



## Living an ethical 'Muslim lifestyle' within and beyond neoliberal governmentalities: discourse and practice of a youth-led British Muslim charity

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## Living an ethical ‘Muslim lifestyle’ within and beyond neoliberal governmentalities: discourse and practice of a youth-led British Muslim charity

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### ABSTRACT

In the early 2010s the then Conservative-led coalition UK government implemented its ‘Big Society’ agenda for the neoliberal renegotiation of the relationship between the state, civil society, and individual citizens. More or less inadvertently, Big Society opened up spaces for everyday ethical agency and postsecular rapprochement. In this environment, faith-based organisations enjoyed a renewed role in the British public sphere, presenting both areas of resonance where neoliberal forms have been co-constituted; and areas of dissonance where neoliberal forms have been resisted. This contribution presents how the youth-led British Muslim charity Muslim Action for Development and the Environment (MADE) inserted itself at the intersection of these spaces, by articulating and trying to enlist young British Muslims into a project of ethical ‘Muslim lifestyle’ – that is, one where everyday ethical agency and pious self-cultivation are mutually integrated and shaped through a constant engagement with, and commitment to, the Islamic tradition. At one level, MADE’s discourse and practices replicated technologies of agency and ‘ideal citizen’ subjectivities constructed by Big Society. However, MADE also resisted this mode of governmentality (and wider neoliberal forms) by explicitly grounding its motivations, values, and norms within an Islamic ethical framework that it self-confidently mobilised as a hopeful counternarrative.

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## Introduction

In January 2015, to mark its fifth anniversary, the youth-led British Muslim charity Muslim Action for Development and the Environment (MADE)<sup>1</sup> held a self-celebratory event at Portcullis House, a building of the UK Parliamentary estate. Starting from its very title – ‘Islam in action!’ – the event was framed by MADE through a clear emphasis on the religious dimension (the ‘Muslimness’) of its own identity and work; and of that of its supporters and target audiences. The two highpoints of the event clearly underscored this framing. Firstly, the climax of the commemorative video showcasing MADE’s key achievements over its first five years of operations consisted in a scene displaying an English translation of a portion of Quran 13:11: ‘Allah does not change the condition of

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a people until they change themselves’, accompanied by the voiceover: ‘Using the Islamic principles of activism and social justice, MADE is building a movement of activists who campaign for change’ (MADE 2015c). Secondly, the event featured an award ceremony for a range of visibly Muslim actors – a veil-wearing Muslim woman; a University Student Islamic Society; an Islamic school; and a mosque – who were celebrated by MADE precisely because ‘each, through their activism has put Islam into action for the betterment of their communities at home and internationally’ (MADE 2015b).

The event’s explicit emphasis on the faith-praxis nexus (‘Islam in action’) epitomised MADE’s broader attempt to articulate a discourse and promote practices through which young British Muslims could at once strive to enact ethical agency while simultaneously also cultivating and embodying a commitment to Islam. Providing a ‘thick description’ (Mills, Durepos, and Wiebe 2010) of such discourse and practices is the main aim of this contribution. In particular, given that the aim is to investigate the discourse and practices promoted by MADE among young British Muslims, the data utilised by the contribution is made of a corpus of materials MADE published between 2010 and 2015 in the form of publicly available documents (annual reports, leaflets, brochures, etc.) and online content (website, social media).<sup>2</sup> Before attending to this analysis, however, it is important to note that MADE’s self-celebratory display of Muslim ethical subjectivity within a central symbol of the British state (the Parliamentary estate) represented an exceptional example within Europe of the relationship between Muslims and neoliberal-secular governmentality – one which was in many ways unique to the specific context of the UK. While a full engagement with this context is beyond the scope of this contribution, it is worth providing a sketch of it in the next section.

### The UK and the ‘Big Society’

MADE was founded in London in 2009 as a youth-led ‘small start-up testing the waters’ (MADE 2014, 3). In 2016 it started to gradually reduce its in-person activities, and subsequently morphed into a digital-only platform in 2017. Afterwards, it went dormant in 2019<sup>3</sup> and eventually ceased to exist in January 2020 (Charity Commission 2020). Therefore, MADE’s formative years broadly coincided with the roll out of the ‘Big Society’ agenda of the then Conservative-led coalition government (2010–2015) (Cabinet Office 2010). This is significant because, as both a political project and a mode of governmentality, Big Society represented a key platform for the renegotiation of the relationship between the state, civil society, and individual citizens in the UK.

At a political level, Big Society called for a ‘smaller government’ (i.e. the retrenchment of the state) by arguing that social-democratic approaches adopted by successive Labour governments since 1997 had led to negative effects on ‘personal and social responsibility’ by promoting ‘not social solidarity, but selfishness and individualism’ in the form of passive dependency on the welfare system (Cameron 2009). Consequently, the political narrative of Big Society contended that ‘solving social problems’ (Cameron 2009) required a localism agenda based on the devolution of power and responsibility to local communities and the wider civil society; and the further opening up of the welfare and other services traditionally provided by the state (Lambie-Mumford and Jarvis 2012, 252). This

narrative complemented an economic policy of public spending cuts and fiscal austerity, introduced to reduce budget deficits catalysed by the financial crisis of 2007–2008 (Dowling and Harvie 2014, 871).

Significantly, these reforms did more than simply alter the scale of public services and call for a bigger role for civil society organisations. As a mode of governmentality, they mobilised ‘a series of rhetorics relating to localism which, in turn, represent manifestations of complex discourses that, when channelled through technologies of control and agency, help to underpin particular practices and subjectivities’ (Williams, Goodwin, and Cloke 2014, 2800). Specifically, in its attempt to redefine ‘good citizenship’ (2802), Big Society sought to construct and enable an idealised type of subject-citizen which the then prime minister David Cameron had previously referred to as ‘community activists’:

We need more community activism, and more community activists. [...] People need help to start up even the smallest projects, get the information they need, understand the dynamics of social activism (Cameron 2009).

Consequently, getting Britons to engage more in volunteerism and civic action at the local, everyday level constituted a key part of Big Society’s localism agenda, under one of its three core components:

Promoting social action: encouraging and enabling people from all walks of life to play a more active part in society, and promoting more volunteering and philanthropy (Cabinet Office 2010, 3).

Under this rubric, the state sought to re-conceptualise mechanisms of civic participation, activism, and democracy, through three key value-based narratives: (i) a narrative of mutualism and care that attempted to mobilise citizens’ affective capacities for empathy and concern for their fellows (Williams, Goodwin, and Cloke 2014, 2800); (ii) a narrative of responsibility-taking that envisioned ‘a society where the leading force for progress is social responsibility, not state control’ (Conservative Party 2010, 37); and (iii) a narrative of empowerment where everyday, community activism was put forward as an effective means for democratic renewal and societal mending (Buser 2013, 10, 14).

According to conventional analytics of neoliberal governmentality, these narratives represented little more than a rhetorical smokescreen to shape citizens’ subjectivities in ways aimed at compelling them to fill the vacuum left by the retreat of the state (Dowling and Harvie 2014, 872). Whilst this interpretation holds validity, it has also been convincingly argued – using both faith-based and non-religious organisations/networks as case studies (Williams, Cloke, and Thomas 2012; Williams, Goodwin, and Cloke 2014) – that Big Society’s key narratives and localism agenda ‘inadvertently opened up a number of ethical and political spaces in which various forms of interstitial politics of resistance and experimentation have sprung up’ (Williams, Goodwin, and Cloke 2014, 2798): in other words, spaces where British citizens and civil society organisations have attempted to ‘prefigure alternative [...] ethical worlds’ within, across, and beyond dominant formations of the neoliberal, through their everyday ethical agency (2803–2804).

Within this context, faith-based organisations (FBOs) have enjoyed a renewed role in the British public sphere. At one level, this was inextricably interconnected with Big Society’s deliberate opening up of public services to alternative providers. Because of their rootedness in local communities, their ability to provide distinct services beyond

those of the state and secular organisations, and their capacity to access potentially 'hard-to-reach' people, FBOs emerged as valuable actors to fill the gaps left by the retreat of the state (Lambie-Mumford and Jarvis 2012). Alongside this pragmatic and instrumental rationale, which compelled FBOs to contribute (more or less directly and consciously) to enact neoliberal forms of government, Big Society's 'government(al)ty by values' (Bulley and Sokhi-Bulley 2014, 465) easily inserted itself within wider postsecular shifts in British society. These shifts have seen religion – which had been previously relegated into private spaces by modernisation-cum-secularisation processes – being released back into the public sphere. As a renewed 'postsecular rapprochement' (Cloke 2010) opened up spaces for the mobilisation of ethical values that are shared (albeit derived from different motivational frameworks) across the secular/religious divide, faith-based organisations have been able to re-enter the public sphere, in order to make contributions to public life (Cloke and Beaumont 2013).

Taking into account these postsecular shifts enables us to interpret FBOs operating within neoliberal modes of governability à la Big Society not simply as actors 'wearing the cloak of neoliberalism'; but also, as actors that potentially 'seek to refashion the [neoliberal] garment and its cloth' through their religious-ethical characteristics (Williams, Cloke, and Thomas 2012, 1486; see also Cloke 2010). In other words, a register of analysis informed by ideas relating to the postsecular enables us to recognise that FBOs operating within neoliberal governmentality environments might be able to concurrently both enact and resist neoliberal formations (Williams, Cloke, and Thomas 2012, 1480). From this angle, Big Society represented not just a set of 'roll-back' and 'roll-out' neoliberal manoeuvres (Peck and Tickell 2002, 384) but also a mode of governmentality that more or less deliberately opened up three key spaces: (i) a space for approaching 'the everyday' (i.e. the local and the mundane) as a realm for ethical agency/activism; (ii) a space for increased visibility of 'the religious' within a predominantly secular matrix; (iii) a space for expanding the role and remit of FBOs.

At the level of state engagement with British Muslims, these developments were accompanied by an increasing recognition (originated during the last phase of the antecedent New Labour government) of the need to move away from a formal and hierarchical approach based on working with a small group of 'leaders', to more informal and network-based styles of governance requiring engagement with a variety of different organisations representing different Muslim identities, interests, and concerns (O'Toole et al. 2013, 19–22). In turn, this shift not only increased pluralisation among Muslim civil society organisations – perhaps unintentionally, given the then government's strong disavowal of 'state multiculturalism' (Cameron 2011). It also acted as a framework for growing inclusion of Muslim FBOs into governmentality structures, through the promotion of forms of engagement that have been typically expressed within a commitment to an idealised national identity based on shared civic virtues (O'Toole et al. 2013, 13–15, 65–66).

As I highlight in the rest of this contribution, MADE inserted itself at the intersection of these processes, by articulating and trying to enlist young British Muslims into a project of ethical 'Muslim lifestyle' (MADE 2014, 3) – that is, one where ethical and pious self-cultivation are mutually integrated and pursued through everyday choices, practices, and behaviours that are inspired by, and shaped through a constant engagement with, and commitment to the Islamic tradition.

## MADE and everyday ethical agency

MADE was established with the explicit twofold aim of: (i) providing a platform to ‘inspire and enable’ young British Muslims to contribute to the wellbeing of people and the planet by acting in a ‘ethical way’ precisely ‘as Muslims’, through the promotion of values and practices perceived as being both ethical *and* ‘rooted in the traditions of Islam’; (ii) complementing the charity-giving paradigm predominant within the British Muslim charity sector, through advocacy, campaigning, and educational activities:

[Our mission is] to inspire and enable young British Muslims to take positive action for social and environmental justice (MADE 2015a, 2).

*As Muslims, we must set an example to others by acting in a fair, honest and ethical way. So whether through actions, speaking out, or having the will to create change, we all have a duty to make a difference* (MADE in Europe 2011a, 11; emphasis added).

We believe that making a stand in the fight against poverty means *more than just fundraising* or paying our zakat (2.5% of annual wealth) – it is about promoting justice, equality, peace and human rights which are *rooted in the traditions of Islam* (MADE in Europe 2010, sec. ‘What is MADE in Europe’; emphasis added).

I discuss how MADE intertwined everyday ethical agency with pious self-cultivation in the following two sections. Before attending to that, it is important to highlight how its discourse incorporated (more or less consciously) some of the key narratives of Big Society.

At one level, MADE challenged neoliberal formations by adopting a critical perspective on today’s predominant political and economic system, which it denounced as culpable of advancing the self-interest of a few at the expense of the many and the environment:

Conflict, natural disasters, climate change, international trade agreements and over-population, are all factors that can create conditions for social injustice. This can be made worse by decision-makers, such as governments, multinational corporations and powerful lobby groups, who support laws and policies which favour the rich and discriminate against the poor (MADE in Europe 2011a, 8).

However, rather than articulating a well-developed critique of unequitable and unsustainable power structures/dynamics, MADE foregrounded an emphasis on the mundane and the local as spaces for, as Big Society narrative put it, ‘promoting social action’ and ‘community activism’:

You probably think that ‘decision-makers’ are fuddy-duddy politicians, or corrupt businessmen, who are out of touch with the world, right? Wrong! Your local council representative, town planner, chief constable, supermarket manager or Imam are all decision-makers who can have an impact on the way you live. They rely on the support of the community, so if you are not happy about a particular issue, then it’s important that you make your views heard! (MADE in Europe 2011a, 22).

Mirroring neoliberal notions of localism engrained in the Big Society agenda, MADE also reconceptualised activism and civic engagement through a shift from the collective, momentous, and contentious; to the individual, ordinary, and non-contentious:

Campaigning is not just for the diehard activist. It is not always about protests, about getting in the news or about changing the world overnight. It’s really about ordinary people doing ordinary things but with extraordinary results! (MADE in Europe 2011a, 9).

Based on these premises, MADE articulated its geography of ethical agency (/activism) across overlapping spheres of young British Muslims' everyday life: the mosque, where they ought to involve in their civic efforts both religious leaders and lay members of their congregation; the university, where they ought to raise awareness among their fellow students about the issues they are concerned about; the local supermarket, where they ought to act as ethical consumers and encourage others to do the same:

Ask your Imam to mention your petition in the Jum'ah Khutbah [Friday sermon] and collect signatures after the prayer [...] put up posters and hand out flyers in your university canteen, library, local restaurant and mosque [...] demonstrate outside your local supermarket to encourage shoppers to buy fairly traded products (MADE in Europe 2011a, 24, 36, 26).

Notably, in the aforementioned extract MADE explicitly identified a specific area of concern only in the realm of consumption, by raising the issue of fair trade. This is noteworthy because of its broader representativeness of MADE's discourse as a whole, as I discuss next.

### **Ethical consumption, as Muslims**

By the time MADE was founded in 2009, ethical consumption – that is, consumption practices that deliberately and proactively aim to avoid harm to other people, animals, or the environment (Harrison, Newholm, and Shaw 2005) – had become a habit for significant minorities in the UK, typically among the academically educated (white) middle class (Varul 2009). This phenomenon has been widely interpreted as the result of a mode of neoliberal governmentality that used market rationalities and drew upon long-standing Conservative traditions of middle-class voluntarism and social responsibility to encourage citizen-consumers to become 'responsibilised' amidst the retreat of the state (Littler 2011, 33). However, it has also been persuasively argued that ethical consumption emerged as a meaningful space for everyday ethical agency, where individuals enact their values to challenge and possibly reshape neoliberal forms (Micheletti 2003, 3–4) – an interstitial space of hope and resistance, which gained popularity over the last decade 'in the meantime' of gradually tightening neoliberal governmentalities (Williams, Goodwin, and Cloke 2014, 2804–2805).

Within this context, from its very inception MADE adopted ethical consumption as a key component of its project of ethical 'Muslim lifestyle'. In February 2010, just few months after being founded, MADE participated in Fairtrade Fortnight – an annual UK-wide campaign coordinated since 1995 by the secular Fairtrade Foundation to increase awareness around ethical consumption and Fairtrade products. Firstly, MADE mobilised a group of young British Muslims to participate in a training session run by the Foundation. Subsequently, these youths organised a Fairtrade Tea Party at the London Muslim Centre (which is attached to the prominent East London Mosque), to raise awareness around ethical (fair trade) consumption among local Muslims; and encourage them to both adopt this form of everyday ethical agency in their own lives ('swap one of their favourite foods for a Fairtrade brand') and also sensitise other people within the realm of their close personal relationships ('spread the fair trade message to friends and family') (MADE in Europe 2010, sec. 'Fair Trade').



The participation of a Muslim FBO like MADE and the involvement of the London Muslim Centre (alongside that of religious actors from other faith traditions) in the otherwise secular Fairtrade Fortnight was facilitated by late modernity's 'geographies of postsecular rapprochement' (Cloke and Beaumont 2013) and the renewed role of FBOs within the Big Society agenda. This postsecular dimension of MADE's work became increasingly evident the following year, through two campaigns it launched around ethical consumption.

On the one hand, MADE organised a campaign 'on trade justice in the cotton industry' (MADE in Europe 2011b, sec. 'Other Campaigns') in collaboration with the Fairtrade Foundation and the Christian Muslim Youth Forum. As the European Commission was preparing for a review of its Common Agricultural Policy, MADE and its secular and Christian partners lobbied the UK government 'to take the lead in ending the EU's distorting cotton subsidies which prevent over 10 million African farmers from trading fairly, forcing them into poverty' (MADE in Europe 2011b, sec. 'Other Campaigns'). The coalition formulated a statement that was endorsed by the then archbishop of Canterbury (Dr Rowan Williams) and handed over to then UK secretary of state for environment, food and rural affairs. Significantly, this campaign not only inserted itself in a postsecular space where secular and religious actors from different traditions work together within shared ethical frameworks, towards common goals (Cloke 2010); it also attempted to engage the British and European governments through more traditional forms of political lobbying, aimed at resisting what MADE criticised as a market-dominated society which is governed by artificial monopolies and unfair trade dynamics.

On the other hand, in 2011 MADE also began to more explicitly encourage young British Muslims to adopt ethical consumption practices *as* Muslims, through an original, independently run campaign which it titled: 'Eat of the Good Things'. Aimed at raising 'awareness within the Muslim community about the importance of ethical consumerism and sustainable food production' (MADE in Europe 2011b, sec. 'It's not over yet!'), the campaign attempted to reframe ethical consumption through an Islamic lens by extrapolating its title from Quran 2:172: 'Oh you who believe, *eat of the good things* [*ṭayyibāti*] that We have provided for you, and be grateful to Allah, if it is Him that you worship' (MADE in Europe 2012, 7; emphasis added). In the Arabic language, the concept of *ṭayyib* qualifies something as being good and pure. More specifically, in the Quran the term is frequently used in relation to food, as in the aforementioned verse. Traditional interpretations of what constitutes *ṭayyib* food predominantly understood this as referring to that which is both halal (i.e. permissible for consumption from the perspective of Islamic dietary laws) and purchased through financial means that are themselves accrued in Islamically permissible ways (Yusuf 2017, 18:49–19:30). In recent years, however, an additional (re-)interpretation of what constitutes *ṭayyib* food has become increasingly popular. This contextualises the notion of *ṭayyib* food within contemporary neoliberal dynamics of food production-consumption, which prioritise corporate profit and personal economic interest (respectively manifested in low-cost, large-scale production, and a growing demand for cheap food) over people, animals, and the planet (whose wellbeing is undermined, respectively, through the exploitation of food workers and the popularisation of unhealthy eating behaviours, the disregard for animal welfare, and the implementation of destructive environmental practices) (Yasin 2017). In turn, this understanding



brings ethical considerations to the forefront of Muslims' food choices, which consequently ought to be approached through the ethical principle of preventing harm – to the self (i.e. *ṭayyib* food as healthy and free from chemicals); to others (i.e. *ṭayyib* food as fairly-traded food); and to animals and the environment (i.e. *ṭayyib* food as free-range and organic food).

Within the context of a wider western food culture in which ethical and healthy eating is increasingly popular, this understanding of *ṭayyib* food has gained popularity among a growing minority of young, educated, middle-class western Muslims (Armanios and Ergene 2018), including those represented by MADE. Notably, both traditional and contemporary interpretations of what constitutes *ṭayyib* food are underpinned by the notion that Muslims should be scrupulous in what they eat, as food choices have an impact on their spirituality and their ability to accomplish good deeds (Shafi [1974] 2011, vol. 1, 424; vol. 6, 319). Therefore, by mobilising the concept of *ṭayyib* to reframe ethical consumption from an Islamic perspective, MADE not only epitomised current ethico-focused interpretative trends but also provided young British Muslims with a concrete example of how Islamic pious self-cultivation is grounded in tangible practice within the realm of the everyday.

MADE further elaborated on the interconnectedness of ethical consumption and pious self-cultivation over the following three years (from 2012 to 2014), through a campaign entitled 'Fair Trade in Islam'. The webpage dedicated to this campaign on MADE's website adopted the slogan 'Fair Trade is Islamic Trade!' in an attempt to promote ethical consumption as an expression of everyday ethical agency which is not only compatible with, but also inherently part of the Islamic ethical worldview. Building on the earlier 'Eat of the Good Things' campaign, this, too, adopted the concept of *ṭayyib* as its overall frame, and more emphatically urged young British Muslims to seek religious excellence (*iḥsān*) also by exercising everyday ethical agency 'on every level' of their consumption behaviours – which, as a consequence, ought to strive prioritising *ṭayyib* food whenever possible:

As Muslims, what we put in our bodies, the environment we live in and the behaviour we adopt *all affect our ability to be better believers and develop ihsaan* (excellence – a higher level of iman [faith]) in all areas of our lives. *We cannot separate the effect of the food we eat on our character and our ability to be productive in worship*, or be mentally sound in our judgement, or have the capacity to do 'more' with our time and health. [. . .] *Consuming ṭayyib food means making conscious choices of 'excellence' or ihsaan on every level of our consumption*. That includes consideration of how the animal was treated, what it was fed, how it was cared for and if there were any unfair or unjust situations that arose before the food reached our plates. *Consuming ṭayyib is not only a sign of ihsaan, it is also a sign that what we eat will absolutely be good for our health, good for our worship and good for our sound judgement* (MADE in Europe 2013c; emphasis added).

From MADE's perspective, then, striving to consume only *ṭayyib* food represents a form of everyday ethical agency. It is also an expression of, and a means to pious self-cultivation – in other words, a space where Muslims can nurture a virtuous inner state, whose external manifestation is a conduct that is virtuous both at the religious level (i.e. choosing *ṭayyib* food to gain greater spiritual clarity); and at the ethical level (i.e. choosing *ṭayyib* food as an expression of a personal commitment to the public good and the welfare of people and the planet).

Based on these premises, MADE also endeavoured to introduce ethical consumption practices into the quintessential Muslim space (the mosque), during the month which is generally considered by Muslims as the most productive period for engaging in self-reform and good deeds (Ramadan), by 're-ethicising' the practice of iftar (the meal taken by Muslims at sunset to break the daily fast during Ramadan) through the promotion across the UK of 'ethical iftars' in which only fairly traded and organic produce was served (MADE in Europe 2013a, 8).

Together, MADE's mobilisation of contemporary interpretations of *ṭayyib* food and its proposal to 're-ethicise' the practice of iftar epitomise how this organisation attempted to embed ethical consumption within a wider project of 'Muslim lifestyle' in which ethical agency and pious self-cultivation ought to intersect across multiple spheres of the everyday. I discuss this in more detail in the next section. Before doing that, however, it is important to briefly outline how MADE's efforts 'to take Fairtrade [and ethical consumption, more broadly] to the Muslim community' (MADE in Europe 2013a, 8) were (more or less inadvertently) informed and shaped by neoliberal and Big Society's governmentalities.

Through its close collaboration with the Fairtrade Foundation and the incorporation of much of its discursive and tactical repertoires, MADE simultaneously adopted and contributed to the set of socio-technical devices and knowledge systems mobilised by governmental, commercial, and civil society institutions to construct and enable the 'Fairtrade citizen-consumer' – an idealised type of neoliberal citizen representing 'a figure who, powered with the right information, is able to regulate market relations and public services through the exercise of individual choice' (Wheeler 2012, 509, 494). More specifically, MADE mirrored techniques of governmentality enacted by the Big Society agenda to produce and normalise neoliberal 'ideal citizen' subjectivities among the youth. As discussed by Bulley and Sokhi-Bulley (2014), this mode of youth-focused governmentality was rolled out by the Big Society agenda through the National Citizen Service (a summer three-week programme of activities for sixteen year olds) through a tripartite framework of (i) knowledge-gaining, (ii) participation, and (iii) responsibility-taking. Within this framework, young people: (i) learnt how to govern themselves according to norms and behaviours prescribed by the neoliberal 'ideal citizen' model; (ii) contributed (as volunteers) to activities through which they educated themselves and each other on how to perform their subjectivity as 'ideal citizens'; (iii) matured into communally-oriented 'ideal citizens' willing to assume responsibility for governing others in their local community (Bulley and Sokhi-Bulley 2014, 460–61).

Whilst the adoption of this tripartite approach was already evident in MADE's first participation at Fairtrade Fortnight, MADE's own 'Eat of the Good Things' campaign offers an even clearer case in point. Designed to 'raise awareness about global food injustice by training and mobilising young Muslims to take leadership roles in their communities, build campaigning networks and inspire others to take action' (MADE in Europe 2012, 7), the campaign's programme of activities closely mirrored that of the National Citizen Service. In fact, during a six-month period, twenty young Muslim Londoners: (i) learnt how to govern themselves according to ethical consumption norms and behaviours; and (ii) educated themselves and each other on how to perform their subjectivity as ethical citizen-consumers, through activities such as learning how to grow their own food at a local city farm, participating in workshops and film screenings on 'issues relating to

global food injustice'; and visiting 'the first halal and tayib [sic] farm in the UK' (Willowbrook Farm 2020).<sup>4</sup> Eventually, participants (iii) matured into responsibilised, communally-oriented, 'ideal citizens' eager to shape the behaviours of others in their community, e.g. through organising 'ethical iftars' and colourful demonstrations against the high levels of food waste in Tower Hamlets in East London – one of the most deprived Local Authority Districts in England, with the highest percentage of Muslims in the UK (Ali 2015, 26, 47) – where MADE itself was based (MADE in Europe 2012, 7).

Importantly, MADE's campaigns on ethical consumption were just part of a wider project of ethical/pious self-cultivation centred on the notion of 'Muslim lifestyle', which I discuss next.

### An ethical 'Muslim lifestyle'

Through its religiously framed discourse and practices, MADE attempted to articulate a distinctively Muslim approach to everyday ethical agency, in which young British Muslims ought to look at the Islamic tradition for guidelines to help them formulate their distinctive philosophy of life and thus strive to be(come), at once, better Muslims and ethical subjects:

We see our campaigns as seedlings by instilling a culture of consciousness, ethical decision-making and activism that is the core of the Muslim lifestyle (MADE 2014, 3).

For MADE, then, 'the Muslim lifestyle' is a way of life where 'ethical decision-making and activism' are profoundly and meaningfully interwoven with a commitment to Islam and pious self-cultivation. To highlight this interconnectedness, MADE anchored its understanding and overarching vision in the two primary sources of Islam: the Quran and the Prophetic example (sunna).

Reference to the sunna was utilised to conceptualise everyday ('small') ethical agency precisely as the type of agency encouraged by the Islamic tradition:

A successful campaign is not about changing the world overnight; it is about recognising the *small part* you can play in the fight against global poverty and then doing something about it – *no matter how small*. The Prophet (PBUH) [peace and blessings upon him] said "the good work most beloved to Allah is that which is done consistently, *even if small*"<sup>5</sup> (MADE in Europe 2011a, 12; emphasis added).

From this perspective, the proactive and conscious implementation of small but consistent ethics-driven actions within the realm of everyday life represents more than just an effective means to 'make a difference'. It is also, and more importantly, a way for young British Muslims to express, maintain, and nurture a personal commitment to shaping their life and daily conduct in a religiously virtuous way, according to the sunna.

MADE's overarching ethos was linked also to the Quran, by deriving the organisational motto 'change yourself, to change the world' (MADE in Europe 2013b) from a portion of verse 13:11, which MADE generally translated as: 'Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves'. This section of verse 13:11 thoroughly

permeated MADE's discourse, and its relationship with the organisation's vision was repeatedly highlighted in critical discursive moments such as annual statements by MADE's Chair and CEO, and in the last strategy document of the organisation:

Our inspiration at MADE in Europe is the Quranic verse that "Allah does not change the condition of a people unless they change what is in themselves" (13:11). We believe that *if we wish to change the condition of humanity worldwide* – and truly tackle the causes of poverty, climate change and conflict – then the *change needs to start with ourselves and our communities here in the UK* (MADE in Europe 2012, 2; emphasis added).

Allah tells us in the Quran that He "does not change the condition of people until they change what is in themselves" (13:11). This verse *inspires us to begin by changing ourselves and our communities here in the UK, looking at how our own behaviour and choices impacts on other people and the environment* (MADE in Europe 2013a, 3; emphasis added).

"Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves." Quran 13:11. [...] We believe that *if we wish to change the world for the better* – and truly tackle the root causes of poverty, climate change and injustice – *then we need to change ourselves!* (MADE 2015d; emphasis added).

Traditionally, this portion of verse 13:11 has been interpreted to mean that 'Allah will not change the (good) condition of a people as long as they do not change their state (of goodness) themselves' – in other words, 'He will not change a bounty that He has granted someone, except on account of an evil that they committed' (Kathir [d.1373] 2003, vol. 4, 340; see also Shafi [1974] 2011, vol. 5, 200–201). However, MADE adopted more contemporary and activist-oriented interpretations that have mobilised this text in a different way, to indicate that no positive societal change appears among a people unless they themselves do not correct negative conditions within and around them, to bring about that positive change.<sup>6</sup> From this angle, MADE encouraged young British Muslims to change themselves and their communities in order to catalyse wider positive change – an approach which also resonated with Big Society's localist agenda for mending a broken society through the production of 'community activists' who are eager and capable of engaging in 'community activism'.

Within this context, MADE attempted to catalyse among young British Muslims two processes that are commonly interlinked in secular expressions of everyday ethical agency occurring in the context of neoliberal governmentalities: (i) 'self-reflexivity' – i.e. an awareness that individuals leave 'ecological, ethical, and public footprints' as they go about their 'seemingly daily private lives' and that, consequently, their everyday acts can potentially restructure society; and (ii) 'responsibility-taking' – that is, the processes through which individuals consider themselves as being embedded in wider issues of responsibility for other people (including future generations) and the environment (Micheletti 2003, 30; 33). This postsecular rapprochement between MADE's religious motivations and wider, secular expressions of everyday ethical agency was evident in a video MADE published shortly before its fifth anniversary (at the end of 2013) to provide, as its title emphasised, an 'Intro to MADE' (MADE in Europe 2013b).

The video recounts the personal journey of self-reform of a fictional 'average [British] Muslim' (named Stick), who eventually becomes one of MADE's supporters. In the first half of the video, as the protagonist goes about various aspects of his secular everyday life (he 'gets his clothes from the typical high street store'; 'likes to drive his car everywhere'; gets

his ‘favourite food [...] from the fried chicken shop’) (MADE in Europe 2013b), each of his actions is contrasted by text captions that highlight their negative impact on people, the environment, and animals (‘Since 2005, over 1800 [garment] workers have died in Bangladesh alone due to the fatal factory conditions’; ‘motor vehicles produce more air pollution than any other single human activity’; ‘2/3 farm animals in the world are now cruelly factory farmed’) (MADE in Europe 2013b). Around halfway through the video, as part of his religious everyday life, the protagonist visits a mosque to attend the Friday congregational prayer. It is here, by listening attentively to the *khutba* (Friday sermon) – which quotes part of a hadith translated by MADE as ‘The world is green and pleasant, and Allah has left you in charge of it, so be careful of how you conduct yourselves’<sup>7</sup> (MADE in Europe 2013b) – that the protagonist’s conscience is awakened. At this climax, the video quotes the aforementioned portion of Quran 13:11, emphasising its link with the process of individual conscientisation experienced by the protagonist of the video:

*Stick realises the changes he needs to make* – ‘Allah does not change the condition of people until they change themselves’ (MADE in Europe 2013b; emphasis added).

The subsequent scenes exemplify the changes that, according to MADE, the average British Muslim ought to make in his/her everyday life in order to implement ‘the Muslim lifestyle’ and thus become *both* more ethically *and* religiously virtuous. These changes consist mainly in adopting ethical consumption practices and sustainable transportation, symbolised in the video by the act of swapping: a high street t-shirt for a fair trade one; mass-produced chicken for organic/free-range; a car for a bike. Subsequently, towards the end of the video, the faith-inspired ethical agency expressed by the conscientised protagonist in his private life spills into the public realm, as he joins a crowd of ‘demonstrators’ holding placards themed around the issues he has become concerned about (‘Fair Trade’ and ‘Workers’ Rights’; ‘Animal Welfare’; ‘Go Green’), and additional ones (‘Maternal Health’) – all issues which MADE itself campaigned on.<sup>8</sup>

Essentially, the video’s overarching narrative illustrates how, according to MADE, acts of pious self-cultivation (attending the mosque for prayer; attentively listening to a *khutba*; reflecting on a hadith) can and should go hand in hand with – in fact, spark – a holistic process of self-reform that, in turn, should prompt young British Muslims to express ethical agency in the realm of their everyday lives, first; and subsequently, possibly also lead them to undertake public forms of civic engagement. As I have argued elsewhere (Pettinato 2016), this narrative – and MADE’s project as a whole – blurs two of the most defining dichotomies constructed by the modern European state: that between ‘the private’ and ‘the public’; and that between ‘the religious’ and ‘the secular’.

Concerning the interconnectedness between ‘the private’ and ‘the public’, MADE echoes approaches to everyday ethical agency that are increasingly common in contemporary western societies, which see everyday conduct as being not just a matter for private life but, rather, as inherently connected with public (local and global) issues related to the wellbeing of people, animals, and the planet (Micheletti 2003, 2). From this angle, the first part of MADE’s video highlights how, according to this organisation, the average British Muslim is broadly failing both to acknowledge these interconnections, and to shape his/her daily conduct accordingly. In doing this, MADE’s critique mirrors a range of contemporary, secular, ‘lifestyle movements’ concerned with socio-environmental issues – from the already mentioned ethical consumption, to ‘voluntary

simplicity' and 'green living' (Haenfler, Johnson, and Jones 2012, 5). Consequently, at the level of *form* (that is, in its outer dimension), MADE's approach to the interconnectedness between 'the private' and 'the public' – and its implications for everyday ethical agency – broadly overlaps with that of like-minded, secular approaches.

Despite this overlap, however, MADE's vision of everyday ethical agency was distinctly Muslim at the level of *substance* (that is, in its inner dimension), because it anchored the primary inspiration and motive for taking everyday ethics-driven actions within the broader framework of a commitment to the Islamic tradition and, consequently, to pious self-cultivation. In the video, this commitment was emphasised not only by quoting Quran 13:11 in its climax but also by explicitly characterising MADE's call as being inspired by the Prophetic example, which was itself primarily framed in terms of ethical agency:

At MADE in Europe we have a vision of Muslims leading the fight against poverty, injustice, and environmental damage, by raising awareness and campaigning for change, *inspired by the teachings of the greatest activist of all times: Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)* [peace and blessings upon him] (MADE in Europe 2013b; emphasis added).

In doing this, MADE clearly also blurred the boundaries between 'the religious' and 'the secular'. In terms of 'subjectivities of postsecularity' (Cloe et al. 2019, 21), MADE emphasised how the average British Muslim's adoption of a materialistic and extravagant (neoliberal) lifestyle expresses a general state of heedlessness of the Islamic ethical worldview – a worldview that constitutes the basis of 'the Muslim lifestyle', which ought to be proactively rediscovered and reclaimed by young British Muslims. In terms of 'spaces of postsecularity' (Cloe et al. 2019, 13–14), MADE identified religious institutions and practices (the mosque; the Friday sermon; the iftar) as key platforms for the conscientisation and individual self-reform of young British Muslims; and simultaneously situated everyday ethical agency also in shared secular spaces of common life (e.g. clothes and food shops; eating places; roads and other public spaces).

## Conclusions

FBOs working in the meantime of neoliberal structures can have an ambiguous and contingent entanglement with wider governmentalities, presenting both 'points of resonance' where neoliberal forms are coproduced; and points of 'dissonance' where neoliberal forms are resisted (Williams, Cloe, and Thomas 2012). The youth-led British Muslim charity MADE was no exception.

In terms of resonance, MADE was shaped on three key levels by the neoliberal, Big Society agenda adopted by the UK government in the early 2010s. At one level, MADE replicated the technologies of agency deployed by the state in pursuit of its localism agenda. Where Big Society wanted to encourage 'community activism' (Cameron 2009), MADE promoted within Muslim communities, specifically, forms of 'everyday activism' traditionally accessible only to well-educated, middle-class (white) individuals (e.g. ethical consumption; sustainable food production; green living). Where Big Society wanted to promote 'social action' by 'encouraging and enabling people from all walks of life to play a more active part in society' (Cabinet Office 2010, 3), MADE aimed to 'inspire and enable young British Muslims to take positive action for social and environmental justice' (MADE 2015a, 2). Where Big Society worked to shape young individuals into 'ideal citizens'



through a training programme (the National Citizen Service) based on a tripartite framework of knowledge-gaining, participation, and responsibility-taking (Bulley and Sokhi-Bulley 2014), MADE adopted the same tripartite approach to engage young British Muslims, specifically. In turn, this led MADE to mirror the Big Society agenda also at the level of subjectivities, as it worked (more or less consciously) to shape young British Muslims along the lines of the 'ideal citizen' constructed and enabled by the state – i.e. as responsibilised, communally-oriented, consumer-citizens who are eager and capable of governing others in their community (Bulley and Sokhi-Bulley 2014, 466). Finally, MADE benefited from the pluralisation of British Muslim civil society which occurred in parallel with governance shifts implemented in the last years of the New Labour government (i.e. from 2005 to 2010), which favoured engaging different Muslim organisations (rather than one or few 'representative' leaders/bodies), representing different Muslims' identities, interests, and concerns. This pluralisation persisted under the Big Society agenda of the Conservative-led government formed in 2010, as its emphasis on localism and on shared civic virtues provided a space for Muslim organisations like MADE to articulate increasingly sophisticated forms of faith-based identities and multicultural citizenship at the local level (O'Toole et al. 2013, 13).

More broadly, MADE was not stranger to the impact of neoliberal structures on western Muslims' religious subjectivities and organisational life, whereby the widespread adoption of consumerism and corporate culture has led, respectively, to the emergence of a niche market of 'Muslim consumers' – i.e. Muslims that enthusiastically support the latest trends from big brands and high-street retailers, as long as these are adapted to specific religious prescriptions regarding halal; and to the entrepreneurialisation of not-for-profit Muslim charities (Wright 2015; Barylo 2016). Within this context, MADE promoted a type of ethics antithetical to the 'prosperity ethics' that has emerged in recent decades among Muslim urban middle classes of countries with recent economies (such as in Central Eurasia), which frame religious subjectivities in terms of financial success (Central Asia Program 2018). Nevertheless, MADE's work was shaped by consumerist and corporate cultures insofar as (1) it adopted a bourgeois focus on consumption as the primary arena for everyday ethical agency; and (2) it emphasised celebrating its members/supporters' 'success' and 'achievements', as exemplified by MADE's fifth anniversary event at Portcullis House.

In light of these resonances, it could be argued that MADE acted as one of 'the "little platoons" in the shape of local, voluntary, and faith-based associations in the service of neoliberal goals' (Peck and Tickell 2002, 390). However, this representation would be incomplete. In fact, MADE also articulated dissonance with/resistance to neoliberal forms in at least three key ways – all of which were underpinned by its underlying faith-based ethos. Firstly, in terms of motivations, MADE's work was neither driven by a desire to become a deliverer of services previously provided by the state (a key implication of the Big Society agenda), nor it was rooted in neoliberal rationalities of results-driven efficiency (a central characteristic of corporate culture). Instead, MADE's motivations were clearly propelled by a desire to integrate ethical agency with pious self-cultivation within the framework of a broader commitment to Islam. Secondly, MADE's faith-inspired desire to stand with 'the vulnerable' stemmed from a distinctive Islamic ethics of justice, which MADE mobilised to articulate its criticism of the neoliberal dynamics it perceived as unjust/unethical towards humans, animals, and the environment. In doing so, MADE tapped into pre-existing forms of eco-focused Muslim criticism of neoliberalism, which have been



articulated in the UK since the early 2000s by pioneering environmental organisations such as the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences (IFEES) and Wisdom in Nature (Hancock 2015, 2017); whilst also integrating these into a wider discourse on Muslim ethical consumption. Thirdly, MADE's discourse and practices promoted Islamic values such as spirituality and simplicity, which stood in opposition to core elements of neoliberalism such as materialism and extravagance, hence developing its own subculture of ethical consumerism within a wider consumerist culture, in ways that integrated a commitment to the Islamic tradition with a desire to express an ethical lifestyle.

From this angle, MADE constituted a notable example of how young British Muslims have been responding in the 2010s to neoliberal modes of governmentality aimed at producing self-governing citizens, by articulating new grammars of 'subpolitical' action in the form of faith-inspired everyday lifestyle politics (O'Toole and Gale 2013, 211–14). More specifically, MADE epitomised the significance of religious (as distinct from ethnic) identities in informing the high rates of civic engagement observed over the last decade among young British Muslims, generally (O'Toole and Gale 2010; Ahmed and Siddiqi 2014; Mustafa 2015, 2016); and among young Muslims in East London, where MADE itself was based, more specifically (DeHanas 2016, 30–53). In doing so, MADE represented an original effort undertaken by young British Muslims in the attempt to integrate their ethical subjectivities with everyday agency and pious self-cultivation in interstitial, post-secular spaces within and beyond neoliberal governmentalities.

## Notes

1. Between 2009 and 2013 the full name of MADE was MADE in Europe. In 2014, following a re-branding on the occasion of the organisation's fifth anniversary, the 'in Europe' in MADE's name was dropped. This change in name is reflected in the reference list with regard to material published by MADE at different points in time.
2. Ethical approval was not necessary for this project because it relies solely on publicly available documents.
3. Because of this, the contribution's links to MADE's website are not currently working, as data collection was concluded prior to MADE's closure, between 2014 and 2017. This study did not generate any new data. The research data supporting this publication are provided within this paper.
4. MADE partnered with the Oxfordshire-based farm in several projects, e.g.: a cycling challenge entitled 'Tour de Farm'; a public talk titled 'Let's Meat: the Ethics of Halal'.
5. The full hadith is reported in the *Book of Prayer – Travellers* in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (hadith 782a; book 6, hadith 255) (Sunnah.com. Accessed 12 September 2021. <https://sunnah.com/muslim/6>).
6. According to Shafi [1974] 2011, this interpretation should be viewed in terms of a general principle – i.e. that achieving positive change is facilitated when individuals sincerely intend to correct themselves and strive in that direction. However, Shafi states that 'this is not the sense of the Verse cited here' because 'Divine blessings are not bound by this restriction. They would, at times, come even without it' (Shafi [1974] 2011, vol. 5, 201).
7. The full hadith is reported in the *Book of Heart-Melting Traditions* in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (hadith 2742; book 49, hadith 12). The part of the hadith referenced by MADE is often translated in English as: 'The world is sweet and green and verily Allah is going to install you as vicegerent in it in order to see how you act' (Sunnah.com. Accessed 25 September 2020. <https://sunnah.com/muslim/49/12>). In recent years, the 'environmentalist' interpretation of this hadith (which MADE adopted) has been widely popularised. However, traditionally the hadith has

been understood as a warning against the alluring character of worldly life. (Encyclopedia of Translated Prophetic Hadiths. <https://hadeethenc.com/en/browse/hadith/3053>. Accessed 25 September 2020).

8. 'Workers' Rights' was at the centre of MADE's 'Every Garment Has a Name' campaign (run in 2013), which focused on ethically sourced clothing in response to the Rana Plaza building collapse in Dhaka, Bangladesh. 'Go Green' refers to MADE's environmental campaign 'Green Up My Community!' (which ran from 2012 to 2015). 'Maternal Health' was the focus of MADE's first flagship campaign 'At Our Mothers' Feet' (2011 to 2012), which lobbied British Muslim international NGOs to increase their work in this area.

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