4 Racialisation, securitisation, and professionalisation of Muslim teachers: life stories from Muslim teachers

- **Imran Mogra**

Abstract

This chapter uses life stories to explore salient episodes from the lives of three Muslim primary school teachers serving education in Birmingham. It draws on qualitative research conducted with teachers in different schools across the city. It illuminates their historic origins, e*xperiences of schooling*, i*nfluences on identity and their conceptualising of professional identity of teachers*. Conclusions, from individual and collective narratives, confirm their orientations to teaching being similar in several types of schools. The participants shared positive and enjoyable experiences alongside some experiences of racism, verbal abuse, and microaggressions. Within their complex web of identities, these first-hand accounts provide an understanding of what it means to be a Muslim teacher in contemporary Britain. All were proud of expressing their identity as Muslims while also acknowledging their professionalism.

Introduction

This chapter uses life stories to explore salient episodes from the lives of three state primary school Muslim teachers situated in and serving education in Birmingham. It illuminates their historic origins, e*xperiences of schooling, influences on identity and their conceptualising of professional identity of teachers*. It draws on qualitative research conducted with practitioners from diverse backgrounds and professional roles in different schools. These time-specific life stories were used to understand various aspects of their lives and work, to give priority to their voice, and to make a key contribution by adding perspectives from a religious tradition to this growing genre. These first-hand accounts provide an understanding of what it means to be a Muslim teacher in contemporary Britain. The *Sewell Report* (HMG, 2021) ignored the validity of "lived experience" for the understanding of racial disparities and the experiences of people of colour by denying institutionalised racism. Thus, there is a continued need for studies of non-white teachers to provide additional qualitative evidence (Tikly, 2022).

Background

In the UK, Black, Asian, and teachers from minority communities have been studied through a range of methodological approaches. The subject matter of these studies includes personal memoirs, offering perceptions about the teaching profession, quantitative analysis of statistical data from local authorities and other agencies, studies of pedagogy and teacher identity; some have used feminist standpoints from sociological reflections, whilst others chose generational studies. Specific issues, such as the investigation of the factors of withdrawal and the changing roles, identities, and professionalism have also been investigated (Benn, 2003; Blatchford, 1991; Dilek, 2022; Ghuman, 1995; Iqbal, 2019; MCB, 2022; Mogra, 2009; Mogra, 2011; Osler, 1997; Osler, 2003).

However, the voice of faith in primary school teaching continues to remain under-researched. Some Muslim female teachers found their experiences to be dependent on the views of Islam held by those influencing their career development as they did not enjoy a secure school environment (Benn, 2003). Another study adopted an agency-structure approach to concentrate on how the life histories of Muslim women teachers reflected their opinions of citizenship and identity and concluded that stereotypical and negative views of Muslims undermine the identities and citizenship rights of all Muslims, particularly women (Osler, 2003). Hence, the notion of the teacher's voice is important, as it carries the tone, language, quality, and feelings expressed by teachers. It represents both the unique individual and the collective voice.

More recently, Dilek (2022) questioned the impact of public policy discourses on Muslim teachers' professional identities. Initial findings suggest that the Prevent policy has a devastating impact on their professional identity, directly or indirectly. He also discovered that the fear of stigma was an important aspect of forming their professional identity both inside and outside of schools. Thereafter, Dilek (2022) postulates that when the political atmosphere and education policy surrounding teachers develop a discourse that contains a stigma against teachers' religious identity, the professional identity formation of teachers becomes more vulnerable. It is thus argued that, whilst these studies substantiate the growth in research related to minority ethnic teachers and reflect a range of relevant topics, the need to investigate the lifeworld of teachers from a faith perspective is important. Britain is a multi-cultural and multi-faith society, and Muslims, as a faith community, are a major constituent part of this community.

Life stories

This chapter is based on research with a group of Muslim teachers in Birmingham who held various posts including as a head teacher, deputy and assistant heads, subject coordinators and class teachers. Life stories, as narratives, are given by individuals and they can be reconstructions of what is considered significant in their life (Miller, 2000). They are important in studying educational institutions and the personnel within them as they reveal how individuals enter a community and mature within a teaching community (Mogra, 2009). The earlier life of these teachers needs to be unpacked to understand them now as teachers, and the changes occurring over time and to acquire a contemporary insider view of a socio-cultural phenomenon. The life stories in this research offer glimpses into the significance of these professional and personal identity attributes and explore the ways in which they interconnect and overlap. Moreover, Zembylas and Chubbuck (2018) highlighted four aspects that are important in the process of teacher identity formation. These include narrative and discourse aspects; reflection aspects; and agency and structure aspects which are deciphered within the themes analysed below. To understand teacher identity, the intersection of identity and politics must also be recognized. Identity, for a participant in this study, Juwayriyah, as seen below, appears to be a performative process in which she draws on diverse resources to construct her multiple selves.

The BERA (2018) ethical guidelines were upheld with honesty and openness characterising the research relationship. Participants were given the right to withdraw at any time and provided informed consent. To create anonymity, pseudonyms based on the first-generation teachers of the prophetic era are used, which also reflect participants' religious and cultural roots.

Theoretical underpinnings

Theoretically, five dimensions of identity have been suggested, which are a useful framework to conceptualise professional identity (Wenger, 1998). These are: (1) identity as *negotiated experiences* where teachers define who they are by the ways they experience themselves through participation as well as the way they and others reify their selves; (2) identity as *community membership* where teachers define who they are by the familiar and the unfamiliar; (3) identity as *learning trajectory* where teachers define who they are by where they have been and where they are going; (4) identity as *nexus of multi membership* where teachers define who they are by the ways they reconcile their various forms of identity into one identity; and (5) identity as *a relation between the local and the global* where teachers define who they are by negotiating local ways of belonging to broader constellations and manifesting broader styles and discourses (Sachs, 2001). For some Muslim teachers, identity embodies the intersection of social class, race, religion, gender, and professional identity (Iqbal, 2019). Thus, they may foreground their identification and disidentification of their religion as an agency to contest and create new ways of being (Moulin-Stożek and Schirr, 2017). This framework is used in developing perspectives on professional identities for Muslim teachers as they address their identity formation.

In presenting three life stories for this research, some editing was necessary for pragmatic purposes (Ritchie, 2003). Editing life stories, however, raises ethical questions about not allowing the interviewees to say what they want to say by segmenting their lives. Nevertheless, a collection of life stories offers a collective feel, unlike individual in-depth life stories. Be that as it may, limitations are unavoidable regarding the extent to which a

researcher can include the desired data in their report since whatever story a person tells about their life remains partial. Hence even the inclusion of a full interview is but a partial construction of the overall life story (Miller, 2000). In these narratives, attention is given to issues that they emphasise; for example, their formative childhood, life before and after becoming teachers, identity and their schooling experience, position, route into teaching and any future plans.

Profiles of three Muslim Primary Teachers

These profiles reveal their formative years and pathways into teaching and, collectively, their life stories are presented using the themes of historic origins, e*xperiences of schooling, influences on identity and conceptualising professional identity.*

Aisha, born in Birmingham, is a deputy head. Her parents came from a working-class background and endeavoured to do their absolute best for their children to achieve academically. They valued education and considered it key to success. Hence, they supported their children from an early age. She did the PGCE course. At the time of the interview, she had been teaching for seven years.	Juwayriyah, born in a North African country, speaks Arabic, French, English, and Spanish. Her stepmother was a headmistress. Her stepfather and stepsister were teachers too. Thus, from a young age, she was exposed to teachers. Her stepfather inspired her to become a teacher. Before arriving in the UK, she had taught English for three years in a baccalaureate system for post-GCSE courses. She did the PGCE course before becoming a teacher. He is an EY practitioner.	Muadh, born in Bangladesh. He did the BEd and supply teaching in different schools. He was exposed to good schools and those in need of improvement. These proved to be valuable experiences that helped him make decisions. He taught as a cover teacher for six months, thereafter, he secured a permanent post in the same school, near his house. He taught there for nine years, leaving after gaining promotion for his current role as a phase leader to be part of senior management.

Historic origins

Aisha's father was self-taught in English, and her mother was illiterate in the English language. She remembers her father aspiring for something more while working at a factory. Later, he established his own business from humble beginnings. Hence, according to her, there was a work ethic within her home with the roles clearly defined. Her mother being the primary caretaker and her father earning with the aim of establishing the family business to make them more successful. Aisha ruminated:

> ...in terms of a range of wardrobes, we didn't have that. We weren't going on vacation. Our experiences were very limited. However, our parents did their very best. They took us on day trips. They taught us to be respectful to elders and to our host community. At school, I think my parents thought it was a real establishment; they

> were very fearful. Yes, what the school said was, basically, right. So, they very much toed the line.

The intersectionality of social class, race, and religion is in-built in her narrative. Talking about her primary school life, she mentioned the considerable influence a family member, who was a fluent speaker of English, had on her. She vividly remembered that some cultural things were accepted as the norms for them. However, these norms were dissimilar for the English community. She shared the example of the dress, revealing that it would be unacceptable for them to wear trousers without something to cover. So, they wore a long dress. In school, this exhibited as tension since for their uniform they were expected to wear a skirt, but they had to almost fight to say: "I'm not wearing a skirt."

> "We have to wear trousers in addition to that." I remember my sister, who is significantly older than me, challenged the school on several things. I remember school dinners. The Muslim children were not getting a great deal on their plates because of the constraints of the menu. My sister wrote and said this is unacceptable and we should change it. So, she has always been a pioneer in that respect, *Masha'Allah*, *Alhamdulillah,* and she has continued to do that. But my parents had to rely on their older child.

It is interesting that her older sister was the pioneer and the mediator of the experiences of racism and the "white world" beyond her community. This intermediary role is poignant, as the young person took on adult responsibilities. Currently, the situation has changed in some schools as there is more provision, particularly concerning food, dress, and collective worship. Aisha explained:

> I think that this is a generation thing. Parents like myself *have* [original emphasis] gone through it. We *know* [original emphasis], and we can empathise with and understand what is going on because our community is now much more multicultural. There is an element of people being more respectful and tolerant. People are now more confident in their culture and can say that just because something is different, it doesn't mean it is wrong.

The idea of "generation" has surfaced a couple of times in her account, and interesting meanings are attached to it. Here, Aisha is talking about her role as a deputy. As she is now in a position to have an influence on, and play a role in, the experiences of children from backgrounds like hers, she is exercising that power.

She had a couple of favourite teachers who remained prominent in her life. They were instrumental in building her self-esteem and making her realise what she could achieve. She felt a teacher "actually had faith in" her.

> She believed that just because I wear a *shalwar kameez, it* doesn't mean that I am going to be an SEN child. She could see my creative potential and developed it *with* real words of encouragement. So, she spoke to me, which you don't often have time for within schools.

Juwayriyah mentioned she had two children and was divorced. She talked about her origins revealing that she had been adopted after her father passed away. She expressed her emotions while recalling her childhood and comparing it to England. She felt it was good because they

were not scared to go outside. She had many friends, visited neighbours' houses, and watched television. They played together without fear. It was a happy upbringing and a happy childhood.

Muadh settled in England when he was 9. He attended a primary school and, after 18 months, went onto secondary education. He is fluent in English and Bengali and can communicate in Urdu. His father was instrumental in guiding him and his siblings to make a good life for themselves. His uncle in Bangladesh has a master's in education. His father instilled in him that education was paramount for success in England. Therefore, he organised an extra tutor to support Muadh. Religion was important, but there were few possibilities for observing it. However, as he grew older, religion became a prominent part of his life. He grew up in Bangladesh with considerable fun and happy memories. These fond recollections prompt him to regularly return to his roots, as this is important for his identity.

Experiences of schooling

Aisha found her primary school secure. She took pride in it:

> I was an avid reader, so you visually pick up clues all the time. We had tests back then, and I wasn't sure what was going on. We went to the front. The teacher would go through a list of words you could read. There was always one word, and *I* used to get it wrong every time. The word was colonel. I used to think, "What the hell is Co-Lo-Nel?" It was a colonel. It was as simple as that, but no one thought to put me right.

Though she considered herself a passionate reader and good speller, the omission by her teacher is questioned, as she presumed that an individual's classroom teacher's effectiveness lies in correcting pupils. This has intruded into the present. She then divulged elements of tension between family, culture, religious values, and the ethos at school. She explained:

> …when they were having a disco. Certain taboo things were outside of my parents' experience and understanding. We didn't have the cultural bridges that we have within schools now... It was a very different and new experience for them. So, if we had school trips, residential trips, or discos, these things were sort of: "Why do you want to do that? What is the educational value of that?" What is the significance and purpose of it within school life?

Her parents attempted to disrupt what they saw as being deficient and problematic in a "racially" organised society and an "othering" community. Thus, the nature of their questioning was both rhetorical and an empowering use of language for her, as, for them, education had been their ultimate goal, which they may have narrowly conceived as being classroom-based only. In this way, Aisha was also becoming alert to the power structures in society, being primed for independence and to assert her cultural and religious values. She was creating a third space and forging a hybrid identity.

In contrast, Juwayriyah attended, with her older brother and sister, a "*masit*" (madrasah) where they wrote their lessons on a slate and dried it in the sun. She also learned the Qur'an. The classroom environment was organised and not strict but firm. It was a huge class with 30 children, and she sat at the back of the class. Her teachers were nice. They learned English in a fun way through songs, repetition and pictures. Her father had wanted them to go to school

and get educated. However, when she was ten, he died. So, they had a family crisis, leading her to be adopted.

Muadh gained limited knowledge of the English language in Bangladesh. In England, the family had a teacher come to teach them the Qur'an and another teacher taught them to read and write Bengali. These experiences were very important to him as they made him feel that school was important. His father attended the parents' evening which was the most helpful thing for him. Having a basic understanding of his faith played a major role in developing his self-esteem, as these foundations of faith and their historical background were instrumental in forming his identity.

Influences on identity

Religion has been a key feature in the life of Aisha which as discussed below, is the case with other teachers. Aisha recalled that her parents were practising Muslims who read their prayers, and, as a family, they would observe Ramadan and Eid. She had a traditional Pakistani upbringing, whereby she lived in a community and was raised in an extended family-oriented atmosphere. As the youngest of six children, she was immersed in her mother tongue. However, as brothers and sisters, they spoke English. She lived in a multicultural environment with a Sikh and Gujarati family nearby and with English neighbours. Aisha described her typical day:

> It had a real community feel. We had a very strong cultural identity because that was very much what the practise was at home. In terms of the tradition, kids go to school, come home, have tea, go to the mosque, come home, and play.

She recalled that, comparatively, there was less Islamic awareness than now. This became so as the environment became clearly more hostile for Muslims. She reflected that her generation is more conscious of it, perhaps because they are of the second or third generation. Therefore, for her, she tapped into cultural traditions like dressing up traditionally and combining them with elements of western dress. Aisha speaks English, Urdu, and Punjabi equally well.

Juwayriyah's identity is also shaped by her previous experiences. Part of her identity is reflected in her *learning trajectory,* where she outlines who she is, where she has come from, and what she was going to be. Later, her linguistic abilities were recognised, as well as her being a Muslim, as she understood the religion and culture of the children. However, occasionally she experienced "the aggro from other colleagues" when she could not fully understand their accents. She exemplified how she was looked down upon:

> Being a bilingual or trilingual person, sometimes it takes time for your brain to register. You might answer. Then say, "God, why did I say that?" Monoglots can't understand this problem as they haven't been there. I am not against them. It is hard because they can't understand where you are coming from. Sometimes, because you haven't lived in that culture, but they expect you to understand it. If they want you to do something and you ask, "Sorry, how am I going to do that?" They reply, *"Well, you are a teacher, you should do it."* [sic]. [I think to myself] "Yeah, but I have never lived in that environment."

Moreover, Juwayriyah felt her classroom experiences shaped her thinking as a Muslim teacher as she understood her pupils' religion and culture, which she thought were very similar, even though she came from a different country. However, she felt Islam influenced both. She had a positive impact as it encouraged parents to help their children achieve and show her as a role model.

However, some parents were apprehensive about their children's future. Therefore, she opined that these parents find it hard to recommend teaching because of discrimination. She explained: "I spoke to one parent, and she said, 'How are you feeling? You are not from here, and you are a Muslim.' I replied, "I am happy. The school is supporting me." When asked about Islamophobia, sexism, and racism, she divulged:

> I have experienced it; when I was a classroom assistant, I had a lot of racism. But me being a very patient person, I go home and cry. But I would never stand up to my bullies. I'll wash my face and then come with a brave face. But now I feel more confident. If somebody calls me something that I don't like, then I do stand up to it because I know my rights. I know that people are wrong. So, they haven't got a chance there.

In her narrative thus far, there is a congruence of her identity formation through personal experiences, professional contexts, and sociocultural contexts. However, her citation of rights adds a political dimension. The reference to "I know my rights" implies a change in how she later saw herself as an equal citizen. Being a Muslim from a non-Asian background, Asian and black Muslim parents in her school respected her. Initially, though, some were surprised to discover that she was a Muslim. She recounted:

> I know they were shocked when they knew I was a Muslim. I said, "Yes." "Yes. I'm not wearing the headscarf, but I'm still a Muslim. They would say, "No, we are not saying that, just the colour." You are white (she was very fair skinned). Yes, I am white, but I'm still a Muslim.

This quotation shows the importance of lived experiences, and these narratives challenge different stereotypes and reductive generalist views about Muslims. Later, once relationships became fully established, parents saw her "not as a teacher, but as a friend or relative." This relationship provided opportunities to involve them more in their children's education. She was now considered part of the larger Muslim families within her school. This is further indicative of the different discourses shaping fluid identities as Juwayriyah moved between different professional and personal statuses and identities.

In contrast, Muadh preferred to limit his conversation on identity. Still, he emphasised that regular visits to Bangladesh influence his outlook and recognises that although he lives in the UK, his parents and grandparents were born in a different country and had a different lifestyle. Therefore, he feels the need to observe how everything happened since, without them, he would not be here today. Thus, he values his cultural roots.

Conceptualising professional identity of teachers

Aisha's circumstances guided her into teaching through an unconventional route. Her first degree was in media and communication studies. Thereafter, she enrolled in a university as a mature student to complete a two-year PGCE course called Bilingual Instructors Teacher

Training from Birmingham City Council to recruit ethnic minority teachers because they were seriously underrepresented, both locally and nationally. Whereas Juwayriyah, upon arriving in England, she was hoping to continue teaching, as her husband, who was a British citizen, had explained to her that:

> I could teach here, but I was shocked when I came as I couldn't teach. I had to train. I thought I could teach because I was qualified. But then I understood because it was a different system. Now I know why, but then I had a shock as I had a BA in English and French.

Nevertheless, she did not feel isolated in school but had not participated in any continued professional development. Significantly, she confided that she wanted to teach French in secondary school. Like most of the teachers interviewed, Juwayriyah had considered relocating abroad, admitting, "I am thinking of maybe when I get to 55. I will go back home before retirement and teach there." Compared to the others, Muadh said more about this theme. For him, being a teacher from the local community and knowing the area well was very important. His head-teacher played a significant part in his career. According to him, the head was fantastic and fair to everybody and whom the children loved being with. He felt the school was more like home, where the staff were encouraged and secure. This made him stay there for a long time.

Muad preferred to serve a school with Asian children based on his childhood memories and the experiences of sports and recreation that he had. Therefore, he wanted to return to the children, for whom it was challenging as the majority were Muslims, who were viewed as a "suspect" community (Arthur, 2015).. Thus, for him, identity was seen as *a relation between the local and the global,* where he was negotiating local ways of belonging through his faith, languages, and heritage to broader constellations of the Ummah (the Muslim global community) and manifesting broader discourses of extremism. These dimensions were helpful for his professional identities, as he was also addressing social and cultural aspects that were personally dear to him.

After reflecting on his experiences with a three-way communication strategy in his lessons, Muadh explained:

> You have children with language difficulties or who come into this country later in life. I wanted to play a significant part and be a role model because, when you look around the country today or the world, there are negative things children see on television that are not giving them positive things to know about life. I wanted to encourage them to be like me.

When Muadh was first appointed, he was considered a 'normal' class teacher. Later, his ethnicity, gender, and religious heritage were seen as a resource.

> Those three aspects played a very significant part because there were many things, I was able to do. Having those skills, those identities, that I don't think any other teacher would have been able to do.

In this way, his gender, ethnicity, and religious identity were acknowledged by the school, which quickly capitalised on his skills. According to him, PE, as a male teacher, was very important for practical reasons and personal interests. The RE dimension was also significant

because he led many Islamic worship and festival assemblies. There were many incidents when he spoke to parents in Bengali and Urdu, which other teachers were unable to do. Hence, during the parents' evening, he was called for translations as well. He felt that the school appreciated his contributions.

Muadh did not report any experience of overt racism, sexism, Islamophobia, or any other discrimination. However, he acknowledged that there were people in the staffroom or in the community who might have different opinions on and about different people. In his previous school, although most of the staff were friendly, nevertheless, a couple of people stood out:

> ... from the way they talked, that they didn't like me being there because I was of a different colour. I had different beliefs. I think most people were supportive and encouraging. Those people who didn't want me there were possibly feeling threatened, and those people were of an older generation of teachers.

Muadh stated that he had a passion for addressing the underachievement of children from the Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities and white working-class boys. He describes himself as ambitious, completing leadership and other courses regularly for his professional development. He expressed mixed feelings; his teaching was joyful and challenging.

Discussion

These life stories reveal that these teachers have had their primary socialisation in different geographies, which has influenced their identity formation, career paths, and religious outlook. Schools have played a significant role in their civic socialisation. In terms of their religious socialisation, they all attended a madrasah, formally or informally, which is a characteristic of the lives of many Muslim children. They all spoke of the relevance and necessity of madrasah in providing the essential teachings of Islam. Moreover, their educational trajectory shows that some attended private, church, grammar, single-sex, and mixed comprehensive schools. As such, they take all these experiences into their conception of what it means to be a Muslim teacher.

All of the three teachers talked about being comfortable with their cultural heritage, which contributes to the enrichment of their respective schools, and significantly, they felt that it raised the self-esteem of Muslim children, which is central to learning. Unsurprisingly, therefore, none reported that their culture was explicitly challenged. Thus, intercultural education is beneficial for children from all cultural groups, including those from the white majority community. Moreover, they draw upon these multiple identities to serve a variety of purposes. They believe that education is the key to producing not only successful Muslim children but successful children from all communities, especially those who are underachieving. Hence, they are all unreservedly committed to the principles of justice and equality. Practically, they consider themselves role models both for the children in their respective schools and for the wider community in general.

These narratives expose some challenges they faced by considering teaching as a gendered, racialized and politicised profession (Zembylas and Chubbuck, 2018). As people from minority heritages arrive in the UK, their accounts become part of the increasing genre available in the fields of race and education. The teachers speak about positive and enjoyable experiences, with some exceptions for racism, verbal abuse, and microaggressions. None of these Muslim teachers reveal the experiences summarised by Osler (1997) of heightened

control, low expectations, frustration and resentment, and contradictions between policy and practise in relation to equal opportunities. None divulged the extreme forms of racism reported elsewhere (Ghuman, 1995; Benn, 2003). Nevertheless, Juwayriyah's experience of facing difficulties because her qualification was not recognised in the UK despite having relevant experience is not an isolated case. Previous studies show the stereotypical views and low expectations of teachers from overseas (Brar, 1991). That said, racism, overt or covert, is a constant feature reported by contemporary BAME. teachers who encounter racialized and gendered stereotypes (Callender, 2020). Recently, black female Muslim teachers have reported microaggressions and racism; both within the Muslim community and in society. For them, race as well as faith are critical to their experiences (MCB, 2022). When added to this layer, it results in a triple penalty, making their economic participation further bleak (House of Commons, 2016).

These life stories highlight how contemporary Black and Asian teachers' experiences expose racism in their everyday affairs and impede their professional advancement. They experience discrimination on the job and encounter higher rates of verbal abuse relative to their white counterparts (Haque and Elliott, 2017; Wallace, 2020). Moreover, Joseph-Salisbury (2019) points to racial microaggressions being an everyday reality for racially marginalised people.

In this study, there was an apparent absence of the expression of Muslim identity in political terms. They placed a greater emphasis on first establishing their teacher status and professionalism. This is supported by the accounts presented in the fuller study (Mogra, 2011), where we see that, while all were proud of their identity as Muslims, there were lapses from some in relation to some normative practices. Of the men, none, except one, wore a beard nor did they wear their traditional clothing to school and none of the females wore the face veil (*niqab*). However, during the interviews, most wore the headscarf (*hijab*).

These life stories reveal the complex nature of the intersection between socio-political and religio-cultural aspects of the lives of Muslim teachers. These teachers encountered barriers at various stages of their schooling and careers. Some had survived a hostile staffroom and Islamophobic taunts by colleagues and encountered barriers to professional advancement. Others, like another Muslimah head teacher, received derogatory racial terms in their childhood. As well as such overt and wounding racism, she was subjected to institutional racism and denial of her dignity and self-respect by her teachers. The sense of injustice and unfairness lives with her to this day. The experiences of some of these teachers were racially and religiously affected (Mogra, 2009). Therefore, studying their lives becomes important to facilitate an opportunity to have their voices heard, thus empowering them. Furthermore, to explore what it felt like to be a Muslim teacher in the context of a society and an educational system that are structured by class, gender, and race and where religion, in some quarters, in particular Islam, is under security and contempt, makes these life stories, as agentic narratives, acceptable as authentic and legitimate.

In their earlier lives, Aishah worked in a media organisation and Juwayriyah had taken up menial jobs. This means that they had chosen to enter teaching after some deliberation. Juwayriyah did not attribute her rejection to any form of discrimination. However, her perseverance helped her overcome barriers. Her friends encouraged her to gain qualifications through a lengthy route. Once employed as a teacher, she engaged in what she enjoyed as a child. In other words, both parties were negotiating power relationships in schools, i.e., Juwayriyah found a school where she could demonstrate her knowledge and skills, and the school, in turn, found someone that they could employ to fulfil their specific needs. At the

time of the interview, Muadh and Aishah had applied for promotion. That said, not all of them are satisfied with their jobs, as Juwayriyah intends to return to her country of origin. Some felt undervalued after contributing to their school's achievements in several ways.

Conclusion

This chapter presented life stories of three Muslim teachers working in primary schools of Birmingham. They conceptualise identity as *negotiated experiences,* as *community members,* as a *learning trajectory,* as a *nexus of multi membership* and as *a relation between the local and the global.* It is also evident that some Muslim teachers' identity embodies the intersection of social class, race, religion, gender. Thus, they may foreground their identification and disidentification as an agency to contest and create new ways of being.

This research has shown that racism continues to impede the professional advancement of some teachers. Therefore, current practices in schools and HEI should continue with the active elimination of all forms of racism. The absence of Islamophobic incidents in this research does not imply that they were unimportant to these teachers or that they had not experienced them in their careers. It is possible that these are not highlighted because other factors overshadowed these experiences or that the race equality policies are effective and that legislation against discrimination on religious grounds has been implemented. The sample did not have a white or black Muslim, so the variables of race and faith could not be compared. Nevertheless, some individual narratives reveal perceptions of unwitting and deliberate elements of Islamophobia.

Future research needs to include a cross-section of teachers from all backgrounds and on a larger scale. The emerging data in this research explores how understanding an individual's career experience depends significantly on understanding their wider life history within the sociocultural world in which they are situated. These narratives preserve the individuality of the participants and offer the reader an authentic voice to lay the foundation for the life stories of teachers to be considered from a faith perspective.

References

Arthur, J. (2015). Extremism and neo-liberal education policy: A contextual critique of the Trojan Horse affair in Birmingham schools. British Journal of Educational Studies 63(3) 311–328.

Benn, Tansin. "Muslim women talking: Experiences of their early teaching careers." In *Muslim Women in the United Kingdom*, edited by Haifa A. Jawad and Tansin Benn, 131-150. Leiden: Brill. 2003.

Blatchford, Iram. "A Study of Black Students' Perceptions of Racism in Initial Teacher Education." *British Educational Research Journal* 17 no. 1 (1991): 35-50.

Brar, H. Singh. "Unequal Opportunities: The Recruitment, Selection, and Promotion Prospects for Black Teachers." *Evaluation and Research in Education* 5 no. 1 and 2 (1991): 35-47.

British Educational Research Association, 2018. *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* BERA: London, 4th edition. https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2018.

Callender, Christine. "Black male teachers, white education spaces: troubling school practices of othering and surveillance." *British Educational Research Journal* 46 no. 5 (2020): 1081-1098.

Dilek, Muzaffer. C. "*Politics, education policy, and teacher professional identity: Muslim teachers in England."* BERA Conference. 08.09.22. 2022.

Ghuman, Paul A. S. *Asian Teachers in British Schools.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1995.

Haque, Zubaida, and Sian Elliot. *Visible and Invisible Barriers: The Impact of Racism on BME Teachers, an NUT-commissioned report*. Communications Department of the National Union of Teachers [Online] https://neu.org.uk/media/2936/view (Accessed January 17, 2022). 2017.

HMG. *Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities: The Report*. London, UK: HMG. 2021.

House of Commons. *Employment Opportunities for Muslims in the UK Second Report of Session 2016–17* [online] Employment opportunities for Muslims in the UK (parliament.uk) (Accessed December 12, 2022). 2016.

Iqbal, Asima. "Race, religion, and school leadership: The experience of Muslim-Pakistani head teachers." In *Race, Education, and Educational Leadership in England: An Integrated Analysis*, edited by Paul Miller and Christine Callender. 211-236. London: Bloomsbury. 2019.

Joseph-Salisbury, Remi. "Institutionalized whiteness, racial microaggressions, and black bodies out of place in higher education." *Whiteness and Education* 4 no 1 (2019): 1-17.

MCB. 2022. *Race, faith, and community in contemporary Britain Essays on Black, African, and African Caribbean Muslims in the UK* [Online] https://mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Race-Faith-Community-in-Contemporary-Britain PMB2022-FINAL.pdf (Accessed 10/22);

Miller, Robert L. *Researching life stories and family histories.* London: SAGE, 2000.

Mogra, Imran. "Being a Muslimah and a Headteacher: Insights from a Life Story Approach Towards Accessing Leadership." In *Muslim Voices in School*, edited by Özlem Sensoy and Christopher D. Stonebanks, 185-201. Rotterdam: Sense Publisher, 2009.

Mogra, Imran. "On being a Muslim Teacher in England: The Role of Faith and History in Educational Reflections." *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 28 no. 2 (2011): 34-62.

Moulin, Daniel-Stożek, and Bertram J. Schirr. 2017. “Identification and disidentification in reported schooling experiences of adolescent Muslims in England.” *Oxford Review of Education* 43 no. 5 (2017): 580-595.

Osler, Audrey. *The Education and Careers of Black Teachers* Open University Press: Buckingham, 1997.

Osler, Audrey. “Muslim Women Teachers: Life Histories, Identities, and Citizenship.” In *Muslim Women in the United Kingdom and Beyond*, edited by Haifa Jawad and Tansin Benn, 151-169. Leiden: Brill, 2003.

Ritchie, Donald A. *Doing Oral History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Sachs, Judyth. “Teacher professional identity: competing discourses, competing outcomes.” *Journal of Education Policy* 16 no. 2 (2001): 149-161.

Tikly, Leon. 2022. “Racial formation and education: A critical analysis of the Sewell report.” *Ethnicities*, 22 no. 6 (2022): 857-881.

Wallace, Derron. ““The diversity trap?” Critical explorations of black male teachers’ negotiations of leadership and learning in London state schools.” *Race, Ethnicity, and Education* 23 no. 3 (2020): 345-366.

Wenger, Etienne. “*Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*.” Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1998.

Zembylas, Michalinos, and Sharon Chubbuck. “Conceptualizing “Teacher Identity”: A Political Approach.” In *Research on Teacher Identity*, edited by Paul A. Schutz, Ji Hong, and Dionne Cross Francis, 183-193. Cham: Springer, 2018.