

## 'Blue Squares', 'Proper' Muslims and Transnational Networks

Hopkins, Peter

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## **'Blue squares', 'proper' Muslims and transnational networks**

*Narratives of national and religious identities amongst young Muslim men living in Scotland*

**PETER HOPKINS**

*Lancaster University, UK*

**ABSTRACT** Despite the volume of research about identities of various shapes and forms, few studies have explored young people's narratives of nation and religion. Drawing on research with young Muslim men in Scotland, this article employs Floya Anthias's ideas about narratives of location, dislocation and positionality in order to seek a deeper understanding and appreciation of the young men's national and religious identities and affiliations. Although the majority of the young men identify as Scottish Muslims, the meanings and associations of these identity markers vary in strength, nature and meaning, and the young men are also connected with a global network of identifications linking them with family heritages in Asia and Africa.

**KEYWORDS** belonging ● identity ● Islamic ● race

### **INTRODUCTION: NARRATIVES OF (DIS)LOCATION AND POSITIONALITY**

Debates surrounding the cultural politics of identities include the theorization of hybridity and diaspora (see for example, Brah, 1996; Mitchell, 1997). These terms have offered researchers the space to question traditional approaches to understandings of ethnicity, migration and identities and in so doing have challenged essentialist and static understandings of markers of social difference. Such approaches stress the importance of a new Scottish Muslim identity that 'is not confined to an ethnic group, but is an

amalgam, neither purely religious nor specifically ethnic, that may be linked to forging identity as a culture of resistance' (Anthias, 2001: 626; see also Anthias, 2002a).

Despite persistent reminders that all forms of identity are constantly being contested, made and remade, it has been suggested that "identity" has overrun its limits' (Anthias, 2002b: 495). Floya Anthias provides a powerful critique of identity, suggesting that the term is ambiguous and involves a range of conceptual problems. Furthermore, the term also 'reintroduces essentialism through the back door' (Anthias, 2002b: 494). Similar criticisms are also made of hybridity (Anthias, 1998, 2001) and in particular, conceptual issues arise when the notions of diaspora and hybridity are linked with anti-racism (Anthias, 2002c). Anthias notes:

Abandoning the notion of identity as a heuristic device does not mean that identity is no longer treated as socially meaningful, since individuals and groups not only may, but often do use the term to signify a range of processes, ideas and experiences relating to themselves and others. (2002b: 494)

Anthias proposes that researchers focus on narratives of location, dislocation and positionality and so problematize the status of identity, whilst also utilizing identity as a meaningful concept. Focusing on accounts of location, dislocation and translocation means that research participants will be able to recount notions of belonging and so tell a story about the social categories that they use to locate themselves in particular places and times. 'Such narratives are not given or static, but are emergent, produced interactionally and contain elements of contradiction and struggle, that is, they are not unitary' (Anthias, 2001: 633). This emphasizes the situated nature of claims and qualities, the creation of these in different times and places, and recognition of the narration as an action or performance.

In her critique of identity, Anthias does not suggest discarding identity, as we need labels and markers of identities to help us understand and classify people and society. And even if academics are to abandon the notion of identity, people will still be classified, either by others or by themselves, as belonging (or not) to certain categories. Perhaps the issue is not the use and existence of identity labels, but the way these labels are used, understood, resisted and challenged. Jan Penrose (1995: 401) makes a similar point in highlighting that 'individual identity formation' is relevant to all human beings and, whilst categories are important, we also need to look at the processes that create, sustain and support them. However, I think Anthias's suggestions are particularly useful in their application towards a deeper understanding of identities and what people mean when they define themselves or others as belonging (or not) to certain social groups. The aim of this article is to explore young Muslim men's understandings of their religious and national identities. In doing this, I employ Anthias's ideas about narratives of location and dislocation to look at the

ways in which the young men consulted in this research discuss, describe and disclose their identities, and the meanings, understandings and places associated with these identifications. Having summarized Anthias' ideas, I initially provide some context for the research project on which this paper is based, after which I explore the complex ways in which the young men feel that they belong, or do not belong, within a Scottish national identity. Following this, I consider the multiple meaning of the young men's Muslim identities, thereby contributing to a small, growing literature about ethnicity and national identity (McCrone, 2002b).

## THE STUDY

The project on which this article is based sought to explore the identities and subjectivities of young Muslim men, because, when commencing the research, far more research had been conducted with Muslim women (e.g. Ahmad, 2001; Brah, 1996; Dwyer, 1999), and it seemed timely to explore the marginalized voices and identities of Muslim men. This project involved 11 focus groups and 22 interviews with young Muslim men living in Glasgow and Edinburgh in Scotland. All of the interview and group discussions were taped with consent, fully transcribed by the author and all research participants chose, or have been given, pseudonyms in order to protect their confidentiality. All of the young men involved were aged 16–25 at the time of interviewing, and they participated in the research project between March 2002 and July 2003. All focus groups and interviews focused on four key themes: Scotland and Scottishness, the local community, being a young man, and being a Muslim. The focus groups were held in local youth groups, community organizations, schools, colleges and mosques, and the interviews tended to take place in the homes of the young men, or in local cafes or community halls. All of the young men were contacted through a process of snowballing where a range of organizations – schools, colleges and universities, mosques, community and voluntary organizations, and youth groups – were asked to identify young men who might want to participate in the project.

Overall, over 70 young Muslim men participated in this project. Most of the young men identified with a Pakistani heritage, although there were also young men with Indian, Bangadeshi, Iraqi, Palestinian, Kosovan and Moroccan backgrounds. Although I am not a Muslim, nor am I of South Asian heritage, my Scottishness and accent often acted as a useful method for facilitating conversation and establishing connections with the young men. After all, the young Muslim men consulted in this project, are like me, young Scottish men. Robina Mohammad (2001) has explained that insider and outsider status are not fixed and are constantly changing and shifting

and being negotiated, managed and contested. Like Mohammad, my positionality varied throughout the research project, as there were aspects of similarity as well as aspects of difference, all of which combined to highlight the multiple locations of similarities and differences encountered simultaneously and in varying ways during the research encounters.

The project was based in Scotland where assumptions about the small size of black and minority ethnic has often led to suggestions that racism is not a Scottish problem, and this stereotype is often reinforced by the ways in which various texts make only a passing reference to the Scottish context (see for example, Abbas, 2005). However, Miles and Dunlop have argued that there has been an absence of a 'racialization of the political process in the period since 1945, rather than an absence of racism per se' (1987: 119), as well as post-war migration to Scotland differing in extent and nature from the migrations to England over the same period. Furthermore, 'a political preoccupation with the religious divide between Catholic and Protestant Christians displaced the racisms at the centre of English political affairs from Scottish affairs, producing what is now recognized as unwarranted complacency among Scottish decision-takers' (Hopkins and Smith, forthcoming). Clearly, then, we need to think carefully about the Scottish situation, and although there are unique aspects to the Scottish context, it is important to emphasize that in Scotland, as in England, racism is often an everyday experience for many people, as research by academics and policy makers focusing specifically upon Scotland have made clear (Arshad, 1999, 2003; Audrey, 2000; Bowes et al., 1990; Cant and Kelly, 1995; Hopkins, 2004a, 2004b; Kelly, 2002; Miles and Dunlop, 1987; Scottish Executive, 2002, 2003; Smith, 1993).

## BEING SCOTTISH

In terms of thinking about Scottish national identity, it is important to recognize that 'nation', like race, is a social and political construction and so is not an essential or immutable entity:

Demonstrating that 'race' and nation mean quite different things in different places underlines the notion that both concepts are social constructions, the product of specific historical and geographical forces, rather than biologically given ideas whose meaning is dictated by nature. (Jackson and Penrose, 1993: 1)

This does not mean that 'nation' is a meaningless concept. Instead, as Penrose (1995) suggests, it might be helpful to focus on the processes associated with the formation of nations rather than taking for granted the category of nation itself. Focusing on narratives of identity, I aim to explore aspects of the young Muslim men's narratives of Scottish national identities

in order to appreciate their affiliations with Scotland, as well as their positions and dislocations with respect to Scotland and elsewhere.

In *Connections* (Winter 1997–98), the quarterly from the Commission for Racial Equality, Rowena Arshad notes, ‘there’s no doubt that ethnic minorities [living in Scotland] see themselves as Scottish. The question is, will they be allowed to be?’ On the front cover of the same issue of *Connections*, a photograph of two ‘Asian Scots at a wedding in Stornoway’ both of whom are wearing kilts, has the caption, ‘New Scotland, new Scots?’ Over six years later, concerns about race, Scottishness and identity are still a central concern as *Connections* (Spring 2004), summarizing the recent research by Hussain and Miller (2003, 2004), notes that 39 percent of Pakistanis in Scotland feel that there is ‘fairly serious’ conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims in Scotland.

People living in Scotland are seen to give higher priority to being Scottish over being British (McCrone, 2002a), as Table 1 highlights. However, this is a simplified understanding of identities as it is focused on their prioritization, rather than on their variations in different places and times, and their fluid and contested nature. An example from my own research emphasizes this point. At the end of the focus groups, I asked the young men individually, using the Moreno question (see Table 1), to clarify which statement best described how they see themselves. In line with the previous work of David McCrone, I found that the young men tended to give priority to their Scottish identities. Analyses such as this are thought to provide important information about the ways in which people order and prioritize their national identities, yet such a line of questioning forces people to choose between two identity markers that they do not necessarily need to choose between. Much of this research does not go far enough, as it simply asks people to prioritize their various identifications, leaving the researcher to make a number of assertions about what the identity choices actually mean. A person might choose to identify as ‘more Scottish than British’, yet the meanings, understandings and interpretations of such an identity will vary greatly between different individuals, groups and places.

The young Muslim men living in Glasgow overwhelmingly selected the first two options, as seen in Table 1. Whilst the young Muslim men in Edinburgh also tended to prioritize Scottishness over Britishness, some of them felt that Britishness was equally or more important than Scottishness. This provides a direct challenge to McCrone’s (2002a) assertion that the prioritization of being Scottish holds true for social class and region. From the limited data produced from this research, it is clear that social class does influence how people feel about being Scottish, and the more affluent, privately educated young men from Edinburgh tended to align themselves as much or more with Britishness as they did Scottishness (see Hopkins, 2006). Also, although David McCrone ignores the significance of regional variations, geography matters, as young Muslim men living in Glasgow

appear to prioritize being Scottish more than young Muslim men living in Edinburgh do. This further clarifies the limited usefulness of the data in Table 1, and points to the potential of Anthias's (2001) ideas about narratives of (dis)location and positionality in obtaining a deeper understanding of the complex identity claims made by individuals.

The information in Table 1 also ignores the possibility of syncretic and hybrid forms of identification. A study of 14–17-year-old school pupils from Glasgow who had a Pakistani heritage found that whilst 97 percent identified themselves as Muslim, the bicultural identity labels of Scottish Pakistani and Scottish Muslim were particularly popular (Saeed et al., 1999). Similarly, in a study about the English and Pakistani populations of Scotland, Hussain and Miller (2003) found that 40 percent of the Pakistani population chose to be identified as Scottish Muslims when offered hyphenated identities of different kinds. This identity choice was also strengthened amongst those Pakistanis who were born in Scotland, with 50 percent of this group identifying as Scottish Muslims. Whilst these explorations of identity make important contributions to debates about terms such as diaspora and hybridity, they still tell us relatively little about what the researchers, or more importantly the research participants, mean by identifying themselves or others as Scottish, Scottish Muslims or Scottish Pakistanis. Further exploration into the meanings, understandings and (re)interpretations of such identities is needed.

Understandings of Scottishness and what it means to be Scottish vary greatly amongst the research participants. Bradley (2003: 20) confirms: 'not everyone born in Scotland wants to be imagined as a Scot and even if they do, the nature of this Scottishness can vary in relation to ethnicity, geography and religion, among other influences'. Being a Scottish Muslim, as many

**Table 1** Which of these best describes how you see yourself?

<i>Options</i>	<i>Year and responses (%)</i>					
	<i>1986</i>	<i>1992</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2002–3</i>
Scottish not British	39	19	23	32	37	36
More Scottish than British	30	40	38	34	31	42
Equally Scottish and British	19	33	27	23	21	13
More British than Scottish	4	3	4	3	3	7
British not Scottish	6	3	4	4	4	2
None of these	2	1	2	4	4	0
Base	1021	957	882	1482	1663	45

*Source:* 1986–2000, McCrone (2002a), 2002–3, Hopkins (2005).

of the young men consulted in this research see themselves, actually tells us very little about the young men unless we are more fully aware of their understanding of what it means to be both Scottish and Muslim (and therefore a Scottish Muslim). This is the main reason why I explored understandings of Scottishness and Muslimness in focus group and interview discussions with the young men.

A deeper exploration into national identity formation might seek to identify the markers being used by people to assert their Scottishness. Kiely et al. (2001: 36) found that there are a number of markers that people use in this regard: place of birth, ancestry, place of residence, length of residence, upbringing and education, name, accent, physical appearance, dress and commitment to place. All of the young men consulted in this research narrated an affiliation to Scotland, apart from two young men who identified as English and one as Welsh. However, in asserting Scottish national identities, the young men tended to utilize markers such as place of birth, length of residence, a commitment to place as well as upbringing and accent. The comments of Rehman, Anwar and Mohammed highlight how the young men used some of these markers to assert their Scottishness:

I was born here, and I was brought up here. (Rehman, interview, Glasgow, 23 June 2003)

I was brought up here, I'm more used to like the Scottish way of life. (Anwar, interview, Edinburgh, 17 December 2002)

Well I've got like a Scottish accent. (Mohammed, interview, Edinburgh, 16 May 2002)

This provides a useful indication of the markers the young men use to construct their Scottish national identities. However, the ideas of Anthias (2001) clarify the limits of such an approach, as they only look at the claims of belonging and not at the narratives of location and dislocation that provide a more intimate understanding of how the young men really feel about being (or not being) Scottish. Also, to simply outline the claims to national identity made by the young men misrepresents the diversity of their views on Scottishness, the other identities and national affiliations that they possess and their complex experiences of belonging, in/exclusion and multiple identities.

Jacobson (1997) notes that two young men in her research suggest that while patriotism is positive, nationalism is *haram* (forbidden). In this respect, the affiliation of Muslims is regarded as primarily focused on their religion rather than the nation in which they reside, thus linking them with the *umma* (although see Hopkins, forthcoming). Talib stated '... I think properly Muslims aren't supposed to have a nationality ...' (Focus group, Glasgow, 5 September 2002), and he strongly disagreed with the constant

worldwide struggle over national boundaries. Talib was the only young man consulted in this research who questioned the significance of nationality. Perhaps the fact that Talib had recently moved from England to live in Scotland, and identified as English, heightened his awareness of the exclusions that national affiliations can create.

Out of the 70 young men consulted in this research, Faruk constructed a narrative highlighting that he clearly identifies as Scottish, and I particularly recall this interview because of the strength of Faruk's feelings about Scotland:

Everything is Scottish about me; I mean what can I say. Yeah, I'm a practising Muslim, and I practice Islam, but that doesn't mean I'm not Scottish. I do all the things that other Scottish people do. I play football, I go out, I do this and that. There is nothing that I can say is not Scottish about me. (Faruk, interview, Glasgow, 25 June 2003)

Faruk differentiates himself from the other young Muslim men because his father is Scottish and his mother is from Pakistan. Faruk narrates his location within Scottishness because he identifies as mixed-race and this means that his skin colour is lighter than his friends. As Scottish, Faruk stresses that his Muslim identity is also a part of this. As such, Faruk is locating himself within a broad multicultural, multi-faith vision of Scottishness, and so challenges the possibility that his national and religious identities are mutually exclusive. Faruk is claiming scale by locating himself as Scottish and Muslim, and is simultaneously resisting the possibility that his Scottishness and Muslimness are incompatible.

In terms of being Scottish and Muslim, Kabir notes:

I don't think there's a tension at all. Em, some people, including some Muslims, want to create tension where there isn't. I'm Scottish Muslim because I'm Scottish and I was born in Scotland. So it's my culture, it's my background, it's my home. Muslim is my goal. Being Muslim is my philosophy or my belief system. It doesn't contradict my nationality in any way because they deal with different questions, you know. It's like being a red square, sorry that's a bad example, take a blue square. Red square is an alcoholic drink isn't it? . . . that's not on purpose, I just want to differentiate. A blue square, it's blue and it's a square. It's being a square doesn't interfere with it being blue. It's being blue doesn't interfere with it being a square. They're just nothing to do with each other but they complement each other and they make a complete blue square. If it wasn't blue it wouldn't be a blue square, if you see what I mean. So being a Scottish Muslim, you know, both of them go together and they make me who I am. They're part of what I am. They're not even complete of what I am because it doesn't describe my character or personality but they don't contradict each other in any way. (Kabir, interview, Edinburgh, 12th December 2002)

Kabir discusses his location within a Scottish identity based on the markers of birth, upbringing and experiences of everyday life. He resists the mutual exclusivity of his national and religious identities, stating that he is a Scottish

Muslim. However, there is a contradictory message in this narrative. The analogy of a Scottish Muslim being like a 'blue square' suggests that being Scottish and Muslim are inherently linked identities, and they are mutually inclusive in that they go together and make Kabir the person that he is. However, Kabir simultaneously constructs a narrative that suggests that being Scottish and being Muslim have nothing to do with each other and deal with different questions. Perhaps this suggests that there are different facets of identity that might be more or less salient in different places and times, and in different contexts. In discussions about Scotland, both Kabir and Faruk claim their sense of belonging and connection with Scotland, along with clarifying the importance of their religious identities. Yet, in discussions about other facets of social life the young men tended to prioritize their Muslim identities, thus demonstrating the difference that identity makes. Muslim Scots could possibly be a more appropriate identity label highlighting the importance of the young men's religious identities, coupled with their claims to the nation.

Even though the young men tend to classify themselves as Scottish Muslims, this description of their identifications omits other senses of belonging, and potential linkages with other locations and places. Kabir notes that his Scottish Muslim identity only describes a part of him, as it does not include his personality or other characteristics. With reference to this, consider this focus group extract:

Nadeem: Nobody can say to you that you are not Scottish or you're not this or that, I mean if you were born here.

Latif: Would you classify yourself as Scottish?

Jamal: Who are you talking to?

Latif: All of you?

Nadeem: Half and half . . . I was born in Pakistan right, but I've been brought up here so I consider myself half and half.

Latif: See I usually go on holiday quite a lot to my country, Morocco. I find that when I go there, they are saying that I am adapting to all these Scottish ways and all these sorts of things, you know what I mean. I say 'what Scottish ways?' They're like 'Oh, you're so Scottish'. When I come here they're like saying that I am so Moroccan. You don't actually notice it, it's just like small things here and there, they can't even tell you what it is, you know what I mean.

Jamal: Our parents were born in Pakistan. I was born in England, but it was only for about two weeks before I moved to Scotland. I would actually call myself . . . I would say that I'm Scottish because I'm from Scotland . . . and . . . yeah, but when I do go to Pakistan it's all this stuff about me being Scottish, but they don't know what they are talking about.

(Focus group, Edinburgh, 4 February 2003)

This account highlights the importance of places other than Scotland in the lives of the young men consulted. Nadeem sees himself as half Scottish and

half Pakistani because he was born in Pakistan. The other young men were born in Scotland yet still associate with the country of their parents' birth through regular visits to, in this case, Pakistan and Morocco. This narrative also explores the subtlety of exclusion in that the young men can be both excluded by others and/or can choose to exclude themselves. Latif is made to feel different in Scotland as people highlight his connections with Morocco, yet when he visits his parents' country of birth they comment on his Scottishness. Latif sees Morocco as 'his' country yet identifies positively with Scotland, and Jamal makes a similar point about his connections with Pakistan. In exploring the young men's narratives of (dis)location, it is clear that they are more than Scottish Muslims or Muslim Scots, as they are also located in an international web of connections, relationships and bonds with the countries of their parents' (or grandparents') birth, or even their own country of birth. This connects with the ideas in Dyck's (2004) research about her participants 'imagining and remembering India' and a range of other places connected with their lives or that of their close friends and family. The young men have multiple identities, feelings of belonging and exclusion and so singular and hybrid forms of identity classification have limited value.

Highlighting the significance of these international connections, Omar narrates his identity as Scottish even although he was born in England, has a Punjabi heritage and now lives in London:

... I mean people come up to me and say 'where are you from?' and the first thing that I say to them is that I am from Glasgow, and they say 'no, no, where are you from?' I then understand that they are trying to get at my ethnic origins. So then I say to them that I was born in Huddersfield. Then they say 'oh so you're English' and I say that I may well have been born in England and lived there for two years, but I would describe myself as Scottish ... but then if they want to know about my ethnic origins I would tell them about my grandparents ... my ethnic origin is Punjabi. I don't want to say Pakistani because it's not Pakistani because Pakistan was created afterwards. My grandparents were born in Indian Punjab, and I have a lot in common with Punjabis, and more in common with Hindu and Sikh Punjabis than I do with Muslims from Pakistan, so my roots are in Punjab and the other language that I speak is Punjabi ...  
(Omar, interview, Glasgow, 19 May 2002)

Omar identifies as a Scottish Muslim, yet in this extract he narrates a strong link with the Punjab through his grandparents. The significance of this link is strengthened because Omar speaks Punjabi and so he has connections with people who come from this area regardless of their religious affiliations. This shows that, given the confidence of Omar's Muslim identity and his associations with Scotland, there are still strong connections with other places. So, although Omar identifies with Scotland, his identities are also influenced by his relationships with other locations through his family heritage and language.

The bonds and connections that young men feel beyond their identification as Scottish Muslims are bound up in a complex web of in/exclusions imposed by the young men, their families and other people. The narratives of the young men, although highlighting their feelings of Scottishness, also emphasize their feelings of difference and otherness. These performances of otherness, or narratives of difference, are what I think exclude the young men from belonging completely within a Scottish national identity, and so contribute to the sometimes fragile nature of their affiliations with the nation. These discourses of otherness concentrated most often on their feelings of difference on the grounds of race and religion, and their everyday accounts of racial harassment (see Hopkins, 2004a, 2004b). Amin highlights the complexity of his feelings of exclusion, noting that he could have chosen to participate in certain activities but instead chose to exclude himself:

Well I wasn't made to feel different but I chose to feel different . . . I mean I could have done that if I wanted but I didn't. (Amin, interview, Edinburgh, 22 July 2002)

Arif stresses that although his beliefs are important to him, they do not make him isolated from the rest of society. This narrative appears to challenge the misrepresentation of Muslims, highlighting how Scottish Muslims, whilst possessing a strong Islamic affiliation, also have links with Scottish culture and society. In challenging the representation that Muslims choose to isolate themselves from society, Arif also narrates his feelings of otherness in that he sees his religious convictions as being fundamentally different to non-Muslims:

Although we do have fundamentally different beliefs, we try to fit in as much as we can with the rest of society. We don't try to isolate ourselves. We acknowledge that we don't compromise our beliefs, but at the same time we want to interact with other people . . . I think a lot of people get the impression that a lot of people like to isolate themselves from the rest of society and that really isn't the case. I mean I think the best example to look at is if you've got a football match between Scotland and another European nation or whatever, although we are Muslims or whatever, we are still inclined to, we still support our home nation. I have always supported Scotland in a football match, even against Muslim countries, I still support Scotland in a football match. (Arif, Focus group, Edinburgh, 30 April 2003)

This appears to challenge the strength of hybrid identities such as Scottish Muslim, as religio-national affiliations involve a complex range of claims, feelings and emotions about belonging and otherness, inclusion and exclusion, location and dislocation.

Talib narrates his otherness and exclusion emphasizing that his skin colour and English accent make him feel that he is not accepted. This is an important point, especially in the context of recent research that has

highlighted how English people are discriminated against in Scotland, often on the grounds of their accent (Findlay et al., 2004; McIntosh et al., 2004a, 2004b). Even if Talib was to desert his religion, he would still be regarded as an outsider, and clearly feels excluded by others rather than choosing to be different himself. This powerful narrative of exclusion highlights the significance of accent, and the continuing salience of race as a marker of social difference, as Scottishness is equated with whiteness:

Peter: So, in what ways do you not feel accepted?

Talib: The first things is my colour, and secondly my accent, you know what I mean . . . thirdly if I was to abandon my Muslim morals and things yeah, and I was to become like totally westernized, I still wouldn't be accepted by you lot as I'll still be seen as an outsider, you know what I mean. It's the same in Scotland; you've got to be white to be Scottish.

(Focus group, Glasgow, 5 September 2002)

In highlighting the significance of his religious identity, Aslam also feels excluded from being completely Scottish. This distancing from Scottishness is based on Aslam's assumption that most Scottish people are not Muslims and therefore have a different religion and so different beliefs from him:

. . . my Islamic beliefs are what make me different and make me not Scottish . . . as such I don't think I'm one hundred percent Scottish, because a normal, well not a normal . . . the average Scottish person is not Muslim and doesn't believe in what I believe. (Aslam, interview, Edinburgh, 18 December 2002)

Given the multiple and varied nature of the young men's understandings of their Muslim identities, it is of little surprise to find that the young men's religiosity influenced their connections with Scottishness to varying degrees. Whilst Aslam and Talib feel different, based on their religious identities coupled with other factors, Shafqat suggests that his religion, skin colour and connections with Pakistan are the only factors which make him feel different:

. . . the only difference with me would be my religion, the fact that I come from Pakistan and my colour comes from Pakistan through my parents. (Shafqat, interview, Glasgow, 17 June 2003)

It could be that Shafqat is playing down the significance of his feelings of difference and otherness, or alternatively he might genuinely feel that his difference and otherness are minimal. Again, however, the reference to skin colour, and therefore race, points to the continuing salience of race as a marker of difference, and an important influence on experiences of inclusion and exclusion, and narratives of location and positionality.

I have concentrated on the narratives of difference and belonging performed by the young Muslim men consulted in this research,

highlighting that whilst they tend to give priority to being Scottish over being British, and tend to label themselves as Scottish Muslims, this is instead a contested identity that ignores the young men's connections with other places and so their multiple identities. Affiliating with the nation is an important aspect of the young men's identities; however, their identification with the nation is also a process that is influenced by their dis/connection and in/exclusions from and with other forms of identification. The young men perform narratives that highlight that the country of their parent's birth (or indeed their own birth or that of their grandparents) is also a significant factor in their sense of belonging in the world, as is their identification as Scottish Muslims. In terms of the young men's views on being Scottish, a subtle process of exclusion through choice, and exclusion through force, is at play. Whilst choosing to identify as Scottish, they also choose to distance themselves from being completely Scottish through their linkages with other countries. However, the main focus of the exclusion is the young men's feelings of otherness and difference on the basis of their race and religion. Regardless of whether or not this is enforced upon them through others or through personal choice, it is clear that being Scottish still has strong connections with whiteness, and either secularism or other religions.

## BEING MUSLIM

As well as exploring the young men's narratives of Scottish identities, I also sought to demonstrate the ways in which they locate and position themselves with respect to their religious affiliations as Muslims. Rather than focus on the *umma* and the global identification that being Muslim is often associated with, many of the focus group and interview discussions tended to focus on the challenges of being a 'proper' Muslim and therefore more attention is given to doing Islam rather than being Islamic. In narrating the practicalities of Islam, Jamal states that it 'is not hard to do' all of the duties required of a 'proper' Muslim (Focus group, Edinburgh, 4 February 2003). So, like the Muslim boys that Archer consulted, the young men that I spoke to regularly:

... engaged in debates about the definition of a 'proper' Muslim. The boundaries of Muslim identity were constantly negotiated and contested within the discussion groups and the boys asserted, resisted and justified various positioning of themselves within or outside particular boundaries. In particular, while the boys claimed authentic Muslim identities through a notion of strength of feeling, or belief, they also acknowledged their more peripheral location in relation to ideals of Muslim identity as enacted through religious practices. (Archer, 2003: 53–4).

In this context, consider this extract:

- Latif: The five pillars of Islam.  
 Jamal: The first thing that you have to believe is in the oneness of Allah, and no one should be worshipped but Allah, and Mohammed is the Messenger or Prophet. That's the first one and then the second one is the five prayers a day. It's really hard to pray five times a day with school and everything on, but when you get the time you should. The five prayers are basically to remind you about Allah during the different parts of the day. The first one is before sunrise.  
 Latif: The third one is that you have to travel to the holy place, Mecca. You have to pray from there once in your lifetime.  
 Jamal: If you can yeah.  
 Latif: And you have to give money to the poor.  
 Jamal: Yeah zakat, you're supposed to give five percent of your money to the poor  
 Nadeem: Yeah, you can do that when you go to the mosque like.  
 Latif: There is the fast.  
 Jamal: Yeah that is part of being a Muslim, you have to fast . . . like five things, they're not that hard to do at all you know.  
 (Focus group, Edinburgh, 4 February 2003)

The young men in this focus group extract fall short of the requirements of a 'proper' Muslim, as they all commented on how they did not pray five times a day due to educational and other commitments. My reading of the narrative constructed in the focus group is that the young men are aware that there are certain duties that they should fulfil as a 'proper' Muslim. Yet these duties are also flexible, and that whilst the young men are 'supposed' to do them, not doing them can be justified because of a lack of time, educational commitments and the other duties that everyday life might entail. The boundaries of Islam are therefore flexible and can be contested. The young men therefore give primacy to doing Islam through adherence to the five pillars, rather than being Islamic.

The young men's accounts of doing Islam often highlight their own shortcomings in fulfilling the requirements of what it means to be a 'proper' Muslim. The focus group extract below reveals some of the practicalities of being Muslim that the young men find important, such as prayer and belief in one God.

- Asadullah: If you go to the mosque regularly to do your prayers and you read the Koran and you know it.  
 John: And you've got the faith.  
 Asadullah: And you believe in one God . . . you like talk to other people and show respect and all the rest of it, in 'it.  
 Michael: The only way that you can become a proper right Muslim, is to go to Saudi Arabia, like going on the hajj, you become a proper Muslim.  
 Bob: It's not just saying that you are a Muslim, you need to do all the

things, pray, fast and all that. You need to know a lot of stuff to become a proper Muslim.

(Focus group, Glasgow, 3 April 2003)

Michael asserts that you only ‘become a proper Muslim’ if you go on the pilgrimage to Mecca, stressing that he sees neither his friends nor himself as ‘proper’ Muslims as they have not yet completed the *hajj*. Along with a series of other obligations and rituals, an important part of the *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) is where all Muslims stand together on the Plain of Arafat where they ‘experience the underlying unity and equality of a worldwide Muslim community’ (Esposito, 1998: 92). In this sense, the primacy that the focus group participants give to completing the *hajj* highlights the global sense of community and belonging, which may be an important aspect of the young men’s Muslim identities. Bob notes that being Muslim is not just about the appropriation of the label ‘Muslim’, but is about doing all of the things mentioned in this extract. This emphasizes the contested nature of what being a Muslim means, as the young men attach varying levels of significance to different aspects of Islam in terms of belief and practice.

As well as discussions about doing Islam, the young men often also referred to the heterogeneity of the Muslim community, thereby challenging the misrepresentation of their religion and emphasizing the importance of belief and practice (see also Modood, 2003). The focus group extract below displays one particular case where the young men, having talked at length about the misrepresentation of Islam in the media, assert their view that Islam is a peaceful religion:

Peter: So if Muslim or Islam to a lot of people means terrorism, what should it mean?

Asadullah: It should mean peace.

Michael: Aye peace.

John: Peace.

Asadullah: That’s it man, it should mean peace . . . our countries don’t go to war over silly things like oil and that, they go to war when they are defending themselves.

Bob: Aye and none of the Muslims go to mosque to talk about bombing other countries.

Asadullah: Yeah, we just go to pray for our God, in’t

(Focus group, Glasgow, 3 April 2003)

The young men highlight the peacefulness of Islam in the focus group extract above, yet they also draw on a global discourse referring to issues of war, control, violence and terrorism. Overall then, the young men have raised a number of contested issues such as the misrepresentation of their religion and the challenges of being a ‘proper’ Muslim.

Aside from the discussions mentioned above, around a quarter of the young men consulted in this research focused on being Islamic through

issues of spirituality. For example, Omar's understanding of his Islamic identity is framed as a spiritual and moral experience:

... for me it's spiritual ... Islam is my guiding light. It has given me my morals and it has given me strength through all the difficult times I have had ... Islam is a faith, it's a total way of life ... it's not something that people should feel threatened about because Islam is a relationship between God and you, and no one can change that or take that away from you ... the word Islam means peace, you know ... for me Islam is a beautiful faith. I think that people should study it and not look at Muslims, as Muslims are a very bad example of Islam, but if they look at the faith itself then, I think they would see that it's not that bad, and it is actually very nice (Omar, interview, Glasgow, 19 May 2002)

For Omar, Islam is experienced as a 'total way of life' and is something that is between the individual and God, and therefore personal. 'Narratives of location are structured more in terms of a denial (through a rejection of what one is not rather than a clear and unambiguous formulation of what one is)' (Anthias, 2002b: 501). Omar, whilst narrating the significance of the moral and spiritual side of Islam, also comments on what Islam and being a Muslim is not about. In highlighting that people should not feel threatened by Islam or Muslims, Omar feels that Islam is often misrepresented and misinterpreted. Taking this a step further, Omar suggests that the best example of Islam is not found in the vast majority of those who claim to be Muslim. A clear distinction is made between the religious faith of Islam, and the use of a Muslim identity that often falls short of the requirements of the religion itself. In this context, almost all of the young men played down their religiosity. For example, Anwar noted the following regarding the rules of Islam: 'actually I'm not sure because I'm not the most religious of people' (interview, Edinburgh, 17 December 2002). All of the young men identify as Muslims, and chose to participate in this study because of their identification as young Muslim men, yet the meanings of being Muslim varies amongst the young men, linking with the earlier discussion about being a 'proper Muslim'.

Ahmed emphasizes the spiritual side of Islam, focusing on belief in god and being a good person. It is clear that the young men value their Muslim identity as an important part of their lives:

Ahmed: ... I guess it's just like ... believe in God, do good things, do good things ... being a Muslim is good.

Aktahr: Being a Muslim makes you feel high ... it's quite hard  
(Focus group, Edinburgh, 19 June 2002)

The narratives performed by the young men tend to focus on either the religious and spiritual aspects of Islam as a faith, or the actual practicalities or duties associated with being a Muslim, and this is an important distinction. There are subtle differences between religiosity and spirituality, with the latter usually lacking a formal institutional base, while both are about

beliefs, morals and ethics. Many people who classify themselves as being religious are also spiritual, yet some religious people will not be spiritual at all, and will simply be following a religion for reasons other than faith and belief. This could be classified as the difference between doing and being, or both or neither. This highlights the usefulness of thinking about narratives of location, dislocation and positionality, and how they help open up the possibility for deeper appreciations and understandings of the meanings associated with particular categorizations. In this respect, consider Rehman's comments:

Being a Muslim is about, just generally being good, kind, clean . . . by clean I don't just mean in terms of clothes I mean like inside as well . . . having respect for everything basically. (Rehman, interview, Glasgow, 23 June 2003)

Rehman highlights the spiritual side of Islam, emphasizing the importance of inner cleanliness and respect for self and others, whilst the young men in the focus group extract mentioned earlier highlight the practicalities associated with being Muslim and therefore the religious aspects and institutional characteristics of being Muslim. In discussing the practicalities of being Muslim, it could be that the young men were responding to my whiteness and their perceptions that I am not Muslim and so felt the need to discuss the main requirements of the religion. Also, especially during focus group discussions, some of the young men might have found it challenging to talk about their faith, emotions and ethereal aspects of the spiritual side of their religion.

The young men's narratives of their Islamic identities highlight the diversity of what it means to identify as a Muslim, as well as the importance of this identity marker to the young men consulted. Halliday (1999: 897) reliably informs us that 'Islam' tells us only one part of how these people live and see the world: and that 'Islam may vary greatly' and Modood (2003: 100) observes that 'the category "Muslim", then is as internally diverse as "Christian" or "Belgian" or "middle class", or any other category helpful in ordering our understanding'. Some of the young men emphasize the practicalities of Islam and thus the doing of their religion, through prayer, pilgrimage, attending mosque and fasting. Other young men concentrated on the spiritual side of their religion and therefore the significance of being Islamic and the positive feelings and emotions associated with being Islamic. Some of the young men focused on both doing Islam and being Islamic and others mentioned neither. This all highlights the multiple natures of the meanings of Islam, even though all of the young men identified as Muslims and often used this form identification in the singular.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this article, I have explored young Muslim men's narratives of nation and religion through exploring Floya Anthias's ideas about narratives of location, dislocation and positionality. In doing so, I have attempted to move beyond simplistic understandings of Scottish national identities that tend to focus on the prioritization of various identifications over others. It is now clear that, although the majority of the young Muslim men consulted identify as Scottish Muslims, this tells researchers very little about how the young men feel about their identities, the meanings and values associated with their identifications as well as the ways in which these might vary over space and across time.

The young Muslim men consulted draw on a range of traditional markers of Scottish identity, such as birth, upbringing and accent, to emphasize their Scottishness. However, exploring the young men's narratives of national identity highlights that their Scottish identifications vary depending on the circumstances, and are strongly influenced by race, ethnicity and the strength of the young men's religious affiliations. Furthermore, as well as seeing themselves as Scottish Muslims, the young men are also part of a transnational network of identifications, linking them to family heritages and cultures in various parts of Asia and Africa. Clearly then, researchers could usefully start to explore the meanings and associations that people possess with regards to identity categories in order that we can more fully understand what people mean by associating themselves with particular identity groups (or not).

Exploring the young men's religious identities also demonstrates how the young men's narratives tended to focus on doing Islam and being Islamic. Many of the narratives of religious identity focus on being a 'proper' Muslim, and the clarification of what the young men see as the true meaning of their religious faith countering the constant (mis)representation of their religion. Since the events of 11 September 2001 in New York, as well as the London bombings of 7 July 2005, the negative attention directed at Muslims has heightened, as various agents – right-wing newspapers, racist political organizations and popular culture in general – draw upon simplistic understandings of Islam and what it means to be Islamic. Claire Alexander has intimated that there are strong 'parallels between media and academic analyses, which raises pertinent, and disquieting, questions about the ways in which selected academic discourses have fed into, and upon, populist soundbite understandings of race and ethnicity' (Alexander, 2004: 544). It is therefore important that we continue to explore the various meanings, connections and associations that Muslims have of their religious faith in order that naive stereotypes can be challenged and overturned. Perhaps one way of doing this might be to extend the analysis contained in

this article to include other markers of social difference – gender, class, age, race, locality, sexuality and so on – and the ways in which these interact and intersect with Muslim identifications. This should hopefully lead to more nuanced and complex appreciations of being Islamic.

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**PETER HOPKINS** is a Lecturer in Human Geography at Lancaster University. Address: Department of Geography, Lancaster University, Lancaster, LA1 4AF, UK. [email: p.hopkins@lancaster.ac.uk]