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Young Muslim women's political participation in Scotland: Exploring the intersections of gender, religion, class and place

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we take an intersectional approach, and examine how gender, religion, class and place intersect and shape the political participations of young Muslim women in Scotland. In particular, we demonstrate how gendered Islamophobia, class status and the political geographies of Scotland are central factors for shaping political identities and political participations. First, we show that although our participants experience discriminatory processes of gendered Islamophobia, which can result in complex barriers to participation, there is also a political confidence, with many engaging in politics and civic life through a variety of mechanisms. For many, participation is motivated by the understanding that it is a way of countering stereotypes of "Muslim women" and the multiple discriminations they face. Second, we examine how the class backgrounds of the young women influence and play a role in their political participations. We argue that class related factors such as education, social mobility and social capital shape and enable their political participations. Third, we demonstrate how the political geographies of Scotland have worked as a politics of belonging, engendering the participation of many of the young Muslim women in Scottish society.

1. Introduction

A small but growing body of academic work has examined the political identities and political participations of Muslim women in Muslim minority contexts. This growth of interest in the political subjectivities of Muslim women is, in many ways, shaped by two core factors. First, it is in response to the popular framing of Muslim women as disengaged, submissive and apolitical and how these framings are – in some respects – becoming more entrenched. Much of the recent research seeks to challenge stereotypes in public and political discourses and provide more nuanced examinations of the political subjectivities of Muslim women (Joly & Wadia, 2017; Lewicki & O'Toole, 2017; Van Es, 2016; 2017). This intersects with the general increase in Islamophobia in society, and the need to focus on how Muslim women think and respond to such discriminations. Second, a broader conceptualisation of what constitutes political engagement and political agency has been central in enabling research to illustrate the political and active agency of Muslim women. For example, feminist political geographers (Hyndman, 2004; Kofman, 2005; Sharp, 2007), researchers focusing on youth, political geography and critical geopolitics (e.g. Benwell and Hopkins, 2016; Horschelmann, 2008; Skelton, 2010,) and youth and citizenship studies scholars (Harris & Roose, 2014; O'Toole and Gale, 2013) have been influential in broadening politics beyond formal and global institutions to incorporate everyday, embodied and informal practices that constitute part of the political.

In order to open out the varied forms of 'new' participations by Muslim and ethnic minority young people, O'Toole and Gale (2013) talk about 'new grammars of action', while Harris and Roose (2014) refer to 'DIY citizenship'. Examples of informal and 'new' participations include online activism, protest marching, boycotting, blogging, volunteering, community work, mentoring and cultural outputs such as music and radio shows (Finlay, Hopkins, & Sanghera, 2017b). It is important to note that some of these participations are not necessarily 'new', but rather they were not previously recognised in more narrow analytical framings of the political (e.g. Horschelmann & El Refaie, 2013). Importantly though, this reconceptualisation of what is political has opened out who qualifies as a political subject, and has assisted the recent focus on the political participation of Muslim women, as well as other minorities and commonly overlooked groups. What much of this research demonstrates is rather than being non-political, subjugated or completely marginalised, many Muslim women have political agency and are mobilising around a range of political issues (Massoumi, 2015; Wadia, 2015; Carland, 2016; Saeed, 2016; Joly & Wadia, 2017; Lewicki & O'Toole, 2017; Van Es, 2016; 2017). In the literature, two broad areas of political activism can be identified. The first is activism that mobilises around challenging patriarchal interpretations of Islam and sexist

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religious practices. A second area is political mobilizations around the discriminations, violence, stereotyping and securitization that Muslim women and Muslims in general face. In addition, research has also explored how Muslim women engage with institutional and electoral politics, such as voting (Joly & Wadia, 2017) and participating in government initiatives (Rashid, 2014). Despite research illustrating political agency, scholars also assert that Muslim women often have to negotiate expectations and structures within their ethnic group, in Islam and in the majority society, which can provide both facilitation to and obstacles for political participation (Joly & Wadia, 2017) Therefore, Muslim women are frequently situated in a distinctive position when they seek to participate in politics and in the public sphere.

We seek to contribute to this body of work on Muslim women and politics, and examine how intersecting factors shape political participation for young Muslim women (15–27 years old) in Scotland. We take influence from Nagel and Staeheli's assertion that 'scholarly literature has shed light on civic participation among Muslims, [but] it has sidelined the diversity of political identities and values that motivate them' (2011, 438). This reorients the discussion towards a clear focus on the material, spatial and discursive factors that shape political participation or facilitate disengagement, rather than primarily focusing on the type of participations. We take an intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1989; Hopkins, 2017a; Mollett & Faria, 2018), and examine how gender, religion, class and place intersect and shape the political participations of young Muslim women in Scotland. More specifically, we demonstrate how gendered Islamophobia, class status and the political geographies of Scotland are central factors for shaping political identities and political participations. Our focus on Scotland specifically is an important contribution of the paper. As Hopkins (2017b) argues, much of the literature about 'British Muslims' generalizes about the Muslim experience based on studies conducted in cities in England, overlooking the Muslim experience in the devolved countries and peripheral regions within the UK. Indeed, Scotland offers a distinct political and socio-cultural context to the rest of the UK. In particular, the political geography of Scotland has been in a state of transformation, with the rise in support for the Scottish National Party (SNP) and the Independence Referendum in 2014. Therefore, this paper contributes to a small but growing body of work that is attentive to the uniqueness of the Scottish social and political context in relation to the experiences of religious and ethnic minority groups (e.g. Botterill, Hopkins, Sanghera, & Arshad, 2016; Finlay et al., 2017 a & b; Hopkins, 2007, 2017b; Finlay & Hopkins, 2019). The youth focus is also an important aspect, contributing to an emerging body of work that specifically examines the experiences of younger Muslim women (e.g Dwyer & Shah, 2009; Mohammad, 2013). Importantly, it provides a youth focus to understandings about Muslims and political participation, something that is absent in much of the existing research on Muslim political identities. Overall, this paper provides an intersectional analysis that is youth focused, place specific and is concerned with the factors that shape political identities and political participation.

In what follows, we firstly give an overview of the study, the Scottish context and the methods applied in the research. Second, we look at the impact of gender and religion, specifically at how experiences of gendered Islamophobia and sexism shapes how young Muslim women engage with politics. Third, we examine how the class backgrounds of the young women influences their political participations. Finally, we look at how the political and socio-cultural context of Scotland shapes and influences political identities and participations.

1.1. The study and Scottish research context

The research context for this paper is upon young Muslim women who are growing up in contemporary Scotland. The Muslim population of Scotland was 76,737 in the 2011 census, which is 1.4% of the population, an increase of nearly 79% since 2001 (Hopkins, 2017b). Of the total Muslim population, 35,496 are women and 41,241 are men. Around two-thirds of the Scottish Muslim community identify with a South Asian heritage. Just over half are aged under thirty, compared to 36% of the total population, thus the Muslim population is a youthful one. Glasgow is home to 42% of Scotland's Muslim population with smaller concentrations in Edinburgh and Dundee. Almost 1 in 3 (31%) of the Muslim population was 'economically active' full-time during the 2011 Census, which was significantly lower than the figure for the whole population (51%).

Scotland is often considered a 'stateless nation' within the UK and has many distinctive cultural and socio-political characteristics with the 2014 independence referendum highlighting some of the distinctive qualities of Scotland within the UK. However, 55% of those who voted in the 2014 independence referendum opposed the notion that Scotland should be independent from the rest of the UK. Nonetheless, the SNP remain the governing party of the Scottish Parliament and another independence referendum in the near future is regularly a feature of political debate. The Scottish context then, provides a distinct and important space to examine Muslim women's experiences.

Our interest in the factors that shape the political participations of Muslim youth warranted a qualitative approach to research that enabled young people to discuss their views and explore their social worlds with the research team. Overall, we conducted research with 19 Muslim women in 2016; we carried out 11 individual in-depth interviews and two focus groups with a total of eight participants. 16 of the participants were young people (aged 15–27 years) and 3 were aged 28 or over. The reason we spoke to three Muslim women over 28 was because they were in publicly prominent roles (politicians and local councillors) and they could provide insights into the experiences of Muslim women in Scotland. 17 of those who participated lived in Glasgow area, and two in Edinburgh. 15 of the 19 were born in Scotland and around two-thirds of our participants identified as having a South Asian heritage. Other ethnic heritages included Indonesian, Lebanese, Iraqi, and Malaysian. Therefore, when we use the term 'Muslim' in this paper, we are referring to a heterogeneous grouping of people who identify as Muslim. The majority of the young women were from class backgrounds where university was aspired to and usually achieved. This illustrates a level of social mobility that is less common for those positioned lower down on the class spectrum. In order to recruit young Muslims to participate in this study, we used a process of snowballing by contacting relevant organizations and asking them to signpost us to potential participants or other organizations that work with Muslims or ethnic minority young people. We worked with university groups, colleges, secondary schools, mosques and refugee organizations. Consent was achieved prior to the interviews and focus groups, and we use pseudonyms throughout the paper to protect confidentiality. The focus groups and interviews were fully transcribed and then analysed by theme.

Our positionality as male, white, Scottish/British and non-Muslim will have influenced – to some extent - the research encounters and data gathered. Nonetheless, we did seek to reduce power imbalances by always utilising language, questions and information sheets that reinforced the agency of the participants and the importance of hearing the experiences and opinions of young Muslims.

1.2. Intersecting discriminations: gendered Islamophobia and sexism

To begin to examine intersectional factors that shape political participation, we look at gender and religion, specifically at how experiences of gendered Islamophobia and sexism shapes how young Muslim women engage with politics. For the majority of the young Muslim women we spoke with, being a young woman and Muslim was seen to have distinct challenges. Participants highlighted that their life worlds are marked by the intersecting discursive and material discriminations of Islamophobia, sexism and racism. Most participants expressed a clear understanding that being Muslim and female generally results in a marginal social positioning, where multiple discriminations have to be

negotiated in everyday life. These multiple forms of discriminations are highly pertinent in shaping how young Muslim women politically participate. For example, consider Linzi's views:

> And you are seeing a lot of sexism happen, a lot of sexism for Muslim Women. And then there is the questions aimed at you like, 'oh but why … why aren't Muslim females involved in politics? And well, because this is what happens when they do get involved. They face all this, they face Islamophobia, sexism, they face … all these different issues that Muslim males perhaps wouldn't face as much. Linzi (16–18, Scottish-Arab, Glasgow)

Linzi highlights the multiple discriminations that Muslim women face and how it creates distinctive barriers and challenges for political participation. The intersecting forces of Islamophobia and sexism can generate feelings of vulnerability and insecurity, which are exacerbated when engaging in politics and public life. Although politics can take place in more private spaces, as argued in the literature (e.g. Kuss, 2017), the participants, when discussing politics, frequently conceive it as something that is more often performed in the public sphere. This is not to argue that they do not engage in politics in more private and domestic ways, but when perceiving and discussing it, the language of conventional understandings of politics are frequently utilised. This understanding of politics as a public process is significant to how intersectional discriminations can politically marginalise, as the public sphere is a space where Muslim women can be more open to hostility (Hopkins, 2016; Najib and Hopkins, 2019; Tell MAMA, 2015, 2017). It is a space that is perceived as both racialized and gendered, more inclusive to non-Muslims and to men. Moreover, the type of question - "why aren't Muslim females involved in politics?" - illustrates certain discourses that circulate about Muslim women, citizenship and politics. Again, it is conceiving politics as something that occurs in the public sphere, and that Muslim women rarely participate in such public spaces. This question then is partly shaped by the discursive framing of Muslim women as disengaged from mainstream society. Moreover, the public realm of politics is where one enacts traditional forms of citizenship, so such a question can been seen to query the citizenship and belonging of Muslim women.

A second distinctive feature of the discriminations experienced by young Muslim women, is they have to negotiate patriarchy and sexism on two levels – within wider society and within localised Muslim and ethnic minority 'communities' (Joly & Wadia, 2017). Barsha notes:

> When I was younger it was a bit difficult for me to engage [in politics] because I would have comments left right and centre about me engaging through the Bangladeshi community. People would say lots of horrible things about it, and I actually had a few issues when I was part of the Scottish Youth Parliament. Barsha (19–21, Scottish-Bangladeshi, Edinburgh)

Here, Barsha illustrates that patriarchy and gender norms within the 'Bangladeshi community' have made it difficult for her to engage in politics. There are sections of the community that appear to disapprove of her active engagement in politics, which has resulted in negative comments and 'issues' within the community. Therefore, young Muslim women can experience the active policing of their voices and participations from both inside communities and wider society. For instance, when Bahija was asked if she thought it was more difficult for young women to get involved in politics, she stated:

> Oh yeah, without a doubt. Without a doubt! Within the BME [black and minority ethnic] Muslim community there is a school of thought that would probably say 'should she be at the forefront'. There is that school of thought you know. And there is the indigenous population that will look at me and think well actually 'Have you got a voice as a Muslim women? There is that image you know about Muslim women. Bahija (28+, Scottish-Pakistani, Glasgow)

In the quote, Bahija illustrates the two levels of patriarchal discriminations and stereotyping that Muslim women deal with. This – she asserts – make it specifically challenging for young Muslim women to participate politically. On the one hand, within communities, they have to enact generational change and mobilise 'new' Muslim femininities, while on the other; they have to challenge and undermine gendered stereotypes of Islamophobia in wider society. All of this situates young Muslim women in a marginalised space, where political participation and social mobility can be especially challenging. For some of the participants in the research, this was certainly the case, with their political agency and political subjectivities being constrained or completely silenced. This was more evident, we found, for the younger participants (15–17 years old) who were still at school and had not gone on to further or higher education at the time of the research. The intersections of age with gender, religion and ethnicity therefore presents additional challenges. For example, during a focus group with students at a secondary school in Glasgow, one participant stated:

> … I don't I feel like I can voice my opinion because I feel like I am too scared of the reaction I am going to get. Whereas like there will be things that I feel strongly but I won't write anything because I know that there will be someone out there that has something to say. And it kind of discourages you, but then obviously there are people who are more proud and they can say it. But I feel like for a young teenage girl … the controversy of voicing my opinion, the abuse I would get. Abida (16–18, Scottish–Pakistani, Glasgow)

Abida illustrates that she is 'scared' to be political and voice her opinion. She is discouraged by the potential abuse she could receive for being a young Muslim women who voices her political opinion. Other participants discussed how the idea of being a political figure or pursuing a political career was a daunting prospect, as they would likely receive abuse and hostility. For instance, consider the following comments made during a focus group conversation:

> Anna: I feel like you would probably get a lot of hate if you were a public Muslim figure. (16–18, British-Pakistani, Glasgow)

> Salma: You would have to have a lot of confidence and you would have to be thick skinned. (16–18, Scottish-Moroccan, Glasgow)

These anxieties about politics are partly because political participation is conceived in its conventional sense, as a public spatial process rather than private, and this could leave young Muslim women open to a range of hostilities, such as Islamophobia, racism and sexism. Drawing on the work by Botterill et al. (2016, 2018, 2019) about young people's everyday securities, we can see that the political realm is a space that could exacerbate a sense of 'ontological insecurity'. In brief, 'ontological insecurity' is 'the feeling of a precarious and threatened sense of existence' (Lang quoted in Botterill, Hopkins, & Sanghera, 2019, p. 469). By not engaging in the public space of politics then, it can be considered as a strategy that is perceived to mitigate further senses of 'ontological insecurity' in a world where they already feel insecure. Therefore, for some participants, intersectional discrimination works to spatially and politically marginalise, pushing them into the private and silenced spaces of society. Islamophobia, racism and sexism function to regulate and discipline subjectivities, making one feel insecure and precarious, which can limit the social and political mobility of young Muslim women. This illustrates how the gendered discourses of Islamophobia can silence Muslim women, which - paradoxically - is what such discourses, try to blame on patriarchal religious practices.

1.3. Mobilising against gendered Islamophobia

We have highlighted that young Muslim women have to negotiate a range of discriminations and inequalities, which can marginalise them. For some, this results in barriers to political participation, silencing them and constraining their political subjectivities. However, we also observed a political confidence in many of the young women, with

many engaging in politics and public life. Rather than internalising discriminations and marginalisation, they were actively resisting it through a range of political participations. The types of participations incorporate both institutional and non-institutional forms, with mainstream politics and alternative forms of political engagement of interest to many of the participants.

A range of factors influence the political participation and political identities of the young women, but we would argue that the distinctive ways Muslim women are marginalised and discriminated against is a core-underpinning factor for their political participations. Marginalisation – to a certain extent – is engendering the active and political engagement of some young Muslim women. As bell hooks highlights, marginality is 'much more than a site of deprivation […] it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance' (1989, p.206). Or as Hall asserts, the margins are 'simultaneously precarious and creative' (2017, 5), where the marginalised are both constrained and mobilised. This notion of marginalisation very much resonates with the experiences of young Muslim women in Scotland, with many attempting to resist and challenge socio-political marginalisation through a range of political participations and activisms. This resistance to powerful forms of discrimination and marginalisation is something we have seen in generations before, with black activism and anti-racist movements from 1960s, 70s and 80s, such as Black Power and the Asian youth Movement (Bloom & Martin, 2016; Ramamurthy, 2013). Therefore, the potential for marginality to produce creativity and resistance is etched into the history of minority struggles. The 'postcolonial present' (Nayak, 2010) then, like the colonial and postcolonial past (Jefferess, 2008), is marked by acts of minority resistance to the continuation of racism, discrimination and marginalisation. It is important to note, this understanding of marginalisation is not to downplay the vulnerabilities, suffering and exclusion of those marginalised, but it is to demonstrate the multiple realities of marginalisation and that it can also engender resistance and creativity.

For the young Muslim women in the research, their participations are shaped by the distinctive ways their identities are framed and stereotyped. For example, consider Linzi's views:

> The way I see it as being a Muslim woman, in this day and age, and in Britain in general, it is almost inherently political. Like everything ends up concerning you in some way or another and it is a whole new narrative from being just a Muslim in general. So I think it does involve Muslim women challenging the misconceptions about Muslim women, challenging it through being seen and heard. Linzi (16–18, Scottish-Arab, Glasgow)

Linzi illustrates that the way Muslim women have become objects of political and media debate has worked as a politicising process, creating a need and motivation for Muslim women to be 'seen and heard'. For many of our participants, there is awareness that they are framed differently to Muslim men in political and popular discourse, which is creating a distinct political space for Muslim women to engage in. Underpinning the politicization of young Muslim women, are processes of misrepresentation and stereotyping. As discussed earlier in the paper, Muslim women are frequently characterised as submissive, apathetic, uninformed subjects who are hidden from the public sphere and vulnerable to patriarchal practices and terrorist manipulation. As a result, young Muslim women are being motivated to engage in politics, as it seen as a way to challenge and undermine a range of stereotypical discourses. Consider the following extracts from a number of the participants:

> It [political participation] is to show that we, regardless of what the media says, we are not, we are not portrayed as the media shows us. We can engage, we are not like, for women especially, we are not fully, we are not oppressed, we can engage and like it is breaking those barriers. Barsha (19–21, Scottish-Bangladeshi, Edinburgh)

> Also because people have the idea that women, Muslim women are oppressed and we don't do anything at all. Because if women are going out and showing their opinion, then that is proving them wrong isn't it. Lara (16–18, British-Lebanese, Glasgow)

> They [Muslim women] are finding themselves singled out in the news and that … Not just because they are Muslim, but because they are Muslim and women …. For example like David Cameron saying that Muslim women are disengaged. So, I would say that perhaps Muslim men feel more clear that they have to answer for that. But, for me, I felt that if I don't answer for that, it would generally be the perception that would be seen of me. Linzi (16–18, Scottish-Arab, Glasgow)

In all the above quotes, the young women demonstrate they are astutely aware of the prevailing stereotypes of Muslim women and that they consider political participation and voicing opinion as way to challenge such representations. This sentiment was highlighted in the majority of interviews when discussing motivations and reasons for engaging in politics. Political participation is partly a strategy of resisting stereotypes of Muslim women, which in turn can challenge stereotypes about the religion of Islam. Other researchers have also observed the strategy of reworking gendered and religious stereotypes by Muslim women. For example, van Es's (2016, 2017), in her research on Dutch and Norweigan Muslim women, demonstrates that many of the women in her research turn themselves into 'ambassadors' of Islam and attempt to break stereotypes of the 'oppressed' Muslim women through everyday interactions and public engagement. Therefore, there is evidence that Muslim women are becoming acutely aware of the role of representation in how they are marginalised, and that they are seeking to challenge such representations through a variety of strategies. For young Muslim women in our research, political participation - in its many different forms – is a way to include themselves in the structures of representation, which allows them to gain some level of control over representations. Strategies for challenging stereotypes and promoting positive self-representation incorporate highly public participations in mainstream politics and social activism, but they also include more micro and everyday strategies of activism. For example, consider the following quote:

> When you start communicating with other people when you are talking to them and you are maybe talking to people of all different races and backgrounds and stuff like that, it kind of helps because they see you as who you are rather than what the media portrays of you. So like you are more involved and you can kind of … they kind of … when someone meets you and they know how you are, they can kind of like reflect when they see that on the TV. They can reflect and be like … well that is not how so and so is. That person they are not that. So they can come to an understanding themselves, rather than just like adopting what the media says. Lara (16–18, British-Lebanese, Glasgow)

Everyday interactions, such as speaking and communicating with people from different backgrounds are a way of challenging stereotypes about Muslim women. As Lara states in the above quote, this allows non-Muslims to have a point of reference that challenges what they see and hear in media and other discourses. Therefore, through micro-strategies of encounter, Muslim women's political engagement and subjectivities can take shape through everyday practices and everyday performances. This illustrates how minorities can strategically utilise encounters to challenge stereotyping, discrimination and marginalisation.

In addition to the stereotyping of Muslim women, gendered Islamophobia - in its many guises – is shaping and motivating the political participation of the young Muslim women. A range of social activisms and mainstream political participations are influenced by the increasing climate of Islamophobia. For example, consider the following quote:

> People can be put off from engaging because of all the Islamophobia that is going around. But I think that actually makes me want to get more involved to portray Islam in a better way, to challenge Islamophobia. Barsha (19–21, Scottish-Bangladeshi, Edinburgh)

Barsha engages in politics mainly through institutional routes, such as the Scottish Youth Parliament and working with the SNP. There are a variety of local and Scottish issues that motivate and shape her participation. But as the quote illustrates, Islamophobia is a significant underlying motivation to engage in politics. Although much of Barsha's political engagement does not directly connect with Islamophobia and discrimination, she considers political participation - per se - as a way for young Muslim's to challenge and undermine gendered Islamophobia. Again, this is partly to do with representation, and providing alternative images of Muslim women through greater participation. There is also an understanding that general participation in more prominent positions and engagement with issues that are not 'exclusively' faith-based, is a way to challenge Islamophobic stereotypes, such as ones that construct young Muslim women as disengaged and apolitical.

To be visibly engaged in mainstream politics and public life is an important way to show that young Muslims are engaged in Scottish and UK life, which in turn, challenges Islamophobia. Drawing on work about the self-representations of American Muslims by McGinty (2012), we can see the resistance and participation discussed in this section is partly a counternarrative of citizenship and belonging. It is an attempt to become visible, to demonstrate an interest in and commitment to Scottish and British society, which overall is a struggle to have their citizenship recognised in the face of growing Islamophobia. In Lewicki and O'Toole's (2017) research, they illustrate how Muslim women make citizenship claims through the "doing" and "undoing" of social norms. This notion of "doing" and "undoing" of social norms very much resonates with the participations of the young women in the research. For example, the active engagement and interest in UK and Scottish politics can be seen as an act of "doing" social norms. It is an engagement with and interest in the democratic structures and political institutions of Scotland and the UK, which is a highly normative practice of citizenship. However, it is also an act of undoing social norms, as it undermines traditional notions of Muslim women as disengaged. It provides an alternative idea about Muslim women, one where they have greater rights and participate visibly in institutional politics. Moreover, it is a spatial process, often aiming to re-centre the identities of Muslim women out of the margins, and into more visible and public spaces. Therefore, although the public realm can engender a sense of insecurity for some participants, for many other participants, it is perceived as a space where they can undermine prejudices, and it could be argued, where they can achieve greater 'ontological security'.

As previously discussed, gender norms and patriarchy within Muslim 'communities' is another way Muslim women are marginalised, and for some participants, this is another factor that shapes their participations.

> I think it is very important [participation] because obviously there is that, there is a whole image that you can't do it. And sometimes it does happen, where I see it myself, where you are told that you shouldn't get engaged too much because you might find it difficult for you to get married or all this stuff. People might think you are too out there and too … not … maintaining your cultural roots. It is really hard to balance, because you get told all this things, but you are just like I am living in Scotland and obviously that kind of thing was okay in Bangladesh, but not here, and not in this day and age. So obviously I feel like I fight against it. Barsha (19–21, Scottish-Bangladeshi, Edinburgh)

As Barsha highlights, certain segments of the Bangladeshi Muslim community police the behaviours and roles of Muslim women. However, instead of limiting Barsha's participations, she is resisting patriarchal gender norms by engaging in politics. Traditional gender norms about the role of Muslim women are - in many respects – motivating and stimulating Barsha to engage in politics. She considers participation as a way to undermine traditional gender norms, and as a way to reframe the role of young Muslim women. This illustrates a youth struggle to create a generational change with respect to the role of women and how they should behave. It also demonstrates a cultural struggle between different generations of migrants and the formation of more hybrid youthful identities. Again, drawing on the work of Lewicki and O'Toole (2017), Barsha's participation is an undoing of social norms, as it is seeking to transform the role of women in Muslim and Bangladeshi communities. It is a strategic process to engender more rights and citizenship for young Muslim women. This resistance to gender norms was articulated by a number of participants, and political participation is seen a way to enact resistance and reframe the role of women in Muslim and ethnic minority communities.

In this section, we have demonstrated that experiences of discrimination and marginalisation are politically mobilising many young Muslim women. The intersectional discriminations that surround and infiltrate their identities and everyday lives shape and motivate political engagement. Many consider political participation – per se – as a way to undermine discriminations and challenge processes of marginalisation. In a sense, these young women are mobilising a politics of resistance, and reimaging the role and image of Muslim women in Scotland, the UK and beyond. However, as discrimination and marginalisation primarily works to silence and relegate, we need to ask; what factors are assisting these young women to participate politically and what mitigates the silencing impacts of marginalisation? Therefore, in the next section, we examine factors that assist these young women to resist certain impacts of marginalisation and participate politically.

1.4. Class, social mobility and social capital

In this section, we advance our intersectional analysis, and examine how the class backgrounds of the young women influence and play a role in their political participations. In the following section, we also look more closely at place, and examine how the political geographies and social context of Scotland shapes their participations.

Scholars have discussed extensively how educational inequalities, power imbalances and weakened socio-cultural capital can result in political marginalisation and political apathy in working class communities (Evans & Tiley, 2017; Manning & Holmes, 2013). These class-based discriminations can deter participation as they facilitate problems with self-confidence, a lack of political networks and disengagement with the mainstream political institutions (Evans & Tiley, 2017; Manning & Holmes, 2013; McGarvey, 2017). This illustrates how class is an important factor to consider when examining why young people are politically active or not. Dwyer et al.'s (2008) research with young Muslim men illustrated how class is highly significant in determining the life chances of young Muslims in the UK. Moreover, class is especially important when looking at political participation, because as Joly and Wadia state 'the socio-economic situation of Muslim women collectively and individually also determines their political behaviour, how they choose to 'do politics' and the level of frequency' (2017: 160). Within the context of the UK, the class status of Muslims is varied, often influenced by place of residence and ethnicity (Thapar-Bjorkert & Sanghera, 2010). However, in general, British Muslims are considered some of the most disadvantaged people living in the UK, with limited social mobility and limited access to Higher Education (HE) and the job market (Stevenson et al., 2017). Within the context of Scotland, Muslims are considered to be less disadvantaged than Muslims in other parts of the UK, but they are still overrepresented in deprived areas and face a range of challenges and discriminations (Elshayyal, 2016).

The participants who were the most actively political and involved in activism were at university, or had been at university. Although class status is multidimensional and complex, incorporating cultural, social,

political and economic aspects (Dowling, 2009), educational status is significant, illustrating a level of social mobility that those at the lower end of the class spectrum struggle to achieve. Statistics in the UK shows that participation of the lower classes in HE remains low, especially in comparison to people from middle class and professional families (Pells, 2016). Therefore, although it is difficult to clearly ascertain the class backgrounds of the participants, especially without greater examination of their economic and cultural capital, their participation in HE does illustrate a certain degree of social mobility. We understand social mobility as the ability to move to another social class strata or the ability to consolidate ones social standing (Bertaux & Thompson, 2006). University provides education and possible further social mobility, but through networks and support it can also provide significant social capital. In brief, social capital commonly refers to the potential resource of networks and institutions for achieving common goals (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 1995). We want to argue then, that the educational status and resulting class dynamics in the everyday lives of the young women is a significant factor in shaping political participation and activism. This is most visibly illustrated through the way participants were engaging in politics through university associations, such as Islamic societies and other student groups. University provides a space to develop political interests and the social capital that these societies offer can engender a confidence and ability to be political and politically participate. For example, consider the two following quotes:

> Being a woman I don't think I've ever felt not able to participate, but I do think that things like that exist and they need to be tackled when they are. But luckily I think I've had good opportunities, education and support and I've never been held back because of my gender. Aiza (22–27, Scottish-Pakistani, Glasgow)

> I mean when I ran for Student Union president I got support, full support from the Islamic Society first, and then from everybody else. My parents, maybe because they were born in this country have always been very supportive of everything that I do. I mean even like being the first female president of the society, I got support from the membership, it wasn't a radical thing, it was a natural thing - So yeah with myself because I've had a great support structure and I've not let it stop me. Amal (22–27, Scottish-Pakistani, Glasgow)

In the above quotes, both participants assert that they have not felt or experienced significant barriers to participation. Instead, they highlight how their education and resulting support structures and networks have assisted them to participate in political roles. Because of their education and personal background, they have attained a relatively significant level of social capital, which provides them with confidence and support networks when engaging in politics and public affairs. It is important to note that their political participations are not restricted to the space of the university, with many also participating in activist groups, volunteering and political parties in non-academic spaces. Therefore, the incubation of social capital and political confidence in the university space translates into participations in wider society, and – of course – this can work in reverse, with wider society participations feeding into campus politics.

The majority of the younger participants, who had not, at the time of the research, been to University, were nonetheless aspiring to study at university and were in the process of applying for a range of degree courses. Their aspirations involved social mobility, and attending university was seen as an achievable goal and something to aspire to. Therefore, they conveyed a confidence and aspiration that is partly indicative of a class environment that aims to be socially mobile. With the transition into university still pending, the political participation of our younger participants were more subtle and individualised, which was an engagement that is neither ‘deeply apathetic about politics nor unconventionally engaged’ (Harris, Wyn, & Younes, 2010, p. 9). For Harris et al. (2010), this is a more ‘ordinary’ from of youth political engagement, which incorporates less spectacular activisms. This mainly revolves around every day discussions and debates about politics. Political discussion was a pervasive way that the younger Muslim women engaged with politics, and many were highly astute at discussing political issues. In a sense, the political debates and policies that focus on Muslim communities can make young Muslim women astutely political, which they convey in everyday conversations. These more subtle forms of participation by younger participants are partly due to greater feelings of anxiety around political engagement. The barriers to participation often experienced by Muslim women were more acutely felt by the younger participants. Therefore, there are signs of youth transitions into more politically active subjects because of age, social mobility, education and social capital.

Muslim women with a low class status and limited social mobility can experience heightened marginalisation when it comes to HE, politics and public life. The Islamic religion, for some, can be just as important a factor as class status for motivating educational aspirations (Thapar-Bjorkert & Sanghera, 2010). However, coming from lower class backgrounds will mean that young Muslim women have to deal with a range of class-based discriminations, which when intersecting with religious and gender discriminations, can make participation in HE, politics and public life especially difficult. Therefore, it is critical to understand that the young Muslim women in this research come from middle-class backgrounds, where HE is aspired to and normally achieved, and this is a key intersecting factor that shapes and enables their political participations. Social mobility and social capital assists them to engage in public life and resist the marginalizing processes of gendered Islamophobia. This is not to argue that class and economic prosperity completely mitigate against the harmful impacts of discrimination; however, it can provide tools, strategies and creativity that help to challenge and undermine prejudice and marginalisation. Finally, considering class status helps to illustrate the varied positioning and backgrounds of Muslim women in society and the heterogeneity within the category of "Muslim woman".

1.5. Political geographies of Scotland & politics of belonging

Despite receiving less attention in many intersectional discussions, the context of place is another key characteristic of intersectionality (Hopkins, 2017a). Therefore, to understand intersecting factors that shape the political participation of young Muslim women, the socio-cultural and political contexts of where they are situated are important to examine. A range of place specific factors can assist, limit and shape political participation of ethnic minorities (Kuss, 2017), such as national and localised political cultures, hierarchies of belonging and racist and discriminatory structures and attitudes. Scotland is a national space with distinctive characteristics, especially with respect to its political culture, and for many of the young Muslim women in the research, the Scottish context is a significant factor in shaping their political participations.

Over the last 30 years, Scotland's political landscape has been in a state of transformation, forging what many consider a politically and socially distinct identity to other parts of the UK (Mooney, 2013). These distinctions are in part a symptom of a number of political and societal changes that have occurred such as the increased devolution of power to Scotland in the early 1990s, the formation of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, the surge in support for the SNP and the Scotland Act 2016 awarding further powers to Scotland in the wake of the 2014 referendum (Elshayyal, 2016). 2014 and 2015 are considered to have been highly 'tumultuous', with ‘remarkable and profound developments in Scotland's political history’ (Rosie, 2015, p. 383). During these years, the rise of Scottish nationalism was firmly crystalized and the build up to the independence referendum in 2014 resulted in Scottish society becoming more politicized. The EU referendum in 2016 in which every area in Scotland had a majority vote to remain within the EU, raises the prospect of a second independence referendum for Scotland, or at that very least, further

devolution (Elshayyal, 2016). Hopkins (2015: 92) highlights how this was a politically energising period for Scottish society, stating:

> It was clear from the coverage from the Scottish independence referendum that many people – including young people – were deeply involved in, and engaged by, the whole process. Many were active in local campaigning, regularly campaigning in debates about the referendum; something about the Scottish independence referendum clearly captured the imagination of the Scottish people.

Therefore, this was also a politically transformative period for young people, with 16 and 17 year olds being granted the right to vote for the first time. As a result, many commentators have argued that the Referendum sparked a political interest in young people, with an estimated 75% of eligible 16 and 17 year olds voting in the Referendum (Baxter, Tait, McLaverty, & MacLeod, 2015). Research has demonstrated that young Muslims and ethnic minorities were also politicized by the political changes in Scotland (Finlay et al., 2017 a & b), and for the young Muslim women in our research, Scottish politics has significantly formed and shaped their political identities. The 2014 Independence Referendum, Scottish nationalism and the SNP were all significant topics when discussing politics and political participation. For example, consider the following quotes:

> I think especially after the Independence Referendum … then I engaged a whole lot more with Scottish politics, I mean after that I joined the SNP. I got … like more into politics and then chose to go and study politics. Linzi (16–18, Scottish-Arab, Glasgow)

> So that independence referendum discussion was great, and there was a lot of young Muslims that wanted to have their opinion on it and have their voices heard. Barsha (19–21, Scottish-Bangladeshi, Edinburgh)

For Linzi, Barsha and many other participants, the Scottish Independence Referendum of 2014 and political moments related to the Referendum were a politicising process, engendering an interest in and engagement with Scottish mainstream politics and the future direction of the country. The referendum made politics pertinent and tangible in the everyday lives of the young Muslim women. A precursor to the Referendum and the 'tumultuous' years of 2014 and 2015 was the rise of the SNP and the growing support for Scottish nationalism, which is another pertinent aspect to the political engagement and interests of many of the young Muslim women in the research. Scottish nationalism is a form of 'minority' or 'sub-state' nationalism, which promotes the idea of Scottish home rule and an independent Scotland within the UK. This was the driving force behind the Referendum in 2014, and was the core overarching debate that revolved around the referendum. For many of the young Muslim women in the research, Scottish nationalism and the idea of an independent Scotland was a political process that they supported. For example, consider the following quotes:

> But yeah I think the campaign captured … what we could see was the successful integration, where Muslims felt Scottish, and that's why they're wanting … that's why the kind of nationalism appealed to them. Because it wasn't like … I think the campaign didn't differentiate, like the result was going to be different for different, you know, BME groups or ethnic people. There was going to be a, you know, Scotland for everyone, I think that's where it kind of captured it very well. But I think young people like change and they like to know that they can be part of that change. As well I think the Muslim vote was very much like the mainstream vote, in that, you know it was part of that sort of rhetoric of change and aspiration. But I think what was done very well was that they didn't separate different groups, you know everyone's Scottish and they're making this decision together. Amal (22–27, Scottish-Pakistani, Glasgow)

> Well I actually believe nationalism has generally been exclusive of people but I think Scottish nationalism, we have kind of redefined nationalism, and that is why I feel kind of proud of the movement if you will. I find it has been really inclusive, it's not about the colour of your skin, and it's not about where you come from, it's about what you want for Scotland … Other nationalist movements would probably exclude me for my background or the colour of my skin and things like that, but I feel we haven't really had much of that here and I feel really proud of that. Sara (22–27, Scottish, Edinburgh)

In the above quotes, Amal and Sara interpret Scottish nationalism as inclusive to young Muslims, demonstrating that it is often perceived as a progressive, civic and liberal form of nationalism, rather than a conservative and ethnically defined one. They consider the nationalist movement to be more concerned about the future direction of Scotland and about creating a 'better' Scotland, rather than it being about ethnic identity and belonging. And as Linzi alludes to, the nationalist campaign and Referendum were often successful in making young Muslims feel Scottish and feel like Scotland was for 'everyone'. Before, during and after the 2014 Referendum, the SNP have actively sought to promote this idea of civic nationalism and evoke a notion of inclusive belonging to Scotland. Therefore, there is considered to be a distinctive political culture in Scotland to the rest of the UK, which many consider more progressive and inclusive (Hepburn & Rosie, 2014; Keating, 2010), especially with respect to migration and multiculturalism (Hepburn & Rosie, 2014). For the young women in the research, the distinctive nature of Scottish political culture and distinct political policies were often facilitating and shaping political interest and engagement. For example, consider the following quotes:

> … absolutely I definitely prefer Scottish politics to mainstream politics, English politics. I think what we've got right, what Scotland has right is it's very inclusive and more grassroots and I think the politics is more in line with what the people want. Hence why we saw such a sudden shift towards the SNP in the last election, and so many more people that were politically disengaged actually engaging. Amal (22–27, Scottish-Pakistani, Glasgow)

> With their (SNP) economic policies and that, I'm not too keen. But with their social justice element and what they are doing in terms of that. I mean their whole kind of creating a healthier, fairer and more equal Scotland, the fact that they are recognizing social isolation, mental health, they are trying to put human rights at the centre of everything. Whereas in Westminster at the moment they want to scrap that, which is frightening. I think they have a more open-minded approach and a more inclusive approach and that is what appeals to me and I think it appeals to a lot of young people, regardless if they are Muslim or not in Scotland. Sara (22–27, Scottish, Edinburgh)

In the above quotes, the young women convey a positive perception about certain features of the Scottish political landscape. Amal considers Scottish politics to be more inclusive and grassroots compared to British politics, and this is making her highly engaged with the political culture of Scotland. Sara sees the SNP's policies and core ideology of Scottish nationalism as inclusive and focused on social justice, which she considers appealing to young Muslims and young people in general.

It is important to note that some commentators urge a cautionary interpretation of the civic and inclusive nature of Scottish nationalism and the Scottish context (Linpää 2018). For example, Linpää (2018) argues that SNP have evoked this notion of an inclusive Scotland through a 'collective amnesia' of Scotland's significant role of in the British Empire. Moreover, she argues that there 'seems to be a disconnect between how belonging to Scotland is imagined and articulated from above and how it is experienced from below' (2017). Importantly, these critiques assist us to acknowledge that racism, xenophobia and segregation remain a structuring feature of Scottish society (Davidson et al., 2018). However, as we have illustrated, many of the young Muslim women in the research, who are from 'below' and in a minority

position, do interpret Scottish nationalism as inclusive and Scottish politics as more progressive. Indeed, the Referendum and debates about independence can be seen to be a significant political moment that opened up a 'politics of belonging' (Yuval-Davis, 2011) for the young Muslim women. Yuval-Davis describes the politics of belonging as 'not only constructions of boundaries but also the inclusion or exclusion of particular people, social categories and groupings within these boundaries by those who have the power to do this' (2011, 18). Institutional politics is an exercise of power that mobilises 'hegemonic political projects of belonging' (2011, 19). Whilst there are everyday politics of belonging, where non-hegemonic subjects mobilise political projects of belonging. The politics of the SNP and the shaping and promotion of Scottish nationalism can be seen as political processes that seeks to create a project of belonging. As we have discussed, the SNP and other factions of the independence movement have sought to create a politics of belonging that is inclusive and civic, rather than exclusive and ethnic. In a sense, this has been an attempt to create an alternative political project of belonging, especially to that of the UK government, which in recent years, has been more focused on reinforcing boundaries and creating a 'hostile environment' to outsiders (Burrell et al., 2018). Although limitations have been found in the politics of belonging evoked by the SNP, our research illustrates that it has, for many of the young Muslim women, worked as a positive and inclusive process. Indeed, the Scottish political context has opened up a space for the young Muslim women to mobilize their own personal politics of belonging. Their participations in institutional and informal politics all works as a process of citizenship. This illustrates how re-imaginations of the nation, where inclusivity and plurality are put at the centre of the national narrative, can significantly assist the belongings and participations of ethnic minorities. Moreover, when an inclusive politics of belonging becomes a core feature of a politicising moment, such as the independence referendum in 2014, it can become more deeply concerned with the fundamental characteristics and future directions of a country, potentially resulting in more profound impacts on belongings and participations.

Although political framings of Scotland by the SNP can gloss over non-inclusive and intolerant aspects of Scottish society, it is a political narrative that seeks to celebrate diversity and promote an inclusive Scotland, which is having positive impacts on the senses of belonging and political participations of many of the young Muslim women in this research. However, it is important to note other research has shown that the Scottish political context has also had negative impacts for ethnic minorities. In research by Botterill et al. (2016), they show that some young ethnic minorities were made to feel insecure about their future in Scotland because of the Independence Referendum. As Yuval-Davis (2011) argues, politics of belonging can be interpreted and experienced in different ways, often dependent on intersectional features of one's identity. Therefore, the heterogeneity and range of standpoints within categories such as young Muslim women and young ethnic minority will result in many different experiences and interpretations of politics. For example, the age, the class positionality and resulting education and social mobility of the young Muslim women in the research can be seen as significant factors for how they experience the Scottish political context. This, again, illustrates the importance of looking at class and place in the intersectional analysis of Muslim women.

2. Conclusion

This paper contributes to scholarly understandings of the political participations and political identities of Muslim women in Muslim minority contexts. Following Nagel and Staeheli (2011) we have focused on factors that shape and influence political participation. We have taken an intersectional approach, analysing how gender, religion, class and place intersect and shape the political participations of young Muslim women in Scotland. More specifically, we have demonstrated how gendered Islamophobia, class status and the political geographies of Scotland are central factors for shaping political identities and political participations. We now make three final concluding remarks to highlight the contributions of this paper.

First, young Muslim women are positioned in a marginal and precarious space, and experience a range of discriminations because of their intersecting gendered, racialized and religious identities. For the young women in the research, exposure to gendered Islamophobia and sexism are central underpinning factors that shape their political participations. For some, it works to limit and marginalize their political agency, pushing them further into the marginal and private spaces of society. However, for the majority, these work as a significant mobilizing factor to engage in politics and public life. Patriarchal cultures and negative attention on Muslims in recent decades, particularly Muslim women, has contributed to an emerging space of young Muslim women's political resistance in Scottish society. Through a range of political participations, the young women are reframing what it is to be a Muslim woman and undermining the marginalization of sexism and gendered Islamophobia. This contributes to understandings of 'the margins' and marginalisation as not solely spaces of deprivation and disengagement, but also spaces of resistance and politics (Hooks, 1989; Hall, 2017). Like the colonial and postcolonial past (Jefferies, 2008), resistance and subversion continue to be an important strategy for minorities in the 'postcolonial present' (Nayak, 2010).

Second, understandings about Muslim women often fail to consider their diversity of backgrounds and identities. In particular, despite a growing interest in intersectionality, social class is often overlooked, with class based power imbalances and discriminations partly flattened out. For the young women in the research, class related factors such as education, social mobility and social capital were intersecting factors that shape and enable their political participations. As the majority were from class backgrounds where university is aspired to and often attained, they achieve social mobility and social capital, which assist them to transgress barriers and engage in politics. Therefore, the paper contributes to understandings about the centrality of social class to the lives and experiences of young Muslim women. Young Muslim women who experience the multiple disadvantages of intersecting identity discriminations and lower class economic struggles can find engagement in politics challenging. They frequently do not have the social capital that can mitigate the oppressive and damaging effects of sexism and gendered Islamophobia, which can lead to withdrawal and disengagement. This, we would argue, illustrates the need for greater engagement with the class identities of Muslim women in scholarly research. Class and economic situations of young Muslim women are not a secondary concern to other identities and characteristics, and until they are better examined, our understandings of the experiences of Muslim women will remain partial.

Third, the paper contributes to understandings about the role of place and geography on the experiences and political participations of Muslim women and ethnic minorities. National political cultures can enable or limit political participations often depending on the policies and discourses of political parties. In Scotland, the young Muslim women have encountered a distinct political culture to other parts of the UK, which many see as more progressive and inclusive, especially with respect to migration, multiculturalism and social justice. The political moment in Scotland has worked as a politics of belonging, engendering the participation of many of the Muslim women in Scottish society. This illustrates how political culture of place, especially the institutional political culture, significantly impacts the participation, citizenship, belonging and identity formations of minority communities. Moreover, the paper shows how the context of place is a central characteristic of intersectionality, intersecting with identities such as gender, religion and race and ethnicity.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest in relation to this paper and its submission to Political Geography.Acknowledgments

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Declarations of interest

None.

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