

Editorial

Afterword

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It is not possible to read the excellent articles that are contained in this Special Issue of *Religions* without reflecting on the development of the study of British Muslim religious life over the past 30 years. When I began my academic career in 1988, the Community Religions Project based in the Theology and Religious Studies department at the University of Leeds was beginning to explore the presence of religions that had primarily arrived in Britain through migration and were beginning to transform the landscape of British religious life. The literature on British Muslims was small, and very few scholars in the study of religion were researching “lived religions”. The Muslims in Britain Research Network created by Jørgen Nielsen existed in its infancy with less than a dozen scholars. Many of the contributions in this collection have been written by scholars with a connection to the Centre for the Study of Islam in the UK, and there can be no doubt of the important contribution of the Centre to furthering the development of the study of Muslim religious life in Britain. What is notable about the studies contained in the collection is that so many have been written by British Muslims keen to own and reclaim their own narratives and to bring an emic insight to balance the rigours of etic methodology. It is also refreshing to read a significant collection of articles that engage with topical concerns of interest to government bodies, policy makers, and the media; avoid the pitfalls of securitisation in the subject area; and, in particular, avoid the posing of simple binary oppositions such as liberal/orthodox, enabling/constraining, or resistance/compliance that can often dominate public and academic debate on the topic. As stated by [Liberatore \(2019, p. 2\)](#), “this multiplicity and fluidity of subjectivities means that they can never be fully captured by ‘strong’ theoretical frameworks, binaries or the linear arguments of academic debate”.

Throughout the articles, one theme that reoccurs repeatedly is that of representation, revealing a complex and creative intermingling of traditional religious authorities, individual rationalising, and the practice of Islam. It would have been easy for the authors to draw conclusions based on a binary contradiction between Islamic orthodoxies and the disruptive inroads of modernity. This trap too is avoided by the contributors. There are no essentialised, overly linear models of orthodoxy and heterodoxy in the development of Islam; instead, the authors acknowledge that it has been the norm over the centuries for Muslim civilisations to demonstrate flexibility and transformation, as their rapid spread led to a multitude of variant localised currents that gave a local flavour. The development of diverse representation, authorities, and leaderships is not new to the 21st century minority British context, and any study undertaken of the “subjectivities” that form the religious life of British Muslims has to be undertaken from within the context of Islamic traditions reworked into the British context. As noted by [Munnik \(2019, p. 12\)](#), the studies suggest that “this is a normal state of affairs and one that can be absorbed in the continuum of history”.

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