Introduction

Background

This book of interviews with writers of Muslim heritage is the first in a two-book project, to be followed by a monograph on artistic representations of British Muslims, 1966–present. In terms of the selection criteria for this book, the interviewed writers are resident in the UK, of Muslim heritage, and have produced literary fiction in English widely considered to be high quality and influential. The second book focuses on representations of Muslims by writers who are often, but not necessarily, of Muslim heritage. Both books analyse the term ‘Muslim writing’, which has recently come into currency, in order to complicate and contest it.

There has long existed high demand for author interviews as resources to supplementing understanding of contemporary literature. Three recent volumes of interviews illustrate this point: Susheila Nasta’s edited volume Writing Across Worlds which contains interviews with writers broadly considered ‘postcolonial’; Philip Tew, Fiona Tolan, and Leigh Wilson’s collection of interviews with specifically British, but mostly White and Christian/secular writers, Writers Talk; and The Big Bookshelf, an anthology of thirty interview transcripts from Sunil Sethi’s Indian television show, Just Books. However, my book differs from these collections, given its exclusive focus on writers with Muslim backgrounds in Britain and beyond. This is important because their excellent writing, while rarely discussed in relation to religious identities, is increasingly gaining recognition from critics, literary prize boards, and research students. The volume is also distinct from the first two in that all interviews are conducted by me as the single researcher.

C. Chambers, British Muslim Fictions
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In recent years there has also emerged great interest in sociological interviews with British Muslims in order to shed light on communities that are marginalized and little-known beyond the stereotypes. For me, the most important of the many books in this area are Philip Lewis's *Young, British and Muslim* and Anshuman A. Mondal's *Young British Muslim Voices.* Despite their similar titles and publication within a year of each other in 2007 and 2008 respectively, they put the interview format to different use. Lewis presents his interviews (with both well-known and unfamiliar young Muslims) alongside readings of novels such as Hanif Kureishi's *The Black Album* and Zahid Hussain's *The Curry Mile,* discussion of intergenerational tensions and *biradiri* networks, and analysis of Muslim websites, mailing lists, and magazines. Mondal uses the interview format more extensively, talking to young, practising Muslims from many walks of life, and presenting their arguments within a journalistic, self-reflexive framework. His main, insightful conclusions are, firstly, that younger Muslims tend to be more religious than their parents and that this is creating conflict between the generations. Secondly, and contrary to the stereotypes, Mondal argues that despite many young Muslims articulating oppositional politics, they are not disengaged from society, with far more of them doing voluntary community work than non-Muslims of the same age. He concludes, 'Principally, I have learned to speak of Muslims rather than Islam.' This is also a maxim I have drawn from my interviews with writers of Muslim heritage, especially given the heterogeneity to be explored shortly. My interviews differ from these two important monographs because, rather than excerpting respondents' comments amid sociological discussion, I provide edited interview transcripts in order to project their voices as fully as possible.

Especially since the 1980s, feminist, postcolonial, and Critical Race Theory scholars have directed attention towards methodological and ethical concerns when conducting research on, with, and for Others, whether these be othered through race, gender, class, or a combination of these. My own PhD thesis