Intersections of 'race' and class in the social and political identifications of young Muslims in England

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Paper presented as part of the Keynote Symposium on 'Theorising 'Race' and Racisms in education' to the British Education Research Association (BERA) Conference, at the University of Glamorgan. (14th to 17th) September 2005
Introduction

This paper focuses on the impact of racism on the lives and schooling of Muslim youth against the backdrop of the politicisation of Muslim identities. Since the mid to late 1980s against the background of broader economic and social changes at a global level there has been an increasing focus on religious identities. In the UK the Rushdie affair\(^1\) sparked a series of debates about the (in)compatibility of Muslim cultures with Western values and about whether Muslims could ever be integrated into British Society. Such debates have spiralled out of control in the aftermath of the London bombings and attempted bombings of July 2005.

Since the events of September 11, 2001, Muslim youth, especially Muslim boys and young men have come under unprecedented scrutiny with questions being asked in media and policy circles about their social and political allegiances. A group that was once regarded as passive and law-abiding especially when compared with their African-Caribbean counterparts has since the late 1980s been firmly recast as a threat to the social order. Alongside arguments about their religious identifications various policy debated on integration after the inner-city disturbances of 2001 and about the educational ‘under-achievement’ of Pakistani and Bangladeshi boys have also contributed to the identification of Muslim boys (of south Asian descent in particular) as a social problem. The repositioning of Muslim boys and men as dangerous fanatics is intimately linked with the representation of Muslim women as the ever more passive victims of oppressive cultures. Since

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\(^1\) The *Satanic Verses* controversy began in 1988 with the publication of a novel in which Salman Rushdie explores the themes of cultural alienation, racism and the role of religion. The strong opposition to the book was based upon the thin line it drew between fact and fiction. Rushdie cast doubts on the authenticity of the *Quoran*, implying that parts of it were the work of the devil. It was in England, and particularly in Bradford, that the strongest reaction to the book was manifest. Although the first book burning was held in Bolton in December 1988, when 7,000 people staged a demonstration, the greatest publicity and condemnation was directed at the famous book burning in Bradford in January 1989. On February 14th 1989, the Ayatollah's *fatwa* was issued, leading to a dramatic turn in events as demonstrations against the book led to scenes of anger, violence and destruction in many parts of the world. But it was the participation of young Asian men in places such as Bradford that grabbed the attention of observers and social analysts.
masculinity is defined in relation to femininity - it is what femininity is not - the more dangerous, volatile, and aggressive that Muslim men and boys appear to be, the more passive, controlled and vulnerable Muslim girls and women are assumed to be.

The supposed radicalisation of Muslim youth and its impact on current discourses of masculinity and femininity

The Rushdie Affair was a major turning point for British Muslims not only in terms of the re-categorisations of various ethnic (Mirpuri, Bangladeshi, Pakistani) groups into religious (Muslim) ones that it invoked, but, also because it occurred around the same time as other protests involving Muslim youth in Europe's inner cities. Such protests have since been read to signal the emergence of radicalisation of Muslim youth across the landscape of Europe and beyond, representing a generalised threat to western democratic ideals.

Over the last decade but especially since September 11 2001, policy and political analysts have been concerned with trying to understand why young Muslims may be 'turning towards' more radical versions of Islam. Such explanations have focussed on:

- The alienation of Muslim youth from the processes of local democracy
- The alienation from elders within their communities
- The role of Information and Communications technology and especially the internet
- Frustration at western foreign policy especially British and US in the middle east and Afghanistan.

2 I am thinking here mainly of the headscarf controversy in France in 1989 when 3 schoolgirls were sent home from school for wearing the hijab sparking a major controversy about the relationship between Islam and the secular values institutionalised in the democracy
The personal and social contexts encountered by those who have been alleged to have engaged in terrorists activities, i.e., they are 'born on the wrong side of the tracks'.

A range of complex issues is covered by these debates which I am unable to deal with here. My purpose in drawing attention to these various arguments about the supposed radicalisation of Muslim youth is to highlight two tendencies in recent media, policy and even some academic discourses which have a bearing not only on current representations of Muslim masculinity and femininity but also on the schooling of Muslim boys and girls.

First, the tendency to read any general assertion of Islamic identity as linked to Islamism which has been described as a particularly totalitarian ideology that is subscribed to by a minority of extremists such as the Taliban and which has become synonymous with terrorism. In the aftermath of the London bombings, British Prime Minister Tony Blair's comments implied a direct link between attendance at a madrasa (place of education) and training for terrorism. Such arguments had been in currency also after September 11.

Second, the tendency to deny agency to Muslim youth. I am thinking here of arguments about the supposed brainwashing of Muslim youth by 'mad imams' as if Muslim youth are not capable of independent thought. This has especially been the case for Muslim girls who are commonly portrayed as victims with the hijab or Islamic dress coming to symbolise both this repression and a refusal of Muslim communities to integrate into western societies. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the case, Shabina Begum, the Luton schoolgirl who earlier this year (in March 2005) won the right to wear the jilbab (a long loose gown that reveals only face and hands) to school is an example.

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3 see for example Abbas's argument about the tipton three and the dudley 2. See also Appleton's critique of this search of the causes of fundamentalism in an old ideology of Islam, The Fundamentalist question, spiked politics 2001
4 Pandelis (2002?) calls for a distinction between what he terms of Muslim voices (Modood uses the term Muslim assertiveness) or ... And Political Islam which describes as....
5 reference?
of both of these tendencies. Although Shabina appeared in public as highly articulate, confident and
determined, asserting that the decision to fight for the right to wear such clothing was her own, the
media pounced on the fact that her brother was a member of the radical Islamic group Hiz-bu-
tachrir and must therefore have put her up to it. Islamic dress is currently the subject of much
debate and discussion and it is not possible for me to deal with the full extent its controversy here.
I do wish to point out however, that is not always the case that girls' families force them to adopt the
_hijab_. In some cases girls adopt it as of resistance both to western values and to their own families.

It is in this context that it is important to look at how Muslim youth themselves define their
experiences of living in England particularly at a time when there are heightened tensions following
the activities and debates of recent months. In the next section I draw on research from two research
projects that I have been involved in, in order to challenge these dominant discourses on Muslim
masculinity and femininity and by doing so offer an alternative account of the identifications of
Muslim south Asian youth in England. The first is a project that is concerned more generally with
issues of schooling and identity in relation to Asian girls (who were predominately from Muslim
families); the second more specifically concerned with social and political identification of Muslim
boys and young men in a post Sept 11 context.

An alternative account of Muslim youth experiences and identifications

1. The Asian Girls project

This research focused on the strategies that Asian girls used to deal with their experiences of
schooling society and was completed in mid 1990s. It drew on interviews (as part of a broader
ethnographic approach) with 44 Asian girls across 8 schools in Greater Manchester and

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6 see Darymple's critique of the supposed link between Madrasas nad Terrorism ('A largely bourgeois endeavour', in _Guardian_, July 20th 2005.
7 see for example Deborah Orr's analysis where she concludes, 'I know that many Muslims are uneasy about this case
and feel that is going to make life in Britain harder for them than easier. The awful thing is I fear, that this is exactly
what it was designed to do. It's already after all, working like a charm'. _Independent_, page13, 5th March 2005).
Staffordshire. The girls were aged 13-16 and were Muslim, Hindu and Sikh from Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi backgrounds though Pakistani Muslims were in the majority (over 80%).

My research revealed that the girls' identities were shaped by a complex interaction of various factors (ie not just religion) including 'race', religion, gender, sexuality and ethnicity. Despite sharing common class and regional locations (they were all located in economically deprived areas that had suffered from the decline of manufacturing which was the major factor in their coming to England) and whilst also being subject to common cultural definitions of them as passive, timid and over-controlled, the girls were able to take a range of identity positions which I refer to as strategies. Through an analysis of the girls' accounts of schooling, friendships, family and peer relations I found five main strategies in evidence. These were:

- Resistance Through Culture - The 'Gang Girls'
- Survival - The 'Survivors'
- Rebellion (against culture) - The 'Rebels'
- Religious prioritisation - The 'Faith Girls'
- Resistance Against Culture

Resistance through culture

The **Gang girls** as I call them drew on a strategy of ‘us and them’ like that found in Willis’s (1977) study but unlike the ‘lads’ they defined their experiences primarily with reference to racism and positively asserted their ethnic i.e. Asian identities. The Gang girls challenged dominant stereotypes of Asian girls as passive, timid and quiet by becoming involved in a number of rule-breaking activities, including fighting to defend themselves from attack. Their prioritisation of racism as a source of oppression in school led to the formation of an All-Asian female subculture, from which
white students and teachers and Asian students who appeared to ally with while in the school, were excluded.

The Gang girls were found predominantly in the lower academic sets and did not expect to study beyond compulsory schooling. In identifying racism as the main cause of their oppression, they appeared to accept and provide justification for the probability that they would not be allowed by their parents to proceed into further education or work. They saw school as a place to have to have fun and adopted a number of strategies to defeat boredom, including truanting and using their home languages as a mechanism of white exclusion. They also tried to convince other Asian girls of the inevitability of their future roles solely as wives and mothers. Guiding this action was the inherent belief that change was not possible - this fatalism drew as much on their local class cultures as it did on their Asian cultures. The girls actively challenged the stereotypes of quietness and passivity but were punished more harshly by staff for doing so than white students who similarly broke school rules. By rejecting schooling the Gang girls played an active part in the conditions of their oppression.

Survival

The 'Survivors' adopted a strategy of apparent passivity – working within stereotypes focusing mainly on achieving academic success in the long term. They prioritised neither racism, nor sexism though they experienced both. The Survivors appeared to conform to the stereotypes of quiet and shy Asian girls and did not actively resist either sexism or racism in school. However, this apparent conformity was part of a conscious strategy of survival. Unlike the Gang girls, they did not use language as a mechanism for excluding white students and made a deliberate attempt to form friendships across ethnic boundaries. Although they were not exempt from name-calling, the Survivors enjoyed positive relations with white students and with staff as a result of their apparent conformity to the dominant stereotype of Asian girls.

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The Survivors were in the higher academic sets in school and were determined to realise their definite career plans. The majority intended to combine careers with marriage but expected their parent to choose their marriage partners for them. Academic success was the key factor motivating their survival strategies and a major consequence of this response was deferred gratification. Accordingly, the girls did not involve themselves in rule-breaking activities, neither did they engage in relationships that might threaten their positive relations with parents or staff in school. They carefully secured the trust and support of their parents through their survival strategy. However, other Asian students in school labelled them as 'stuck up' because they associated with schoolmates across ethnic boundaries. Their survival strategies offer the potential to widen access into higher and further education for young Asian women but cannot be read without reference to broader patterns of discrimination that exist in the labour marker.

Rebellion (against culture)

The ‘Rebels’ as teachers referred to them, prioritised uneven gender relations within their communities. Without actively resisting these, they were critical of parental and community values and they actively dissociated themselves from the Gang girls.

Like the Survivors, the Rebels were mostly in the higher academic sets at school and enjoyed positive relations with staff. They were the most likely to dress in western fashion but as they had their parents' permission this did not indicate active resistance. Both immediate and deferred gratification was in evidence, with some of the girls allowing leisure pursuits, such as going to night-clubs, to interfere with school work. They also communicated their willingness to involve themselves in romantic relations, but without the knowledge of their parents. Their willingness to associate with boys and to positively dissociate with the Asian girls groups led to their experiencing sexist name-calling at school. Although they experienced racism, the Rebels prioritised uneven gender relations within their communities. Some described their parent's views as 'backward'. Thus, on occasion their views displayed an internalisation of racist ideology and this was further evince in
their negative description of other young Asian women in their schools. The Rebels played active role in the transformation of their cultures by rejecting some aspects and accepting other aspects of religious and cultural teachings. However, their actions within school were contrasted with those of other Asian girls who they characterised as 'backward' or 'refusing to integrate'. This their action unwittingly reinforced the negative imagery of Asians in British society.

Religious prioritisation

The ‘Faith girls’ as I call them, adopted a survival strategy and for the most part worked hard to achieve academic success. But, they positively asserted their religious identities and were prepared to act defiantly when a religious principle was perceived as being attacked. Like the Gang girls, The Faith girls highlighted the operation of racism in school, but they did not actively involve themselves in fighting. Confrontations with other students in the school or with teachers arose only when a religious principle or practice was being attacked. The Faith girls were in the mid to higher sets and were regarded positively by staff for two main reasons: firstly they were 'see' to integrate, because in school they formed friendships that crossed ethnic boundaries; secondly they appeared to conform to the stereotype of the shy Asian girl.

Deferred Gratification was an important consequence of this response. The Faith girls did not involve themselves actively in all-Asian friendship groups. Instead they worked consciously to achieve academic goals,. A striking characteristic of the Faith girls was that they displayed a willingness to forsake future career plans for marriage. They were also readily accepting of their parents' choice of marriage partner. Unlike the Gang girls, this prospect did not cause them to reject schooling and replace it with strategies to defeat boredom in school They continued to pursue academic success in the hope that their parents might allow them to succeed, so ultimately adopting a survival strategy.
A fifth strategy, of **Resistance against culture**, was not found in the main study, only in the pilot study for this research. There were three main reasons for this. Firstly, most of the girls viewed their parental cultures as a positive source of identity and did not wish to resist their parents overtly. This was also the case when they required their parent's trust in order to pursue academic goals. Secondly, direct and overt resistance was not necessary for some girls, because their parents permitted them to adapt cultural practices as appropriate. Thirdly, some of the Asian girls avoided overt resistance because they had learned from the experiences of other Asian girls that resistance did not pay. They knew that such resistance could have severe consequences, such as being withdrawn from school or even being 'sent back to Pakistan'. I have retained it as a possible strategy because it exists even if uncommon.

I have drawn on these strategies employed by Asian girls here in order to illustrate the varied nature of their responses. While dominant discourses both of Asian femininity and Muslim femininity position them as the passive victims of oppressive cultures, the strategies outlined above reveal that they are anything but. Rather than being the passive recipients of fixed cultures, Asian girls are actively engaged in producing new cultural identities by drawing on residual elements of their home cultures and reinterpreting them in the local cultural spaces they inhabit. These reinterpretations are shaped and influenced by a variety of factors including gender relations within their communities as well as in the mainstream, their class locations and their locality. Although I have drawn on five strategies to describe these reinterpretations, I want to suggest that these strategies presented are in no way exhaustive or static and are subject to change at different historical moments and so the same young women may draw on more than strategy at different times in their lives.

In order to illustrate further the ways in which young people's identities are shaped by a complex interrelationship of a number of factors. I also draw here on the Muslim boys' project.
The Muslim boys project

This project involves two stages of research. The first part (conducted jointly with Dr. Bulent Gokay at Keele) involved focus group and individuals interviews with a group of 12 boys and young men (aged 11-18) who regularly attended a youth group in one inner-city local neighbourhood - Newtown in the West Midlands. This part of the research was conducted in May and June 2002. The second part of the project, which began in June 2003 and is ongoing, involves interviews with schoolboys aged 12-16 also in the same area. The geographical area in which the boys are located is characterised by widespread poverty and high unemployment and racial tensions. Manufacturing accounts for around 35% of employment in the area. A high number of people claim housing benefit and higher than average numbers of children in the city is eligible for free school meals. Unemployment is around 6% which is higher than average for Britain 4.9%. In Newtown this figure is even higher - 8.6%. The proportion of ethnic minorities is 5.25 including Irish but 6.8% for under 16s. Ethnic minorities account for just 8% in this particular town, they are largely concentrated in two neighbourhoods Newtown and Belstone which each account for 40% of the minority population. The interviews with the boys focused on a range of themes including their experiences of family, neighbourhood and schooling but it was politics that emerged strongly across the interviews

September 11 and the 'war on terrorism'

There was strong agreement among the boys that the events of Sept 11 2001, and the ensuing 'war on terrorism' have had a significant impact on the local community. But the boys were keen to point out that rather than producing something new, September 11 had merely aggravated existing tensions. The boys’ accounts reveal that new racist terms of abuse such as Bin Laden have been added to the usual repertoire of racist insults. In the early 1990s Rushdie and Saddam were

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9 This research is reported more fully in Shain and Gokay (2002) Inner city lives, Muslim youth perceptions and urban practices in England (paper presented to AARE conference, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia).
appropriated as new racialised terms of abuse. The comments below are illustrative of some of the views expressed on this issue:

No the thing is they started thinking, since, since like that incident happened September the 11th, they think all Muslims are terrorists when they haven't even got evidence that it was him (Bin Laden). They're just accusing him because they're scared of him.

They started being more sickening in their attitudes towards Asian people. They look at every other Asian as a terrorist…they judge the whole crowd by…they judge the majority by the minority. [Before Sept 11th], it was bad but not that bad. That just triggered it. They didn't used to call us terrorists then they used to call us pakis.

It just got worse….it's everywhere we go because every time some war kicks off on the TV or anything like that, or anytime a bomb goes off in any country, they think Bin Laden's behind it. Everything that goes on, they think it's Muslims.

Media is bad news. You know because at the end of the day who's running the media? Americans and all the British and they're the ones that hate Muslims. And at the end of the day, Muslims are going to take over one time and they ain't gonna like it. They'll come in numbers.

The boys' youth worker also shared the boys concerns about the impact of September 11 on Muslims:

People are really sceptical about this whole thing [the war on terror] thinking there's justification for them to kill Muslims if they suspect that…they can suspect what they want…it's like a different day, a different era. And as much as the people have been
discussing Sept 11, it has had a massive impact on the community. We've had a lot of how can you put it.. from the white community ..Some really ignorant comments.. Like oh I wonder what it would be like ‘you couldn't really go on holiday now could you?’ Because we look like terrorists. …That’s the sort of stupid thing they're saying. Whatever they've been fed by the press that's what they've been repeating. Because they’re white they class themselves as being the same culture as the Europeans and the Americans. I don't see any belonging.. Growing up, Asian people have got this togetherness … white people don't have in their own families let alone in their communities.

What the above comments suggest is that the events of September and 11 2001 and the ensuing ‘war on terrorism’ have fuelled a deep sense of scepticism about the West and its motives. For the boys and their youth worker the whole affair has fuelled a sharp sense of non-belonging – a polarisation of communities but they were keen to point out that such tensions were not caused by Sept 11 alone -it had merely aggravated existing tensions.

What the boys accounts also reveal is that when talking about the impact of global events such as September 11, their Muslim identities came to the fore . They referred to themselves and others as Muslims (although in one of the accounts referred to above, Asian is still a preferred label). And yet on the other hand - arguments about territory and turf dominated the boys’ talk.

Avtar Brah's observations about the local cultures inhabited by Muslim youth are particularly useful to refer to here:

The lived cultures than young Muslim[s] .. inhabit are highly differentiated according to such factors as country of origin, rural/urban background prior to migration, regional and linguistic background in the subcontinent, class position in the subcontinent as well as in Britain, and regional location in Britain. British Asian
cultures are not simply a carry over from the (country of origin) . . . Hence Asian cultures of London may be distinguished from their counterparts in Birmingham. Similarly, east London cultures have distinctive features as compared with those from west London. (Brah, 1993, pp. 448-9)

One aspect of this relates to the boys’ location in Newtown which like neighbouring Belstone hosts the majority of the ethnic minority population. Historically there have been rivalries between working class youth in Belstone and Newtown that seem to have had a lasting legacy as minority (mainly Muslim) youth have taken up residence in those white working class areas. These working class rivalries it would seem have now taken on a specifically racialised character. As the excerpt below illustrates, this involves struggles over territory with not only white youth but also with other Muslim Asian boys:

The only common factor was that we're Muslim …But the differences [in perception between the youth of both neighbourhoods] were.. Right, from Belstone…'The thing about Newtown is that they all dress like niggers'. Newtown, 'The thing about Belstone is that they're all well-behind.. proper typical Pakis’ so this is what these are labelling theories that come from the European side …We call it area-ism.

The boys from Newtown here draw a distinction between their own brand of street culture (which draws on 'black' or African-Caribbean definitions of street culture, styles of dress and musical identifications - eg the emphsis on having the right labels, listening to rap) and other Asian boys who by comparison display a more 'towny' masculinity that reflects an engagement with more traditional ideas of what is fashionable (eg bollywood style with loud shirts and tight jeans and more traditional forms of music).
The rivalry takes many shapes and comes through clearly in discussions about football.

We play five a side in tournaments but we the thing is you know what the problem is with the …it’s a territorial thing. Newtown v Belstone…

In relation to their interactions with white working class youth the boys drew on particular expressions of masculinity with the emphasis here on sporting prowess.

See the thing was.. When we went there, they (white boys) weren't better than us in table tennis, they weren't better than us in pool and when we played football against them they thought they thought they were better than us but then we proved 'em wrong. And we beat 'em at that, that just topped it off that just put the cherry on the cake.

White girls play a central role in these masculine rivalries.

we would talk to the girls but the boys wouldn't talk to us and they didn't like it that we were talking to their girls and Tariq was doing something naughty with one of 'em so….

Racist name-calling and racial violence were central in defining the boys' experiences with local white youth and in their everyday experiences of schooling. The boys reported that their attempts to interact with local white youth in neighbouring clubs were met with hostility, suspicion and racism. Racist name-calling was cited by some of the boys as a mechanism of excluding them. ‘They called us curry monster…and they called him a chocolate bum and him a chocolate soldier' said one. Another reported physical violence

Yeah I went to [another club in Oldwych] but then like a lot of fighting happened because we were Asians and they were whites and there were a lot of conflicts and because they
…the white workers couldn’t interact with the Asians they had to call Aziz (Youth worker) which is wrong. Why call another Asian because they're youth workers? They should be trained to deal with all different people. Why did they have call Aziz who lives in Newtown who knows these children - do you get me? There's no point. Why not just let the people who are working there deal with the Asian children?

The example cited below illustrates the degree of racial violence that is accepted as part of routine experience:

In my school there was a fight..quite a lot of them. There was a kafuffle and someone hit this guy in the head with a hammer. No names, everyone knows who he is and he hit the guy in the head with a dotty hammer and the other guy slashed him in the head with the scissors and with a pen – this gorrah [white boy] and this is five minutes before...there was no one.. Everyday there's a teacher in the canteen. That day there wasn't and the was already trouble in the school and it just got kicked off in the canteen and they went down the corridor and that when Tariq over there hit the guy with the hammer ...we found out afterward some guy had crushed his fingers and they had to call Aziz in, and the REC and the thing was yeah they wouldn't treat us... as soon as Aziz and that turned up they treat us differently but when they're gone they treat us treat us differently again.

It is clear from the above that such incidents occur in informal learning environment when teachers are not present but there is also an accusation that lip-service is paid to equal opportunities and that once out of the gaze of the REC schools, schools turn a blind eye to such incidents. The boys wanted such incidents to be dealt with promptly and quickly in order for trust to be restored in the teachers. Arshad cited above goes on to extend this argument to political attempts to intervened
...argue that if such incidents as the above are left unchallenged, then talk of dealing with racism is meaningless:

You see, if that MP [David Blunkett] wants to get rid of all this racism and all that, how can that happen when incidents like Ashfields, when like all racism in schools and everything happen. First you've got to clean that up before you can get to communities..., that's true isn't it? You have to start at the bottom, then work your way up.

The incident to which he refers in Ashfields was a more formal attempt to get local white and Asian youth to interact through a football match. But as with many such attempts the outbreak of violence brought a swift end to the day. Yacoub, the boys’ youth worker explains that 'some white kid went in with a really bad tackle that the referee ignored...fighting broke out'. With reference to another attempt to get bring Asian and white youth together through football, he explains how such incidents normally arise and what he and his colleagues are attempting to do to deal with them.

When we were in the 'kick racism out of football' and we went to this other team. The white team said 'we’ve got this mate... we've got this friend who's a gypsy.. so I hope you don't mind but we call him Paki.. cos he's a tinker and he's dark. So if you don't mind, he's going to be playing and that's his name.' So, one of the Asian boys shouted out 'well one of my friends is Asian, but we call him Honkey Man, do you mind that... and they were like 'whoa!' And the Asian lads said 'we're just saying...'

What also comes through clearly in these accounts is the complex and contradictory nature of contemporary racism. On the one hand the boys refer to being commonly addressed *terrorists* and *Bin Laden* illustrating the ways in which the politicisation and racialisation of religion now shape contemporary racist discourse. And yet on the other hand as the above examples illustrates that biological nations of 'race' are also drawn on in everyday encounters.
Contemporary racism therefore contains variants of old themes and draws on a range of discourses about inferiority and superiority, biology, culture and difference. Some of the ideas an images referred to in this paper suggest a re-working of old colonial discourses eg the backwardness of Muslim cultures in the politicisation of religion that has been in evidence since the mid to late 1980s. Other ideas such as the notion of Muslims as terrorists are new…… [more on this]

**Conclusions**

I hope that the research evidence drawn here, while fairly small-scale and in no way generalisable, illustrates some of the complexities and the varied nature of the contemporary forms of racism that shape the experiences of Muslim youth in England. The current focus on the supposed radicalisation of Muslim youth is significant for understanding the ways in which Muslim youth are currently positioned as the victims of 'backward' Muslim cultures, with boys being assumed to be constantly in danger of being brainwashed into radicalism and girls being both the victims and symbols these repressive cultures. I hope that the accounts of young Muslims referred to in this paper go some way towards challenge these dominant discourses on Muslim masculinity and femininity and that they also illustrate the range of factors that shape their experiences of schooling and their social and political identifications. While it is undoubtedly true the politicisation of religion has had an impact in terms for bringing Muslim identities to the fore in certain contexts, in the local struggles engaged in by Muslim youth, a range of other preoccupations are also significant in shaping identities. These include various struggles over schooling, masculinity and femininity, over territory etc that are played out in the context of their local class cultures.

*This document was added to the Education-line collection on 8 August 2009*