

Young Muslims, Pedagogy and Islam: Contexts and Concepts by M.G.Khan.

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As I was reviewing this book, a (supposedly 'Liberal') Coalition government minister resuscitated calls for the full force of British law to be used against the small minority of Muslims, themselves a small societal minority, who wear the Niqab, or full face covering. Both France and Belgium, the latter a national government who can agree on virtually nothing else, have passed such laws. This gives some small sense of the Islamophobic climate in western countries in recent years that has cast young Muslims as the 'modern folk devils' and which provides the frame for this fascinating and compelling book. M.G.Khan highlights how this external gaze, and forms of 'purist' internal Muslim community responses to it, force young Muslims to actively consider faith and its place in their 'identity': *Muslim young people are caught between two ideological discourses; a discourse that sees no good on the one hand (Islamophobia), and on the other, a protestation of the 'beauty of Islam' that sees no bad, and young people end up living the ugly side of both'* (p.81).

Khan's response to this reality is a book that seeks to develop a theoretical, pedagogical framework for 'Muslim youth work' and which justifies the need for it as a form of anti-oppressive practice. Here, he takes an approach that both works with and against internal and external norms of 'being a Muslim', as Yasmin Gunaratnam (2003) describes the difficult balancing act of working with, but not essentialising or reifying specific, lived identities. Such tensions are illustrated by Khan's thoughtful consideration of the considerable role for youth work within Britain's 'Prevent' counter-terrorism programme – this has enabled and funded more space for work with Muslim young people on a faith-identity basis, but also led to the 'ghettoisation' of both Muslim professionals and the young people themselves simply as 'Muslims', rather than as people with complex and multi-faceted identifications. The result of such analysis is a thought-provoking, educative book that should be read by anyone concerned with the pedagogical and ethical basis for modern youth work, whether Muslim or Non-Muslim, faith adherent or atheist. At first sight, the book's title and significant quoting from, and consideration of, key concepts of the Qur'an, such as the much-misused 'jihad', are challenging for a non-believer. However,

they are both educative in the face of ignorance about a much-maligned faith and are used to develop more universal consideration of what is 'good' youth work pedagogy and of the importance of relationship-building.

The fact that it is not an easy book to categorise indicates the strength and depth of the writing – at times the book moves between theorisation of youth work pedagogy, Islamic theological interpretation and explanation, analysis of controversial social policies and reflection on what it is to be human, all underpinned by a very significant range of sources but without letting those other sources get in the way of Khan's very personal direction and voice. This complexity reflects Khan's varied involvements, not only as a professional youth work practitioner and University-based educator, but as someone who has been a key figure in the creation of the Muslim Youth Work Foundation and in the 'Young Muslims Consultative (the government-directed re-naming to 'Advisory' is one of a number of insightful policy analyses in the book) Group' developed in the early stages of 'Prevent' programme. The extremely honest and hard-edged reflection in a chapter titled '*On anthros and pimps*' on internal and external researchers and the gate-keepers who facilitate their access to 'marginalised' groups such as Muslim youth reflects Khan's experiences of engagement in these highly contested policies. Khan highlights the significant responsibility of youth workers as 'border pedagogues' in accessing, and enabling access to, marginalised young people in pursuit of both policy goals and associated research, arguably professional/ethical issues that we have not discussed enough as a profession as state-funded youth work in Britain has found itself directed more and more overtly in support of wider policy agendas, whether 'reducing teenage pregnancy' or Prevent.

As someone who has researched the impact of Prevent on both society and youth work, I found such reflections and insights illuminating. For that reason, I was somewhat disappointed that the negative connotations similarly applied to policies of community cohesion were not developed in the same way. My own experience is that ground-level youth work community cohesion practice is significantly more positive, and we certainly need more youth work-based discussion of such policies and their impacts on the ground.

The number of books focussed on youth work has thankfully grown substantially in recent years, with many of the text-books very helpful in use

with youth work students. This is a different type of book though, a genuinely philosophical and theoretical discussion of youth work's pedagogical purpose and approach that also provides hard-edged critique of societal attitudes towards young Muslims and policies aimed at them, while written in an accessible and engaging style. As such, it deserves a broad audience, having much to say to experienced youth work practitioners and trainers, as well as trainee professionals ready to engage in 'deep' pedagogical consideration.

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