

Faith, ethnicity and place: young people's everyday geopolitics in Scotland

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Research about the experiences of ethnic and religious minority young people was conducted by Newcastle, St Andrews and Edinburgh Universities from 2013-2015.

This research explored the experiences of young people growing up in urban, suburban and rural Scotland, focussing on everyday geopolitics and patterns of Islamophobia among ethnic and religious minority young people. Everyday geopolitics describes the way in which international, national and local issues (economic, political and social) shape, and are shaped by, people's everyday lives in different contexts.

The research focused on the experiences of six different groups of young people:

- Muslims;
- Non-Muslim South Asians;
- Asylum-seekers and refugees;
- International students;
- Central and Eastern European migrants; and
- White Scottish young people.

The full report is published and available free:

<https://research.ncl.ac.uk/youngpeople/>



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Methodology: How we did the research

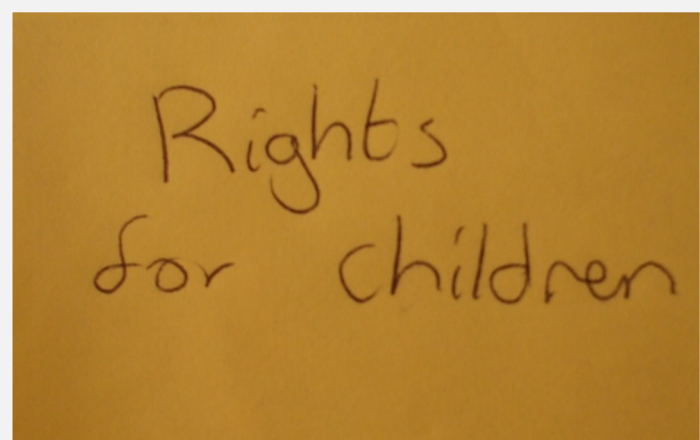
- We adopted a qualitative approach and conducted 45 focus groups and 224 interviews to access the social worlds of the young participants;
- 382 young people participated in the research, comprising 190 young women and 192 young men; and
- 100 young Muslims, 81 non-Muslim South Asians, 37 asylum seekers and refugees, 30 international students, 39 Central and Eastern European migrants, and 96 White Scottish young people participated in this study.

Politics and Participation

- Young people engaged in politics through various media platforms, but were not always clear on how to access politics and influence change. Their political engagement was often influenced by both parents and friends;
- Young people voiced mistrust of politicians and political parties, and recognised the policy differences between Scotland and Westminster;
- Although young people had low levels of membership of political parties, many were interested in issue-based politics (e.g. human rights); and
- Young people were politicised by the Independence Referendum and by the opening up of the vote to those aged 16 and 17.

National Identity and Scottishness

- The independence debate acted as a catalyst for young people to reflect on what it meant to them to be Scottish; many felt that Scotland was a 'fair society' that was 'diverse' and 'friendly';
- Young people affiliated themselves to Scotland and Scottishness, irrespective of their ethnic and religious heritage; however, experiences of racism in public spaces sometimes eroded this and made them feel excluded and alienated;
- Young people often pointed out that national identity is only one aspect of their identity, with faith, ethnicity and cultural heritage also being important. Many young people also reflected on their transnational and hybrid identities; and
- Young people talked about important locations that nurtured a sense of Scottishness, including urban areas and educational sites.



Interactions and Encounters

- Most young people were highly positive about diversity in Scotland and many engaged in inter-religious and multi-ethnic friendship groups at school and university;
- There was some evidence that specific religious and minority ethnic groups were more segregated than other young people. In Glasgow, young people tended to identify Slovakian, Romanian and Czech young people as the most isolated minority groups, and some participants felt that Muslim students were the most segregated at university; and
- There was evidence of sexism and homophobia amongst participants, as well as personal experiences of these forms of prejudice.

Migration and Mobility

- Young people's experiences of migration have led to multiple understandings of 'home';
- Language is a key barrier for migrant young people, including for their parent's generation;
- Migration heritages are important to young people's sense of identity and experience; and
- Many young people talked positively about immigration and supported pro-migration policies in Scotland, however they also recognise the negative impact of the media on immigration discourse, and have personal experience of 'securitisation'.

Racism and Discrimination

- Young people felt it is important to talk about racism and referred to racist incidences on the basis of accent, skin colour, faith, dress, nationality and ethnicity;
- Young people explained that racist incidents tended to be triggered by media stereotypes and people who were under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs;
- Young people understand that racism can be both covert and overt. Encountering and responding to racism was context-dependent, based on the intersection of place, community size, peer and intergenerational relations, and personal identities; and
- Many young people demonstrated resilience to everyday racism and felt able to manage and respond to it.



Being Mistaken for a Muslim

- Young people from non-Muslim South Asia, Africa, and some Central and Eastern European countries experienced being taken as Muslim;
- Young people with South Asian heritage were most commonly misrecognised as Muslim (Sikh, Hindu, non-religious Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi). They claimed this was the result of their skin colour, hair style and facial features, leading people to assume that they followed the Islamic faith;
- Young people explained that negative media representation, homogenisation of the 'Asian' community, the small size of some ethnic and religious minority communities and low levels of public awareness of religions were why they were sometimes mistaken for Muslims.

Islamophobia

- Young Muslims questioned the usefulness of the term 'Islamophobia'. The term is seen to be 'othering', reinforcing difference, which in turn further marginalises Muslims;
- Young people preferred the term 'racism' to 'Islamophobia'. The media, including social media, are catalysts of anti-Muslim sentiment; and
- If Islamophobia is defined narrowly as anti-Muslim sentiment, there are clear incidences of discrimination and prejudice against Muslims, which is often gendered and determined by where people live

Any questions or feedback about the report, please email Peter Hopkins
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