Micro-level management of Islamophobia
Negotiation, deflection and resistance

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Introduction

This chapter will address the issue of anti-Muslim victimisation and the intensification of an Islamophobic climate in Britain over the last two decades. With reference to empirical data drawn from a qualitative study conducted in the northwest of England, we wish to elucidate a range of micro-level strategies used by British Muslims to prevent, circumvent and challenge discrimination in their daily lives. In order to do so, it is necessary to discuss the social, cultural and political environment that renders Islam and its British followers suspect and makes concentrated identity management techniques essential for Muslims living in Britain today. Sociological research undertaken since 2001 suggests British Muslims have been subjected to over a decade and a half of multi-layered hostility, from widespread and increasingly normalised anti-Muslim political rhetoric (Ansari and Hafez 2012; Yilmaz 2012) to biased, discriminatory media discourses (Ahmed and Matthes 2016; Allen 2012; Moore, Mason and Lewis 2008; Poole 2002) and security and counter-terrorism policies built on the assumption that all British Muslims are either at risk of radicalisation or potential terrorists (Nabulsi 2017; Kundnani 2015). We will argue in this chapter that it is these three interrelated and mutually reinforcing social processes that have increased the vulnerability of British Muslims. We begin by outlining the institutional networks through which Islamophobia thrives, focussing on the media, the political realm and legal and policy frameworks. Having set the context, we go on to draw on experiential vignettes to illuminate some of the practices common to young Muslims as they seek to negotiate and consolidate their identities in a labile and troubling environment.

Defining the institutional context: the making up of Muslims

While ethnic minorities have long suffered macro- and micro-level aggressions, British Muslims were designated in the mainstream mass media as unwilling to assimilate in the wake of the Salman Rushdie Affair in the late 1980s (Meer 2013). At this juncture, concerns about Rushdie’s provocative and defamatory re-telling of the origins of Islam were largely brushed aside and recast as the ‘uncivilised’ attitudes of ‘barbarians’ and ‘dangerous fanatics’. Although, the publication of The Satanic Verses marked Muslims out as ‘different’, Kundnani (2015) avers...
that the violence in northern mill towns in 2001 served as a watershed moment at which British Muslims were identified as particularly problematic. Dominant discourses suggested that Muslims required both scrutiny and encouragement to assimilate more readily, rather than being allowed to live in parallel communities. In the years that have followed a series of terrorist attacks in the UK, Europe and North America committed by Islamist extremists have served to entrench anti-Muslim ideologies and attitudes. It is the deleterious effects of discourses which depict Muslims as a homogeneous, ‘risky’ group that we wish to detail here, by focussing in turn on the media, politics and security policies.

In terms of the sphere of politics, it is important to note extreme right, anti-immigration political movements have long been part of the landscape. Historically, the far right have focused on Jews and Judaism, but in recent years this attention has been re-directed towards Muslims and Islam. Ansari and Hafez (2012) argue that the far right view that Islam and Muslim values fundamentally conflict with Western values has been co-opted to different degrees by both liberal and conservative parties and woven into the policies of Western governments over the past two decades. Kelly (2011) reports the extent of normalisation of anti-Muslim sentiments which led Conservative cabinet minister Baroness Warsi to assert that ‘Islamophobia has now crossed the threshold of middle class respectability . . . it has passed the dinner party test’. Political parties from across the spectrum have articulated concerns about the cultural threat posed by Muslims and calls for immigration controls specifically targeted at migration from the Muslim world are commonplace (Hogan and Haltinner 2015). Yilmaz (2012) claims it is this very debate that has expedited the rise of the far right through two simultaneous processes. First, it has enabled right-wing parties to gain public support and has forced mainstream parties to the right. Second, it has re-structured the political landscape and aligned social and political movements along the axis of culture; a factor that is represented as central to issues, not only of citizenship and belonging, but also security and economy. The far-right have been successful in keeping the national focus on these multiple ‘drawbacks’ of Muslim citizenry with a particular focus on the threat to ‘British values’. Founded on a generalised suspicion of Muslims, this political vision strands across formal politics, unifying ‘the people’ against the Muslim ‘other’ (Wodak 2011). This trend is similarly observed by Lucassen and Lubbers (2011) who argue that perceived cultural ethnic threats are a stronger predictor of far-right preferences than perceived economic ethnic threats. As problematic Muslim difference takes center stage in political narratives, discourses recounting historic social divisions coalesce and unify against the Muslim ‘other’. Such findings have led some commentators to assert that the success of the far-right is of hegemonic proportions (Mondon 2015; Yilmaz 2012). That is not to say that their narrative is without its detractors, instead that sameness and difference in culture is the defining element of society. In other words, the far right has established an epistemology of what constitutes the most important aspects of social life to align with their own Islamophobic perspective. According to Mondon (2015) the enduring triumph is ideological, with far-right discourse now prevalent within mainstream liberal democratic agendas.

Far right ideology is no longer the preserve of the political fringe, but has become meshed with policies from across the political spectrum (Ansari and Hafez 2012; Yilmaz 2012; Fekete 2006). The national security agenda and its attendant narrative of Islam as a threat is illustrative of this and constitutes the second of the three discursive contexts that frame British Muslim lives to be discussed here. The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 is the sixth addition to a raft of counter-terrorism legislation introduced since the 2000 Terrorism Act sequentially carried through by successive Labour, Coalition and Conservative governments. The national security agenda allows mass surveillance and control of movement while restricting pluralism in favour of social cohesion through assimilation and extensive scrutiny of all British Muslims in
the formal service of ‘public good’ (Kundnani 2015). Such policies reinforce the extreme right’s opposition to not only militant Islam, but to Islam and Muslims as a whole, on the grounds that Muslim ‘difference’ and presence is problematic for a unified, liberal democracy. Consistency between the security policies of successive governments from across the political divide can clearly be seen in the ‘conveyor belt’ theory that underpins British counter-radicalisation strategy. As Kundnani (2015) explains, since 2006 the philosophy underpinning State counter-terrorism policies in the UK has assumed a linear, mechanical process of radicalisation by which an individual is propelled from religious conservatism to extremism. This is particularly evident in the Prevent policy, which attempts to deploy ‘risk focused’ prevention measures to govern terrorism pre-emptively (see McCulloch and Pickering 2010; Mythen, Walklate and Peatfield 2016). The Prevent strategy allows the government to police future crimes that do not yet exist, but may be in the making, through surveillance of entire communities who are ‘at risk of being risky’ (Heath-Kelly 2013). While the policy is designed to be ‘community led’ and driven by intelligence freely given from within the British Muslim community, both the designated ‘priority areas’ and allocations of Prevent funding suggest that areas with large Muslim populations have been targeted (Kundnani 2009). In practice the implementation of counter terrorism and security policies has involved the assumption that Muslim communities have the capacity to foster the ideologies that support extremism because they do not vocally celebrate ‘British values’. This assumption serves to ideationally discipline Muslims, encouraging them to assimilate and embody those values. In order to do, multiculturalism of the past is rejected in favour of a muscular defence and promotion of a monocultural Britishness (Meer et al. 2010). To this end, the government has urged commentators, journalists, academics and the general public to become more forceful in defending ‘Britishness’ (Kundnani 2015). Concomitantly, the introduction of new Prevent duty guidance in 2015 legally responsibilises professionals working in education, healthcare and welfare to identify the ‘tell-tale’ signs of radicalisation and to report those deemed to be ‘risky’ (see Nabulsi 2017; Mythen 2015). Government statistics for those referred from the first year since the duty guidance was introduced are troubling. Reporting on Home Office statistics, Versi (2016) notes Muslims, particularly young children are over-referred, with one in 500 subjected to Prevent measures in 2015–2016, a fact that is rooted in the design of the strategy rather than its implementation.

Despite widespread suspicion of Muslims, the assumption that radicalisation is rooted in Islam is without evidence. As Travis (2008) notes, the UK’s own intelligence agencies have long rejected this thesis. As far back as 2008 an MI5 report analysing the behaviour of several hundred convicted terrorists ascertained that most lacked religious literacy. Indeed, in opposition to State understandings of radicalisation rooted in ‘conveyor belt’ theory, the evidence suggests that well-established religious identities actually protect against propensity toward violent extremism. More recently, reporting on a review of a biographical database of 100 people involved in terrorism in Europe, Roy (2017) concluded that those who fall into violent extremism do not descend into violence through reading the Qur’an, or even adhering to conservative interpretations. Again, the evidence inverts governmental philosophy to note that paucity of religious knowledge and a proclivity toward hedonistic ‘western’ lifestyle are common factors among those convicted of terrorist related offences. Regardless of the lack of supporting evidence for the underlying assumptions of the Prevent strategy, it continues to encourage citizens toward surveillance of Muslims. This creates an atmosphere in which Muslims are structurally vilified and anti-Muslim attitudes are not only tolerated, but often celebrated as a form of patriotic protectionism.

The third overarching discourse that melds with and ideationally permits preventative counter-terrorism strategies and the mainstreaming of far-right ideology is the representation of
Islam and Muslims in the media. A plethora of empirical studies (see Ahmed and Matthes 2016; Allen 2012; Moore, Mason and Lewis 2008; Poole 2002) demonstrate that negative stereotypes of Muslims are commonplace based on Islamophobic discourses in media representation of Muslims. Ahmed and Matthes’s (2016) meta-study shows that Muslims are predominantly negatively framed, with Islam being portrayed as a violent religion. Allen’s review of such large-scale content studies concludes that Muslims are habitually associated with social problems and generally portrayed as threatening. Allen’s (2012, p. 9) analysis shows that the most common nouns associated with Islam and Muslims were ‘terrorist’, ‘extremist’, ‘Islamist’, ‘suicide bomber’ and ‘militant’. According to research developed at the University of Cambridge presented at the House of Lords in January 2017, longstanding, sustained and largely unchallenged mainstream media discourses have contributed to rising hostility towards Muslims in Britain. The report goes on to assert that under—representation of Muslims within journalism does little to tackle media bias with only 0.4% of British journalists being Muslim (Farmanfarmanian 2016). The mainstream media narrative is rooted in the cultural challenge Muslims present to ‘Britishness’, thereby intersecting with and enabling restrictive, targeted counter-terrorism measures that assume British Muslim culture itself breeds terrorism through its rejection of Britishness, which in turn melds with the normalisation of far-right rhetoric that locates Islam and Islamic culture as both alien and corrosive. The three mutually reinforcing social processes described above have been intersecting and crystallising for almost three decades, highlighting the normalisation of anti-Muslim discourse at the institutional level. Crucially, a lack of concentrated institutional action against Islamophobia has afforded a ‘permission to hate’ (Hussein and Poynting 2017, p. 335) at the everyday level, as illustrated by progressively negative public attitudes towards Muslims and in anti-Muslim hate crimes that not only increase year on year, but also peak in the wake of terrorist attacks (Burnett 2016).

Living with the consequences of Islamophobia: managing problematised identities

In a socio-political climate in which Islamophobia is prevalent, it is important to examine the impact of media and political discourses on the micro-level interaction strategies that British Muslims deploy to prevent, circumvent and challenge everyday anti-Muslim behaviours. To do this in what follows we will discuss salient findings from a qualitative study conducted in the northwest of England with a sample of 32 young British Pakistani Muslims aged between 18 and 25. The participants were recruited through existing contacts with the community and through snowball sampling thereafter. The study was conducted in two phases, the first involving four focus groups, the second comprising twelve in-depth interviews with participants from the focus group sample. The focus groups allowed participants to discuss sensitive topics in a safe space with peers from the same community, while the semi-structured interviews supported in—depth exploration of issues raised in the focus groups. All of the focus groups and interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim and axial encoding was conducted to organise the raw data into ideas, themes and phenomena as they arose (Strauss and Corbin 1997, p. 61). The data analysis process then moved into a second phase where the researchers discussed the emergent patterns and comprehensively compared them to the initial coding labels. This process yielded three micro level interaction strategies British Muslims deploy to prevent, circumvent and challenge everyday anti-Muslim behaviours which we will elaborate here: negotiation, deflection and resistance.

The discussion will draw on core concepts from both Homi Bhabha’s (1994) third space thesis and Erving Goffman’s The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959) to elucidate the ways in
which identities embedded in more than one cultural experience are performed and managed in an increasing hostile social context. This analysis will highlight the innumerable ways in which British Muslims successfully navigate the frequently conflicting demands of their hyphenated identities, merging their Islamic cultural and religious heritage with displays of Britishness. Sirin and Fine (2008, p. 156) assert Muslims living in the West since the turn of the 21st century must ‘work the hyphen’, carefully deploying strategic behaviours to traverse the contested social and political terrain in which their biographies are set. Here Homi Bhabha’s (1994) work on hybridised identities that exist in an interstitial ‘third space’ is useful. Bhabha alludes to the creative spaces between cultures in which new identities are formed and reformed. For him the third space is not a neutral territory in which cultures mix in equal parts with equal value. Rather it is a space that is saturated by power relations and one in which existing inequalities and imbalances are embodied by the actors within it, resulting in ‘unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation’ (Bhabha 1994, p. 245). Social hierarchies of contemporary Britain are mirrored in the third space and necessitate strategies concerned with performance management that seek to preserve a coherent and unspoiled self. In the analysis below we draw on the frameworks provided by Bhabha (1994) and Goffmann (1959) to illumine three strategies British Muslim participants in the study used to negotiate everyday situations at the intersection points between Islamic cultural heritage and British identities. First, we outline the elements of strategies of resistance, a tactic deployed when neither negotiation nor deflection is deemed appropriate and a robust defence of Islamic identity is warranted. It should be noted from the outset that although these categories are separated for analytical purposes they are not mutually exclusive in practice, being employed together or individually depending on the particular social context.

The first of these, negotiation, designates the British Muslim self as ambassador for Islam, adopting an attitude of tolerance and using reasoned argument to break down barriers, misconceptions and stereotypes, in short to present Islam positively. This strategy can take various forms, inter alia: embodying the cohesiveness of Islam and ‘British values’ by ‘performing normalcy’, an expression of ‘reactive pride’ for Islam and its values against sustained vilification, a mission to educate rooted in an authoritative understanding on the position of Islamic teachings coupled with expertise on global Muslim affairs. Each of these manifestations will be discussed in the context of participant experiences. One function of being an ambassador for Islam is to accentuate the cohesiveness of Islam and ‘Britishness’ by emphasising how Muslims are no different to individuals of other faiths. These acts, which we dub, ‘performing normalcy’, are connected to the wider practice of ‘performing safety’ (Mythen, Walklate and Khan 2009, p. 749) which is a type of self-regulation geared toward signposting the self as ‘safe’ to reduce the risk of victimisation. While this concept is concerned with diminishing the enunciation of Islam in interaction, including minimising outward cultural displays; moderating the use of Urdu in certain public contexts, removing traditionally Islamic clothing and consciously refusing to be drawn into contentious political debates. To this end, ‘performing normalcy’ amplifies similarities and attenuates differences in an attempt to undermine the ‘othering’ of British Muslims. The following focus group conversation among university students shows how they use their personal experiences and biographies to highlight consistencies between Islam and Britishness, with the aim of undermining popular perceptions.
Rabiya: I think that’s just a part of life now. You have to try to fit in as best you can, don’t you? You have to try to show people we’re no different to them really.

Zialdin: We are the same. I don’t really see any difference between me and most people I know. I’m Muslim, yeah, and yeah I do some things that they don’t do, like when I pray, but that’s private. So, there’s no real difference between us.

Rehana: I know what you’re saying, but we are different, normal differences like the differences between one group of white people from another or how white people are different to black people. It doesn’t mean we can’t get on. I use that in arguments, you know: ‘tell me how we are different?’ They never can though, because we’re more the same than different.

Here, the students echo essentialist discourses when claiming ‘we are all the same’ to challenge the stereotype of Muslims as problematically different. Spivak (1988) describes this as ‘strategic essentialism’; behaviour deployed by minority groups to resist negative stereotypes through minimising inter-group differences and highlighting shared characteristics. Here the strategy is used to lay claim to a Britishness that crosses cultural and religious difference, thereby redressing the notion that Islam is profoundly at odds with liberal democracies.

The impetus for using negotiation as a strategy in daily interactions is not confined to self-protection against discrimination (Mythen, Walklate and Khan 2009) or a desire to embody the cohesiveness of Islam and Britishness. It is rooted in a strong feeling of pride in Muslim heritage. Since the Rushdie affair of the late 1980s, Islam and its values that have been steadily denigrated while sustained and legitimised attacks have increased feelings of victimisation and marginalisation in the community (Zempi and Awan 2017). Negotiation in daily interactions is an opportunity for young British Muslims to redress identity balance through a phenomenon identified by Modood (2005, p. 292) as ‘reactive pride identity’. This constitutes intentional adoption of stigmatised social status as a reaction practised in the face of discrimination. In this case a British Muslim identity that voluntarily embraces and proudly displays Islamic identity as a reaction to domestic and global victimisation of the ummah. This is clearly illustrated in the following conversation between a group of young Muslim women discussing pride as a reaction to denigration and a desire to represent that pride in Islamic heritage by appearing unmistakably Muslim.

Basanti: In the past, I hated anyone saying anything about my scarf. I’d really go on the defensive. Now though, I realise that’s my opportunity to stand up for myself, put people right about Islam. I show them I’m proud of being a Muslim, and that’s why I wear it. It’s become more about showing the world I’m Muslim and I don’t care.

Pia: It’s hard, but I’m sick of always having to be nice about it. Sometimes I just want to say, ‘and what? It’s a scarf, deal with it.’ It’s not about what they think. It’s up to us to speak out. Who else is going to talk about it, or anything to do with Muslims if we don’t? At the end of the day it’s us who know about Islam and what it means.

Both Basanti and Pia respond to their designated status by adopting the stigma symbol that marks them out as ‘other’. By refusing all attempts to locate the veil as a symbol of Islamic patriarchy, Pia and Basanti re-claim and socially re-position it and thus themselves as veiled women that exist outside of disparaging normative discourses. Increasing identification to a socially group can alleviate the effects of stigma by tapping into the positive feelings of pride. Not only do such behaviours counter everyday Islamophobia, positive identification with Islam acts as a psychological barrier against the incessant cultural denigration of Islam in the media, thereby protecting the self from castigation. This assertion is consolidated by Abu-Rayya et al’s study.
that reported a positive relationship between accentuating Islam’s positive attributes and well-being among Muslims (Abu Rayya et al. 2016).

Pia also raises an interesting point about in-depth knowledge of Islam and Muslim affairs. She claims being an ‘expert’ in daily interactions generates a self-confidence from which to lead discussions and challenge stereotypes. The following conversation segues with Pia’s assertions:

Abid: I’m always surprised by how little most people know about Islam. But they always have to have an opinion, don’t they. I don’t want to say they’re all ignorant, but yeah most of them are. I’m sure they get everything from the media. It’s not from having Muslim friends or spending time in Muslim countries. I bet they get all their information from other white people, what they’ve seen written about Muslims, or from friends when they’re out drinking.

Sajid: Yeah white people, writing lies for other white people. You know that thing about ignorance, that’s why I have to speak up. They don’t want to know about what’s happened in the Middle East, about how wealth here is built on Muslim backs. Most people don’t even know their own history and how Muslims fit into that. When you hear that sort of crap you have to say something. I almost feel it’s my duty to put people straight.

Sirin and Fine’s study (2008) which examined young Muslims daily lives in the American context, concluded that religious and cultural expertise allows individuals to confidently correct everyday fallacies about Islamic teachings. Here both Abid and Sajid express a confidence in their advanced knowledge of Muslim geo-politics and Islamic scripture that provides them with a solid platform from which to subvert everyday rehearsal of normative discourses.

Having explored how British Muslims identities are forged in a third space through negotiation, our empirical study suggests that cognate strategies of deflection are also frequently mobilised. Strategies of deflection are somewhat similar to negotiation in that they require a degree of acceptance of anti-Muslim sentiment. However, while negotiation embraces ‘Muslimness’ to subvert common stereotypes, deflection necessarily requires the actor to distance the self from the stigmatised social status of being Muslim. In this way, deflection strategies allow British Muslims to circumvent uncomfortable discussions or potential victimisation through omitting mention of personal values, religious beliefs and certain cultural practices.

Deflection can thus be understood as a transitory form of ‘mimicry’ (Bhabha 1994, p. 86). It acts as a form of emulation that appears when members of a colonised society imitate and take on aspects of the culture of former colonisers. Yet, rather than being an act of direct coercion, the actor performs a double articulation, whereby the ‘other’ is appropriated for power as she or he visualises it. Deflection is a type of mimicry that is space and time contingent and has the specific purpose of controlling and guiding particularly tricky face to face interactions to avoid both conflict and ruptures in performance. While mimicry is an act, deflection can be defined as an action and a strategic tactic. An individual might actively blend in, by speech or action as discussed above, or may choose to employ a silence or omission of personal characteristics or beliefs in order to avoid disrupting immediate impression management. Here we discuss accounts that show an appearance of being the same as non-Muslims, not by emulation but by muting difference. In our analysis, deflection is a performance management strategy that takes two forms. First, it facilitates transitions between different social situations. Second, it serves as a method of conflict avoidance during interactions operationalised via self-censorship in speech and demeanour. These strategies allow the actor to perform different personas across social situations that appear incongruent, while at the same time maintaining coherent internal beliefs and values.
The discussion in the previous section shows Pia and Basanti embracing the social stigma attached to the *hijab* to display pride in their Muslim identities. They invite discussions with the purpose of challenging negative stereotypes that associate veiling with patriarchal oppression. By way of contrast, in the account below deflection rather than engagement is used to negotiate an identity built on diverging belief systems. Aafreen chooses to deflect negative associations by simply removing the headscarf, effectively breaking any association between her and the imposed stigma otherwise associated with veiling.

**Aafreen:** I don’t really have any choice but to wear a scarf to college, but I always take it off if I’m going out afterwards. It’s okay to wear it at home and stuff, but it’s easier not to when you’re out some places. People always have something to say and most of the time I can’t be bothered to deal with it. So I don’t. I just make sure I put it on before I go home, just to avoid any trouble. Why make trouble for yourself? It’s just an easier life, to do what I do. Then I don’t get any hassle anywhere.

Aafreen explains how she enhances ‘Muslimness’ around the family and reduces it in the public sphere. It is a self-conscious strategy that allows her to ‘fit in’ and avoid conflict by making a simple change. As Aafreen remarks, ‘it’s just an easier life’. This account illustrates how deflection allows actors a degree of elasticity to selectively reveal or withhold traits to facilitate a smooth transition between social spaces that cross the hyphen. The transition was not confined to clothing choices across social space but also the types of behaviours that were knowingly revealed or exposed in specific contexts.

**Zialdin:** There’s some stuff you’re not going to take home. I never really talk about going out with my friends, where we go or what we get up to. There’s no point. It’s about keeping everything easy. I don’t want to choose who I am, I want to be both.

Aafreen and Zialdin’s accounts show how superficial changes allow them to control and tailor performances to each context without altering core identity. Essentially, they mimic the differing norms of each situation without appearing to enter the third space, when in fact recognising that one’s hybridity is a precondition of such an impression management strategy. While this approach appears to be an unproblematic way of managing the transitions ‘across the hyphen’, the above accounts do not fully illuminate the profound impact on an individual’s day to day experience and personal reality. To simply define hybridised identities as fluid and manageable through small changes of performance across the different ‘stages’ of daily interactions elides the negative impacts for the self and the routine but necessary struggles to manage these. Fazal’s account highlights the difficulties involved in negotiating identity in the third space:

**Fazal:** I don’t like doing it, not at all. I feel really bad lying to my family sometimes. I know I’m a different person at home to when I’m out with my friends. I honestly think it would be too hard to deal with, so lying is easier. People always say honesty and all that, but if you’re Muslim it’s sometimes difficult saying the truth. You just can’t do it. I know it’s a crap situation, but it’s just the way it is.

Attempts by Muslim youth to negotiate these dualities in the Canadian context has led Zine to propose that some young Muslims display ‘split personality syndrome’ (Zine 2008, p. 4) in that they develop a double persona in efforts to resolve cultural contradictions involved...
in living ‘at the hyphen’. Here Fazal illustrates Zines’s assertion suggesting that differences across the hyphen can only be managed through omissions and misrepresentations. In addition, he indicates the deception necessary to manage the hyphen creates feelings of guilt, an assertion that was echoed across the discussions. Participants in the study spoke of ‘compromising’ or ‘hiding’ their beliefs, not ‘being themselves’ or feeling disingenuous. Frequent self-censorship during everyday interactions was chosen as a course of action despite subsequent self-admonishment, shame or guilt. The conversation below highlights the accumulative cost of maintaining an unspoiled social self at the expense of repeatedly repressing aspects of the Muslim self in public.

**Fazal:** I deliberately stay away from talking about Islam and all the controversial stuff. I don’t really like all the confrontation. Some people can’t help but go for you. It’s just afterwards; you know when you feel you’ve let yourself down, let your family down. Then I think I should’ve said something. It’s hard to get rid of that feeling.

**Adil:** I know. Once this friend of mine said something about how they’d watched this documentary and he couldn’t understand why Muslims had to be so violent. His whole argument came down to him believing Islam is violent. I didn’t say anything because I just can’t be bothered arguing. I was the only Muslim there and just couldn’t see the point in trying to challenge him. Anyway, it really stayed with me, that feeling like I’d betrayed everyone. It felt like, all those Muslims who’ve suffered because of the West, and I couldn’t even stand up for myself. It got so I couldn’t stand him anymore. I actually hate him.

This discussion reveals frustration, anger and self-recrimination when fundamental aspects of the self are subdued to maintain contextual equilibrium because fluidity of external presentations does not correspond to fluidity of core beliefs and values. In Goffmanian terms, social actors are ‘merchants of morality’ (Goffman 1956, p. 156), as such they define the moral contours of a situation and attempt to convincingly project themselves as moral beings within the definition of that particular situation. Here, acting according to the definition of the situation and its attendant moral norms necessitates the subjugation of core values. The British Muslim actor must deflect a salient part of identity, which renders the hyphenated self insecure, resulting in feelings of regret, shame, and self-admonishment. In this way, the negative impacts of deflection reverse the pride and empowerment that can arise from negotiation strategies that necessitate embracing Islam. Deflection strategies potentially distance the self from Islam and protect against public denigrations of the self. Yet, on the flip side, they simultaneously contribute to feelings of shame associated with denying a salient part of one’s identity.

Despite the differences in outcomes, the aim of both these strategies is to avoid ruptures in the sense of a cohesive British Muslim identity. In the final analytical section we discuss resistance as a method deployed in interactions where both negotiation and deflection are deemed inadequate and only a robust and explicit opposition to perceived Islamophobia is suitable. The extracts below highlight how resistance is used as a last resort to tackle persistent anti-Islamic behaviour. Participant’s accounts indicate two main reasons for reticence in using resistance; first, open conflicts rupture daily interactions that are preserved by negotiation and deflection. Second, the negative impacts of conflict based on accusations of racism endure beyond the timeframe of the initial rupture. Here, Taj describes deploying deflection in order to maintain cordial workplace relations until the point at which resistance became a necessary response to grievous mockery of Islamic culture.
Taj: This woman at work, she kept on saying ‘Well, you’re not like a real Muslim, because you’re allowed to work, you’re allowed to show your hair, you are allowed to go out.’ I didn’t want to argue with her so I left it, for ages. I knew she was a bit racist and I just didn’t want to get into it. Who wants to go to work and end up fighting with people? In the end, she forced me to respond. It happened so often, I ended up telling her she was an ignorant racist. . . . If it was one thing I would’ve stayed quiet, but . . . Now we don’t really speak. It makes situations really awkward. That’s what I didn’t want to happen.

Here, Taj resists gendered anti-Islamic stereotypes through confrontation after an extended period of deflection. Her unveiled status is deemed positive in relation to normative Islamophobic representations of veiled women. In positioning Taj as an ‘acceptable’ Muslim, her colleague denigrates both veiled women and Muslims more widely. This extract illustrates the unwillingness to use resistance to both avoid the confrontation itself and its future consequences. Deploying explicit resistance a last resort is echoed by Fazal and Adil in a conversation about playing football at the local sports club.

Fazal: How many times did that guy keep saying stuff about Muslims? He couldn’t keep his mouth shut. We spoke about him so many times, about how to ignore it. It went on for weeks. One week it’d be comments like, ‘Why you even here, you lot play cricket?’, then it’d be thinking he was funny by calling us terrorists. When he called my brother Talib, sorry, I just lost it. Sorry, no.

Adil: They just want a bit of controversy. See if they can rile you a bit, get a response from you. In the end they get the reaction they want. But it was us who lost out. We’re the ones who don’t get a game now.

In both of the above extracts, resistance is deployed only after deflection has been unsuccessful as a conflict avoidance strategy. Reluctance to engage in conflict around Islam and anti-Muslim racism is enacted to avoid long-term disruptions to social relationships. Yet there are limits to this strategy and consequences when alternative modes of resistance are deemed necessary. In Taj’s case his workplace relationships have suffered, while Adil and Fazal have been excluded from selection for subsequent football matches.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to explore the everyday experience of young British Muslims and to contextualise participant narratives in wider ideological discourses that construct Muslims in the UK as ‘other’. In order to do so, the chapter outlined three mutually reinforcing processes that provide the societal backdrop for Muslims lives in the UK; the normalisation of far right ideology, negative representations within an Islamophobic mainstream media that has been largely unregulated over the past three decades and security and counter-terrorism policies that have both targeted Muslims and defined them as simultaneously risky and at risk of radicalisation. Within this broader setting the chapter set out to map everyday strategies used by young British Muslims to negotiate, deflect and resist everyday manifestations of legitimised Islamophobia. In order to illuminate these strategies we have drawn upon data from a study focussed on the daily experiences of British Muslim youth living in the northwest of England. While the testimonies of our participants were varied and diverse, in this chapter we have sought to illumine three fluid forms of identity management that have emerged in the context of a hostile environment. First, we discussed techniques of negotiation, through which
individuals seek to combat everyday Islamophobia by using reasoned argument and adopting a tolerant attitude. In this mode individuals act as envoys for their religion, embodying and furthering greater understanding between British Muslims and wider society. Second, we documented practices of deflection through which participants sought to avoid potentially difficult social interactions through concealment and strategic omissions. Third, we elucidated forms of resistance, a tactic deployed when neither negotiation nor deflection is deemed appropriate and a robust defence of Islamic identity is warranted. As an ensemble, these impression management strategies ensure minimum degradation of the hyphenated self in daily life. Yet, it must be recognised that such intensive identity management is only required as a response to institutionalised ideological processes that have normalised the denigration of Islam and Muslims. It is the ideology that underpins Islamophobia — routinely reproduced in political rhetoric, the mainstream media and within national security policies — that permits hostility against Muslims. Rather than being managed by those subjected to them, such micro acts of everyday aggression must be challenged and eradicated.

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