

**Being Black and Muslim**

Read the article and answer the questions below.

To be Black and Muslim in today’s society is to be part of two marginalised and misunderstood communities. To simultaneously navigate the various stereotypes that are held about Black people and of Muslims. It doesn’t help that both communities have their own issues within and towards the others. There is Islamophobia in Black communities and anti-Blackness in Muslim communities. Both are a result of the idea that each community is monolithic. That Black people in the UK are Christian or atheist and that Muslims are South Asian or Arab. A visit to any Mosque would show how ludicrous this notion is. A conversation with someone from Nigeria, the most populous nation in Africa, would reveal that their President is Muslim, and the country’s population is equally Christian and Muslim. My experience as a Black Muslim always has to be either as Muslim or Black, never both.

We’re in a unique place to recognise the issues present towards our communities. While Muslims happen to be some of the most charitable people in the UK, charity fundraising efforts is often for non-Black Muslims, rarely Black Muslims. Palestine rightfully gets attention because of the unique situation the Palestinians are in. However, when the plight of people in Nigeria or Somalia living in fear of attacks from Boko Haram or Al-Shabab is raised, it is often ignored.

Recently there were mudslides in Sierra Leone killing 499 people, with many more unconfirmed deaths. Barely anything was heard about this tragedy. Even our history is ignored. We constantly hear of Muslim dynasties such as the Mughals or Ottomans, but rarely of any Black African ones. Timbuktu, Sokoto, Mogadishu and Zanzibar have been reduced to footnotes. We are essentially invisible.

We are also invisible in the Black community. Historically, it has been understandable given that the vast majority of black people in the UK had their origins in the Caribbean. However, the fastest growing part of the black community are Africans. Islam has been present on the continent since 615 AD when Muslims escaping persecution in Mecca sought refuge in Ethiopia. The three biggest African communities in the UK; Nigerians, Ghanaians and Somalis are no strangers to Islam.

There have been uncomfortable moments revealing the difficulties of being Muslim and Black. One incident that still upsets was when footage filmed on a bus in Willesden in 2015 went viral. A Black woman threatened to kick a pregnant Asian Muslim woman in the stomach and accused her of hiding a bomb under her clothes. The response on the internet from many Muslims was to engage in vile racist insults. We can’t ignore the fact that there are black men pulling off Muslim women’s hijabs or that there is hatred of black people in the Muslim community, with the word ‘slave’ frequently popping up as an insult.

We are not in a position where we can choose which side we belong to because we belong to both. Antony Walker came from a devout Christian family but it didn’t stop racists from burying an axe in his head simply because of his skin colour. Last year, a Somali woman was beaten up by an Islamophobe, resulting in the death of her unborn twins. All because she is Muslim.

Being black and being Muslim isn’t a mutually exclusive choice. We should use the situation we are in to fight for the rights of both Muslims and Black people. Racists don’t care what our faith is. Those who hate black people will hate us regardless of our specific ethnicity or whether we’re Muslim, Christian or of no faith. Those who hate Muslims will hate Muslims whether they are Black, White or Asian. We can, however, use our experiences to fight for both communities, and be part of the solution to the ills that affect us.

We have to realise not only what our disadvantages are but also our privileges in order to be effective. In this country, Muslims have been racialised as brown Asians or Arabs and unless we visibly look like Muslims we tend to escape the brunt of Islamophobia. We also tend to face less anti-blackness from Muslims who look down upon black Christians. That isn’t even to bring up the oppression black women, LGBT+ folks and/or disabled people face. Being able to move within two communities gives us voices in two communities. We should use that to not only fight for ours right but to also be effective allies for others. A true ally isn’t someone who feels guilty and does nothing. An ally is someone who takes real action. Allies such as Clara Amfo who refused to work for L’Oréal after Munroe Bergdorf was unfairly fired stating “If she’s not ‘worth it’ anymore, I guess I’m not either.”

**Feisal Haji is a former refugee from Somalia. He studies Computer Science at Kingston University. He is a Trustee of his Students' Union and part of the NUS Black Students' Campaign. He aspires to go back to his homeland and do his small part to help develop Africa by teaching digital skills to the next generation.**

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1. Underline Keywords and phrases in the article.
2. What were the main points made in the article?

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1. Do you agree with the points made? Why?

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1. What are some of the challenges raised in the article for Black Muslims?

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1. Do you think challenges faced by Black Muslims will be different for Muslims of other ethnicities? Give reasons for your answer.

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