Islam on Campus: Contested Identities & the Cultures of Higher Education in Britain, by Alison Scott-Baumann, Mathew Guest, Shuruq Naguib, Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor and Aisha Phoenix. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020, 272 pp, £75.00, ISBN 978-0-19-884678-9.

From the outset, *Islam on Campus* aims to challenge some of the prevailing discourses on Islam in the UK through empirical qualitative and quantitative research at universities. The authors introduce the work by describing the prevalent securitization of campuses in relation to Islam. They argue that "UK universities have been called upon by the British state to participate in an arguably insidious regime of surveillance" drawing on rhetoric around "the dangers of 'radical Islam'" and of campuses "as 'breeding grounds' for terrorism" (1). As such, the book largely explores relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims on campus. This focus is perhaps exemplified in the chapter on Islam and Religious Diversity on Campus (Chapter 6) but is overt throughout. It also seems shaped by the authors' active efforts to include both Muslim and non-Muslim participants in their fieldwork.

To set the scene, Chapter 1 helpfully outlines the context of the UK Higher Education Sector while Chapter 2 provides an overview of the comprehensive research methods used and methodology. The methods used include a survey of over 2000 students (48-50) as well as qualitative case studies of four universities and two Muslim colleges (43-48). At these institutions, fieldwork included interviews, focus groups and ethnographic observation. Chapter 3 explores student demographics from the research survey as well as outlining a framework for different dimensions of university life. It gives a profile of the six institutional case studies, which is a helpful inclusion that contextualises later chapters. The remaining

chapters could be considered the main 'findings' which help address some strikingly strong and perhaps 'radical' questions posed in the introduction:

> "Are there students and staff whose beliefs and opinions are considered less worthy than those of others and to whom an epistemic wrong is being done on campus? Are there processes taking place in campus spaces that weigh up and measure many different understandings of what is important and find some less worthy of trust than others?" (p.2)

To address these issues, the authors have three main frames of analysis – gender, inter-religious relations, and 'radicalization' – which form corresponding chapters (Chapters 5-7) alongside other pertinent topics including ways of knowing about Islam on campus (Chapter 4), the teaching of Islamic Studies (Chapter 8) and conceptions about freedom of speech (Chapter 9). The five authors involved in this research are all sociologists of religion but with very different specialisms which allows the work to cover the broad range of topics outlined.

The book concludes (Chapter 10) that "Muslim students feel a heightened vulnerability" on campus and that "university learning struggles to embrace them" (219) addressing the important questions outlined in the introduction. Amongst its recommendations are assertions that universities should provide more "support for the power to speak" (231) and facilitate "physical, digital and intellectual spaces where students can come together to learn from each other" (232). These recommendations highlight a common thread throughout the book – which is reflected in the statements of participants - that a primary way to address prejudice is through education, dialogue, and discussion. It could be argued

there are broader structural issues that are only touched upon in these recommendations. However, the authors address this in their assertion that "there is something profoundly *social* about universities that is missed in accounts that foreground the neoliberal regime" (78). The book also acknowledges existing studies which look at these wider societal issues, for example, how government laws and guidance affect ideas of free speech on campuses (Scott-Baumann 2017).

One of the refreshing things about this book is the attention given to the diversity between campuses. The authors note the distinct differences between each institutional case study in several chapters, including the varying awareness of and attitudes towards the government Prevent strategy (160-163). Whilst inhabitants of a politically active campus known for anti-Prevent campaigning seemed most aware of the strategy, it was interesting that participants at another campus were twice as critical. The finding that university support staff were less critical of Prevent than academics and students was another insight that resonated with my own experience working in a student support department. The use of these case studies helps paint a picture of the diversity of student life and helps avoids the "essentialization and homogenization" (35) of Muslims (and even non-Muslims) the authors set out to achieve.

Whilst *Islam on Campus* was not what I initially expected – i.e. an account of day-to-day lives, practices, and activities on campus centred on the Muslim experience – a closer reading of the title discussing "contested identities" clarifies its attention to issues of prejudice and inter-religious relations. Nonetheless, it provides a valuable and insightful contribution to various fields. It will be especially useful for academics interested in

discrimination and prejudice in modern Britain as well as those with a focus on inter-faith relations. Additionally, the book's discussion of gender, the UK Higher Education context and Islamic educational paradigms means it is relevant to the fields of gender studies and education studies. The work is also valuable for non-academic university staff and management to explore ways their campuses can be more welcoming and inclusive of the diverse student body.

References

Scott-Baumann, A. 2017. Ideology, utopia and Islam on campus: How to free speech a little from its own terrors. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 12(2), pp.159–176.

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