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Researching the Other: Issues of Agency and Voice in Ethnographic Fieldwork with Young Muslim Girls

This paper reflects on four years of ethnographic fieldwork among Muslim girls in the Netherlands. The denial of Muslim girls' agency and the subsequent deprivation of their voice in the public sphere inspired my PhD project in which I aimed to investigate Muslim girls' own understandings of their culture. I focus on the problems encountered investigating 'own understandings of culture' when that culture was not my own in terms of religion, ethnicity and age. These problems were of a conceptual and practical nature, and stem from the complex relationship between *agency*, *voice* and *experience*. Does giving voice to these girls imply ascribing agency to them as well? How can we operationalize agency and connect it to everyday lived experience? Tackling these complexities, my paper provides an account of interpreting and representing particular Islamic voices that are often overheard in both media and academia.