and consequences: affecting both the identity of 'the self' and identity as perceived by wider society in both public and political spaces.

In relation to the problematisation of Muslim identity, some studies approach this broadly and from the external perspective of what they refer to as the 'Muslim question': including among others, Parekh (2006) and Vertovec (2008). Others investigate the effect of problematisation on Muslim identity and the consequences on both internal and external perspectives, for instance McDonald (2011), Croft (2012), Kundnani (2014) and Ali and Whitham (2018). For Brown (2010) problematisation is evident in the social, political and cultural processes that continually frame and reframe Muslim identity as contestable to normative British identity and values. Constructed as dangerous internal 'Others' that present real and tangible threats to 'us', not only can this be seen to have been reinforced via the various political crises referred to previously but more recently via Britain's burgeoning counter-extremism and counter-terrorism policies. For Brown, not only does this culminate in Muslim identity being attributed with a series of unfounded claims that are both threatening and dangerous to 'us', but so too do they typically demand changes in "the ordinary and unexceptional lives of [British Muslim]

citizens" (Brown 2010, p.172). For Allen (2015), this is most evident in associated political discourses about 'Britishness'. Through ascribing a certain 'way of life' and 'values' to what it means to be 'British', not only are none of these ascribed to 'Muslims' but neither can 'Muslims' ever be seen to be 'British'. Sitting in stark contention and opposition to 'Muslimness' and Muslim identity, not only does the 'Otherness' of Muslims become irreversibly fixed but so too is the message conveyed to 'British' society, as well as Muslims themselves, that Muslims can never be British (Allen, 2015). As Croft (2012) puts it, this culminates in the 'insecuritisation' of Muslim identity.

In seeking to conceive this in a way appropriate to this study, Choudary's (2007) investigation into radicalisation and British Muslim identity is particularly useful. As he explains, certain processes of securitisation not only problematise Muslim identity but so too necessitate a response or change to it. Accordingly, Choudary argues that certain externally applied factors are not only determinative on one's own understanding of Muslim identity (the self) but so too are they determinative on the external performance of that same identity. Likewise, certain external factors ascribe Muslim identity as being a barrier to integration not least through the attribution of that identity being seen to be wholly 'Other'. In addition to the impact of external factors and the ensuing consequences of this, Choudary also identifies what he refers to as internal factors and consequences. In this respect, evidence exists that processes of problematisation and securitisation have the potential to catalyse Muslim identity as a means to mobilise in relation to internal empowerment and political participation. Likewise, Choudary notes how those same processes have the potential to strengthen a sense of collective belonging around the notion of Muslim identity. In investigating the experience of young Muslims in Birmingham to understand if - and indeed, how - the subsequent problematisation and securitisation of the city and its Muslim population shapes and informs their lived reality, Choudary's findings are extremely useful.

Problematising Birmingham

While Birmingham has been problematised in the past, not least in the aftermath of 1981's 'race riots' in Handsworth (Cottle, 1994; Peach, 1996; Jefferson, 2012), today's problematisation can be understood to be almost singularly concerned with the city's Muslim population. According to Iskajee (2018), problematisation coincided with the UK Government identifying Birmingham as a Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) Pathfinder city in the wake of the 7/7 terror attacks. The forerunner to PREVENT - the UK Government's controversial and much criticised counter-extremism strategy (Allen, 2017b) – the objectives of Pathfinder was to target certain Muslim communities and encourage them to identify as a welcome part of British society (Communities and Local Government, 2007). Add to that those objectives requiring Muslims to reject and actively condemn violent extremism, the underpinning inference of Pathfinder was that Birmingham's Muslims were 'problematic': not seeing themselves as part of British society due to a perceived receptivity towards violent extremism. More so, that the Pathfinder also stated the need to isolate violent extremist activity seemed to suggest that this type of activity was already evident within Birmingham's Muslim population. Placing Birmingham's Muslims under immediate and increased scrutiny, Pathfinder also put pressure on those already working with and within Muslim communities; expecting them to engage in activities many felt were counter-productive and with the potential for long-term detrimental consequences (Isakjee, 2017).

So too were the city's Muslims being concurrently securitised. This was most evident in 2011 in the fallout from Project Champion (Isakjee & Allen, 2013). Distinct and different from PREVENT and Pathfinder, Project Champion was an ill-conceived counter-terrorism initiative that saw more than 250 surveillance cameras installed in two of the city's most densely populated Muslim areas. Noting how Muslims living in both areas were initially misled about the purpose of the cameras – being told the cameras were solely for crime reduction - an

independent review by *Thames Valley Police* resulted in the cameras being dismantled a few years later. The review however evidenced how democratic structures and elected representatives were bypassed in order to secure funding for the scheme and subsequently construct it (Isakjee & Allen, 2013). With trust between the city's Muslims and its governing institutions rapidly eroding, Project Champion functioned to securitise the streets and areas that many Muslims in the city identified with and called home while simultaneously problematizing the communities who lived there. Similarly for many, their children attended schools amid allegations in 2014 that Muslim 'hardliners' were plotting to 'take-over' 20 state schools in the city (Allen, 2014). While West Midlands Police claimed the allegations were a hoax, they nonetheless prompted the largest investigation into the education sector in British history. Despite no evidence of a plot being uncovered, the allegations further intensified the scrutiny of Birmingham's Muslims. Amid claims of entryism, the controversy escalated fears of cultural clashes and further 'takeovers' of public spaces and institutions (Holmwood & O'Toole, 2017). Accordingly, Birmingham's Muslims were seen to pose a very real threat to institutions in the city and the country more widely.

Birmingham's Muslims were most recently problematised following 2017's terror attack in Westminster. As soon as details emerged that Khalid Masood - the perpetrator – had lived in the city immediately prior to the attack, the world's media turned its focus on Birmingham. Scrutinised by British and international media outlets alike, one Belgian news reporter claimed Birmingham was the 'global centre of jihadism'; describing the city as 'the new Molenbeek', the Brussels suburb where police raided a number of houses in March 2016 following the terror attacks in Paris four months earlier (Allen, 2017a). In the UK, the *Financial Times* referred to Birmingham as a 'hotbed' of Islamist activity; while the *Independent* said the city was a 'breeding ground for British-born terror'. It was the *Daily Mail* however that ran the headline, 'So how DID Birmingham become the jihadi capital of Britain?' (italics used in the original headline). It went on to claim that within a few miles of where Masood had lived, 26 of the country's 269 'jihadis' had been 'produced' (Allen, 2017a). In spite of the coverage however, Masood had only lived in Birmingham for around a year prior to the attack, and as confirmed by Neil Basu – Deputy Assistant Commissioner of the *Metropolitan Police* and Senior National Coordinator for *UK Counter-Terrorism Policing* – Masood, acted alone and had no links with any known extremist networks in Birmingham (Booth, 2017). Neither was Masood known to have links with any of Birmingham's Muslim communities nor any of the city's mosques. Nonetheless, the focus on matters of security that prompted attention on the city's Muslims not only added to their problematisation, but so too did it go some way to codifying them as the internal 'Others' cited previously (Brown, 2010).

Belonging and Home

To some degree, belonging appears a somewhat self-explanatory concept. At its most straightforward, existing literatures define belonging as that which connects our respective identities to different spaces; one that typically involves an emotional bond being established (Inalhan & Finch 2004; Guiliani and Feldman, 1993). Antonsich (2010) attempts to stratify this by setting out a five-fold typology of the constituent albeit fluid components of belonging: auto-biographical, relational, cultural, economic and legal. While useful, Antonsich overlooks the emotional which is problematic for Ignatieff (2006) who posits that it is emotion more so than anything else that makes people 'feel safe' and therefore feel at 'home'. In this respect, 'home' does not need to constitute a physical structure or space because, as those such as Mallett (2004) rightly point out, physical spaces can be associated with women's experiences of violence, oppression or persecution. Accordingly, Boccagni (2017) defines home as the special relationship between person and place: a normative, socio-cultural experience that tentatively offers security and familiarity as also control over others in certain specific settings. Isakjee's (2013) linking of belonging and home is therefore pertinent. As he explains, home is where people are likely to have an imagined and psychologically felt sense of belonging. Often

whimsical or idealist – sometimes both – notions of home and belonging can be seen to be shaped and informed by the emotional bond referred to previously. That emotional bond therefore has to be integral to collective understandings and meanings.

Another oversight within Antonsich's typology is the exclusion of the political. For Yuval-Davis (2006) this is problematic. As she puts it, this is because there is a clear interconnectedness between the emotional and the political when trying to understand notions of belonging. For her, this is because within that same interconnectedness the political has the potential to not only disrupt but also more importantly, threaten the emotional bond that confers feelings of safety and security upon notions of home (Yuval-Davis 2006). The disruptive influence of the political therefore can result in individuals and communities feeling less safe and less secure; this she refers to as the 'politics of belonging'. Political actors, mechanisms and processes – including the media – can all function in a multiplicity of ways in order to construct boundaries and divisions between different identities and identity groups. Crowley (1996) goes further, arguing that these actors, mechanisms and processes – coined by 'the political' - also function in order to do the 'dirty work of boundary maintenance'. By this, Crowley asserts that the politics of belonging are the processes that differentiate, discriminate and demarcate. In line with Clarke (2003), such constructions reinforce notions of order: about who 'we' are and, through processes of stigmatisation, marginalisation and intolerance, who 'we' are not. In doing so, the politics of belonging can construct dichotomies of 'us' and 'them', in the same way that processes of problematisation do (Brown, 2010).

Findings

The Abstract City

When asked about Birmingham and their relationship with the city, young Muslims focused on notions of identity. This was apparent in a number of ways although most prominent was their self-identification as 'Brummie'. A widely used demonym to refer to anyone born in or who lives in the city, it is also a wholly inclusive term of endearment that cuts across all other markers of identity. That young Muslims choose to self-identify in this way would seem to suggest a deep – and seemingly unproblematic – sense of identification with the city. For some, this was both straightforward and simple. As one participant put it, "I couldn't have any more in the world…I am happy that I am living here in Birmingham…I'm a Brummie".

For some, Brummie was the sole marker of identification. For others, it was part of a dualistic identity. In this way, some self-identified as a "Brummie Muslim" or "Brummie Paki": the latter expressed by a handful of participants of Pakistani heritage. When asked why they chose to identify with the term 'Paki' - a typically derogatory and racist term of abuse - they jokingly replied that it was "OK for us to use it". Other participants spoke how their self-identities were more fluid and multi-layered, taking into account markers of nationality, ethnicity, heritage and religion especially. All however acknowledged that they were either a Brummie or identified as being from Birmingham and saw no tension or contestation in doing so. During one focus group, a participant asked their fellow participants the extent to which they felt 'British' or 'Brummie'. While almost all said they felt both, a small number of male participants acknowledged the impact of external factors on their own self-identity. For them, Britain's foreign policy over the past two decades and its deployment of armed forces in various Muslim-majority countries meant that it was sometimes 'easier' to identify as 'Brummie' rather than 'British': "…it's not always easy what with them and the Americans killing Muslims like in the Middle East".

As well as forming a part of the participants' own self-identity, there was also a clear identification of Birmingham with Muslims and their communities more broadly: affirming Choudary's (2007) categorisation of collective belonging and identity. From the discussions

facilitated, this was quite straightforward; mirroring how a significant percentage of the city's population were Muslim. As one participant put it, "Birmingham has a very large Muslim population so you feel that you are at home". While some spoke about the city being a 'Muslim city', it is necessary to clarify this in order to avoid misinterpretation. Rather than staking a claim to ownership or to suggest Birmingham was in any way akin to the city suggested by Emerson previously, participants were rather more straightforwardly referring to Birmingham being a place where large numbers of Muslims could – and indeed do - live. Expressed in a number of different ways, one said, "when I go abroad and I go on holiday I always look forward to coming back. I can't wait to go back. At home is Birmingham for me". However while this – and other – participants referred to Birmingham as 'home', this was markedly different to how they referred to certain specific areas of the city they rather more emotionally referred to as 'home': areas where they were born, grew up and tend to still live (see the following section). Here then, Birmingham was a 'home' that shaped and determined identity but did not entail much of an emotional bond. Without a deep emotional connection, young Muslims conveyed the relationship between their identity and the city of Birmingham in ways that felt rather more abstract and cold: a large entity within which they were a significant population albeit a population that was simultaneously less than spectacular or special. In this respect, the connection was rather more pragmatic than emotional: "I am very happy to live in Birmingham".

In trying to understand this, it is necessary to revisit the notions and understandings of belonging and home referred to previously. Given the pragmatic nature of young Muslims' relationship with Birmingham, one might argue that the relationship between identity and city was more akin to a feeling of belonging as opposed a feeling of home: of Atonisch as opposed Ignatieff. Still, a good number of participants routinely and quite unproblematically described Birmingham as 'home' thereby alluding to something of a sense of collective belonging and identity. This might be best explained by considering the difference between scholarly and non-scholarly conceptions as also the corpus of language and terminologies available to both. Accordingly, while scholars and non-scholars use the same phrases and words, both constituencies might use them in vastly different and disparate ways. While participants therefore spoke about Birmingham as 'home', they did so in ways that did not reflect the scholarly literature and the notions that duly underpinned them. Given the pragmatism of the language and self-identification of participants, the absence of the emotional was in itself notable. In this respect, while the abstract city was that which young Muslims in the city identified with and felt as though they belonged to, there was little evidence that they saw the city as being 'home' in accordance with scholarly understanding or meaning.

'Muslim Areas'

When asked about the area they lived in, one participant spoke about it being a largely 'Muslim area' adding, "the neighbourhood that we live in, it is very multi-diverse so you do not feel that you are an outsider". As before, there should be no misunderstanding or misinterpretation about how participants regularly and unproblematically referred to certain areas of Birmingham as 'Muslim areas'. A destination city for migrants to the UK for more than half a century, different communities – ethnic, religious and cultural - have historically gravitated to different and quite distinct areas of Birmingham, many comprising a ring around the city centre. As one participant that had come to Birmingham with her family explained:

> *…when we moved to Small Heath there was such a big community of Somalis here…in fact, I did not speak Somali before I came to Birmingham. So it was very difficult for me in that sense. All of a sudden you have to learn about your culture…*

Accordingly, it is common for different areas of the city to be 'flavoured' by and subsequently referred to in line with the diasporic communities known to reside in them. A historically

transitory and protean process, it was once common to refer to Digbeth as an 'Irish area' for instance. When referring to 'Muslim areas' therefore, not only was it typical but so too unproblematic for the participants. One such location was Sparkbrook, the site of Rex and Moore's (1967) groundbreaking sociological study titled "*Race, Community and Conflict: a study of Sparkbrook, Birmingham".* The book evidenced how half a century ago the area was made up of minority communities that were clustered together in socio-economically disadvantaged areas. Today, socio-economic disadvantage continues to be causal in the locations where some ethnic minorities – including Muslims - reside in the city. The majority of the city's Muslims (71.7 per cent) live in seven of the city's most deprived wards: Sparkbrook (19,372); Bordesley Green (18,629); Washwood Heath (16,847); Springfield (13,461); Lozells and East Handsworth (10,853); and, Nechells (8,822) (Allen, 2017a). Bordesley Green, Washwood Heath and Nechells are also in the top 1% of most deprived Super Output Areas in the entire UK (Allen, 2017a). Today's 'Muslim areas' are extremely similar to those that Rex and Moore (1967) previously investigated. There is no evidence to support claims that Muslims in the city choose to self-segregate (Allen & Ögtem-Young, 2018)

However, while participants spoke about Birmingham the city abstractly and pragmatically, they spoke about 'Muslim areas' with warmth, emotion and a clear sense of idealism: "You don't have to take a train to do something, eat a nice dinner or something. Everything is right here. You don't have to go into the city centre or travel to see family further away". It was not uncommon for participants to focus on issues that included 'growing up', 'school', 'family' and 'friends' among others. For example, one particpant explained, "My university education was here, my college was here, the latter part of my secondary education was here. My postgraduate degree I did here. I feel I am very accustomed to living here". Associating a range of formative life events with the places they grew up in demonstrates clear and strong emotional bonds with 'Muslim areas'. In a further example, when one participant responded, when asked by another the extent to which they visited other areas of the city, "why would I, I have everything I'd ever need right here on my doorstep…I love this place". In these examples, participants combined expressions of emotionally informed whimsy and idealism (Isakjee 2013) with expressions of emotional depth (Boccagni 2017). The 'Muslim areas' of Birmingham were where the young Muslims from the city felt the greatest sense of belonging and 'home'.

While familial and kinship networks were most prominent, emotional bonds were additionally strengthened through various community and religious infrastructures, cultural and linguistic commonalities, and a range of services and facilities through which shared memories and common histories could be maintained and importantly, continued. These shared memories were threefold. The first were personalised and included shared memories of attending certain schools, going to certain parks and living in certain streets among others: "…I still miss the walk to Moseley School with my boys". The second were religious, cultural or both, focusing on shared memories of growing up as a Muslim or as part of a specific community that in turn necessitated certain activities, practices and rituals: all of which combined to reinforce Muslim identity: "I remember Eid in the park, it was so good…so many people, my dad knew everyone". The third were rather more associated with heritage and shared memories of families coming to Birmingham, the stories these entailed, and the challenges faced albeit noting that few of the participants had experienced these first hand: "when I lived in Denmark for example, we didn't have any family. Here now, we have family in Nechells…in Alum Rock". These combine to make participants feel 'safe': something that sat in stark contention to the more securitised city centre spaces considered in the next section. At times, this was explicitly simply and straightforwardly expressed, "nah it's safe round here…it's like you know everyone". At others, it was rather more inferred, "my dad doesn't mind me going to the dessert shops as he knows I'll be fine…you don't get that sort of trouble round here". Without doubt, the experience of feeling 'safe' was integral to the process of strengthening the emotional bond between young Muslims and the 'Muslim areas' they understood and duly expressed as being 'home'.

The City Centre

Whether through whimsy or idealism, the sense of feeling 'safe' evident in relation to 'Muslim areas' was counterbalanced with feelings of 'risk' when participants were asked about their relationship with other parts of the city. This was initially apparent in expressed tensions about where young Muslims 'chose' to go and where they 'had' to go. As one participant explained:

> *my parents worry more, they tend to want me stick to certain areas. Whereas the younger generations put themselves out there a little more…go to different areas maybe to work or study somewhere else…because of this, parents worry as they think the dangers increase…that's why it trickles into the family.*

As regards those deemed 'safe', Star City was recurrently cited: an entertainment complex about a mile outside the city centre comprising a multiplex cinema, popular restaurants and a handful of outlets offering activities including crazy golf and five-a-side football. While participants spoke about Star City posing little risk to them, many spoke about how their parents' also holding a similar view, most seeming to think that it was safe for their children. As a few participants also noted, part of this was due to there being few outlets that sold alcohol; a factor that seemed important in the decision-making process of where young Muslims 'chose' to go. In stressing the importance of feeling and subsequently being safe, it was interesting how participants balanced observations about Star City: juxtapositioning the view that it was "a bit rubbish…" with the caveat "…but it's OK for us to go there".

In relation to where participants felt they 'had' to go, the focus on risk – in particular, risk of victimisation – came to the fore. So too were these spaces associated with processes and mechanisms of scrutiny and securitisation. This was especially evident when participants felt they 'had' to go to the city centre, be that to work, to access transport or engage in shopping among others. Across the discussions, few spoke about going to the city centre for leisure or entertainment reasons (except for shopping): "I don't feel safe [there]…my mum tells me don't go to the crowded places, stay away from the city centre…I haven't been in the city centre since the Manchester bombing [in 2017]". For Gilroy (2004), Britain's urban city centres were spaces where convivial multiculturalism became pertinently manifest. As he explained, people interacted with each other in close proximity so these spaces negated notions of difference – and 'Otherness' – to that which was ordinary, banal and unremarkable, mundane even. This was not necessarily the view shared by many of the young Muslims when asked about Birmingham's city centre. For them, the city centre was where their perceived difference was seen to be most prominent: prominent in ways that were problematised. Participants spoke about how they felt that their Muslim identity put them at risk of victimisation from Islamophobically-motivated bigotry or hate. While none of the participants had personally experienced any such bigotry or hate in the city centre, the perceived risk was tangible; readily apparent in how they spoke about feeling vulnerable, anxious and targeted for being Muslim: "You hear stories…there was a girl who got bacon suffocated in her face…another who got kicked down the stairs". Explaining why she personally felt at risk of victimisation, another female participant said "you never know…there's been a lot of terrorist stuff going on", making the explicit link between identity, security and victimisation.

A key factor in feeling at risk of victimisation in the city centre was that their Muslim identity may come under scrutiny through securitisation processes. The securitized scrutiny was twofold. The first was from the public who participants perceived as fearing, disliking or feeling threatened by those identified as being Muslim This reflects the findings of both Brown (2010) and Allen (2015) about how notions of threat and danger were routinely attributed to Muslims. The second was from the police and the perceived association of Muslim identity with terrorism

and violence. This informed participants' feelings of being at risk of victimisation as many of the participants felt that their Muslim identity made them more likely to be subject to police surveillance and, by consequence, stopped, searched and arrested. In an acknowledgement of Choudary's (2007) category about how Muslim identity is required to respond to external factors, some participants explained how the high number of terror incidents perpetrated by Muslims in recent years had intensified the scrutiny they felt they were under: "everyone thinks we're terrorists…we all look the same to everyone else".

This was especially evident among male participants a number who spoke candidly about being acutely aware of the way they looked, how they behaved and what activities they felt they could – and could not - participate in: all determined by their Muslim identity. As one put it, "beard, cap, rucksack…who wants to sit next to the Muslim on the bus or train?" while another laughingly said, "I never run in the city centre, especially If I have a bag on your back…man going to get shot by the police if I'm running in a crowded space". Recurrent among the participants was the carrying of black rucksacks, speaking in languages other than English, and reading websites or content on their phones that were overtly Islamic when in close proximity to others. While these restrictions were largely self-imposed, they undoubtedly suggest the internalisation of the problematisation of Muslim identity in increasingly securitised settings. As one male participant put it, "I don't want to scare anyone, you know what I mean…I also don't want to have the police on my back either". The problematised city therefore not only effects how young Muslims perceive and understand their Muslim identity, but so too does it problematise how those same young Muslims seek to perform their Muslim identities. Muslin identity by the young people who participated in the study was asymmetrically performed in different areas of the city and in different relational contexts.

Conclusion

When considered through the multiple lens of Muslim identity, notions of belonging and the problematised city, what emerges is something of a complex picture. Whether in terms of how young Muslims connected to the abstract and remote city, or through the emotional bonds between them and the city's 'Muslim areas', or in response (or reaction) to the perceived securitised city centre and increased risk of victimisation and scrutiny, the relationship between young Muslim identity and Birmingham as a problematised city was multi-faceted and multi-layered. There was no evidence from the discussions that young Muslims do not feel they belong to or feed excluded from city of Birmingham and all that this entails, including its problematisation. Birmingham, or at least parts of it, are unquestionably home ensuring a concurrently bi-polar identification with Muslim areas and the city centre. As such, this research challenges received understanding that the problematisation of Birmingham is likely to have a detrimental effect on how the city's young Muslims relate to and identify with the city. Accordingly, the young Muslims engaged appeared far removed from the demarcated 'Other' perceived to not to want to be part of contemporary British (Brummie) society – as inferred by the PVE Pathfinder a decade and a half ago– or who are perceived to present a dangerous, typically violent threat – as per the fallout from Masood's terrorist attack. The participants (Brummie) Muslim identity clearly attributed a sense of a collective identity a sense of belonging to the city and of being at home in certain areas, there was no evidence that this was akin to the problematised Muslim identity indeterminably linked to the problematised.

However, the problematisation of the city and the ensuing processes of securitisation have detrimentally effected the participants relationship with certain areas of the city – mostly the city centre – and the performance of their identity within those areas. Participants felt a greater risk of victimisation as young Brummie Muslims when going to the city centre. In these spaces, their Muslim identity made them feel they would be more susceptible to scrutiny and suspicion and also at greater rosk of becoming a victim of bigotry or hate. When considering young Muslim identity in the city of Birmingham therefore, it is necessary to counter-balance their

relationship to the (abstract) city and the relative safety afforded by its 'Muslim areas', with the experience of risk encountered in the city centre. Through the internalisation of the city's problematisation and by default the problematisation of Muslim identity, young Muslims feel duly required to, if not necessarily respond, at least be necessarily aware of this risk. Changes to the performance of Muslim identity among young Brummie Muslims is in many ways therefore, a safety measure: one that seeks to protect them from bigotry and hate that is informed and given credence by the city's problematisation.

This is however best understood through the framework of Yuval-Davis' (2006) concept of the politics of belonging. For her, the politics of belonging become manifest via the political processes and mechanisms that seek to demarcate 'us' from 'them'. In doing so, these same political processes and mechanisms construct imaginary boundary lines that are unquestioned in both the political and public spaces (Allen & Ögtem-Young, 2020). In Birmingham, these boundary lines have been cumulatively constructed via the PVE Pathfinder, Project Champion, Operation Trojan Horse and post-Masood inference of the city as 'jihadi capital' among various others. Accordingly, these boundary lines have not only conferred legitimacy on Birmingham being a problematised city but so too have they conferred legitimacy on the problematisation of its Muslims also. In this way, both the city and its Muslims are constructed as being entirely 'Other'. Through the framework of the politics of belonging therefore, while Birmingham's problematised Muslims might therefore 'belong' to Birmingham the problematised city both are inherently and indeterminably 'them' to that which might be perceived and understood to be the normative 'us'. Both Birmingham and its Muslims therefore are unquestionable 'Others'.

The findings presented here can therefore be seen to be disruptive in that the Muslim identity of the young people engaged was neither problematised nor 'Other'. Nonetheless, whether thinking through the strong emotional bonds that exist between young Muslims and 'Muslim areas' or the securitisation of the city centre that in turn prompts the risk of victimisation, both can be seen to have been shaped and influenced by the construction of imaginary boundary lines. While those lines help to reinforce notions of a collective identity and thereby a strong sense of belonging, so too do they reinforce the securitisation and problematisation of Muslim identity that this article shows is duly internalised by at least some of the city's young Muslims. As such, a stark contrast can be seen between the depth of safety and security in certain areas and the depth of the risk of victimisation in others. For them, the areas where that risk of victimisation is greatest is where the boundary lines have most clearly demarcated those with Muslim identities as the 'them' from the 'us'. The imaginary boundary lines therefore can be seen to serve the function of demarcating problematisation.

The tangible consequence of this – the problematizing attribution and demarcation of Muslims and Muslim identity as 'them' and therefore 'Other' - was evident when participants spoke about feeling the need to restrict certain behaviours and activities. Here, both the problematisation of Birmingham's Muslims and the problematisation of the city can be seen to be being internalised: the culmination of the drip-feed of problematisation discourses for more than a decade that in the here and now can be seen in how young Muslims' understanding of their own identities can simultaneously conjure feelings of security and being safe while at the same time conjure feelings of insecurity and being unsafe. That this is evident among the young Brummie Muslims – albeit without explicit acknowledgement or recognition – suggests that the actual impact and effect of problematisation are rather more external than internal. So while for them at least, Muslim identity does not detrimentally limit their relationship with the city, it does limit how they perceived the perceptions of others of their Muslim identity. Accordingly, while young Brummie Muslims' identity is key to them belonging and feeling at home in some certain areas so too is it key to them feeling quite the opposite in other certain areas. Belonging and not belonging, home and not home: all premised on where they themselves perceived their identity to be problematic or not. If the problematisation of the city of Birmingham continues and even intensifies - and by consequence, the problematisation of

Birmingham's Muslims also – it is possible that this might change; the imaginary boundary lines making it ever more difficult to ever really belong.

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