

Title—Young British Muslims: Between Rhetoric and Realities

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Categories: Women, Islam, Colonialism, Feminism

Place: UK

Time: 1980-Present

Argument Synopsis:

The Muslim population in Britain, as well as in Western Europe at large, is consistently deemed incompatible with Western values and seen as alien. Sadek Hamid's *Young British Muslims* is an essay collection that aims to offer alternative perspectives on young British Muslims that are not centered on problems, as the dominant research and media tends to be. Specifically, Muslims in Britain are often accused of holding values that are antithetical to liberal democracy. This extends to the dominant belief that Muslims are disinterested in gender equality, distrust the concept of freedom and prefer theocratic modes of governance. Hamid argues that this fear-based rhetoric does not increase the understanding of what the majority of young British Muslims think or the realities of how they live their lives. This essay collection seeks to humanize the everyday lived experience of young British Muslims in order to challenge the dominant representations of this population. The contributors are both Muslim and non-Muslim specialists to provide a variety of perspectives. Important to note that the phrase "young British Muslims" is not used monolithically throughout the collection.

While a large percentage of young British Muslims retain an emotional attachment to their faith, this does not imply that the bulk of this population is religiously observant. Notable, a fair amount will foreground their ethnic or national identity over a religious one. However, the media and much of dominant research continues to categorize this entire diverse population as young Muslims. Hamid posits that until the late 1980s, in the UK religion was most associated with ethnicity. The explosive Rushdie affair in 1989 shifted this understanding, as the controversy became the turning point in the self-definition of many young Muslims. Religious beliefs became a much stronger form of self-identification post-1989. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 and 7/7 furthered the essentialization of Muslim youth, leading to the media labeling all Muslims as radicals, extremists, or terrorists.

The essay collection is divided into three sections. The first provides context to the study of British Muslim young people as a category, providing a historical overview referencing the colonial past into the present. The second section addresses some of the most controversial issues by tackling the most frequently discussed stereotypes against British Muslims, namely: sexual exploitation, gender issues, and extremism. The third provides detailed case studies of the interests and activities that animate their everyday experiences, such as the use of the Internet to challenge Islamophobia or the emergence of Islamic fashion-scapes in Britain.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- No other minority in Britain is subjected to the same level of public scrutiny and hostility as British Muslims
- Dominant research on Muslims in the West falls into three categories: gangs & grooming, terrorists/extremists, and gender (the hijab, forced marriage, and honor killings)
- Muslim population in Great Britain is very young (2011 census showed over half of the population was younger than 25)