

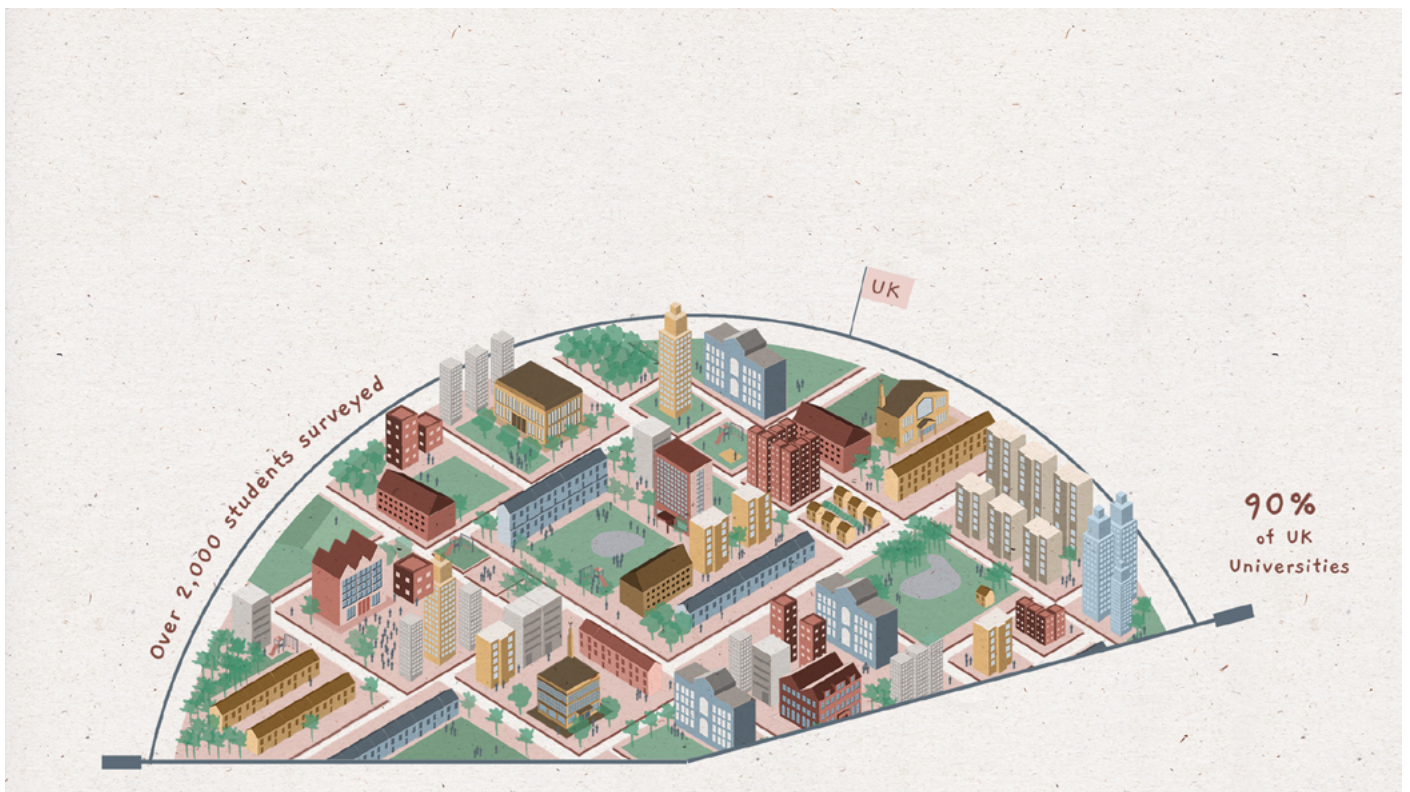
OUTSIDE THE BOX

Exploring Islam
on University Campuses
in the UK

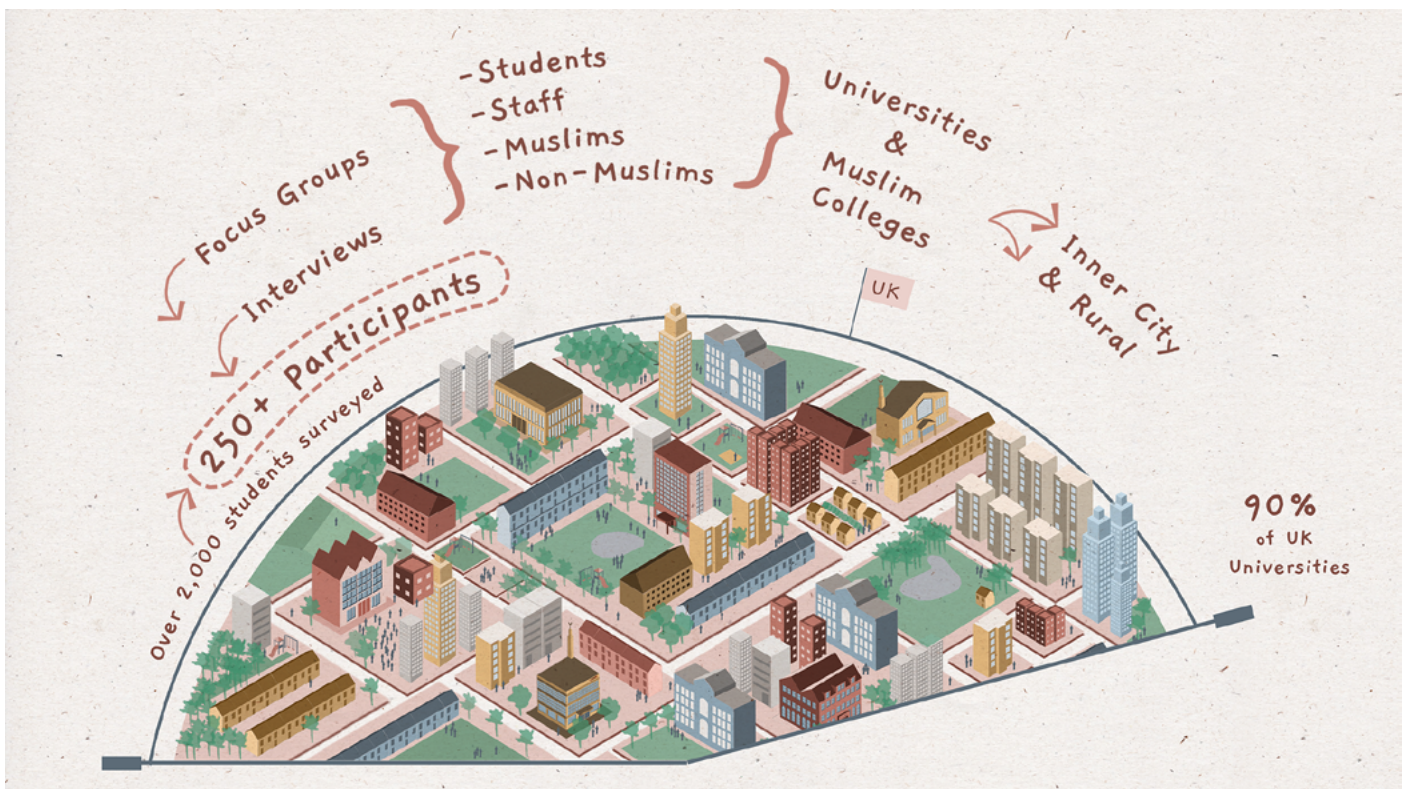




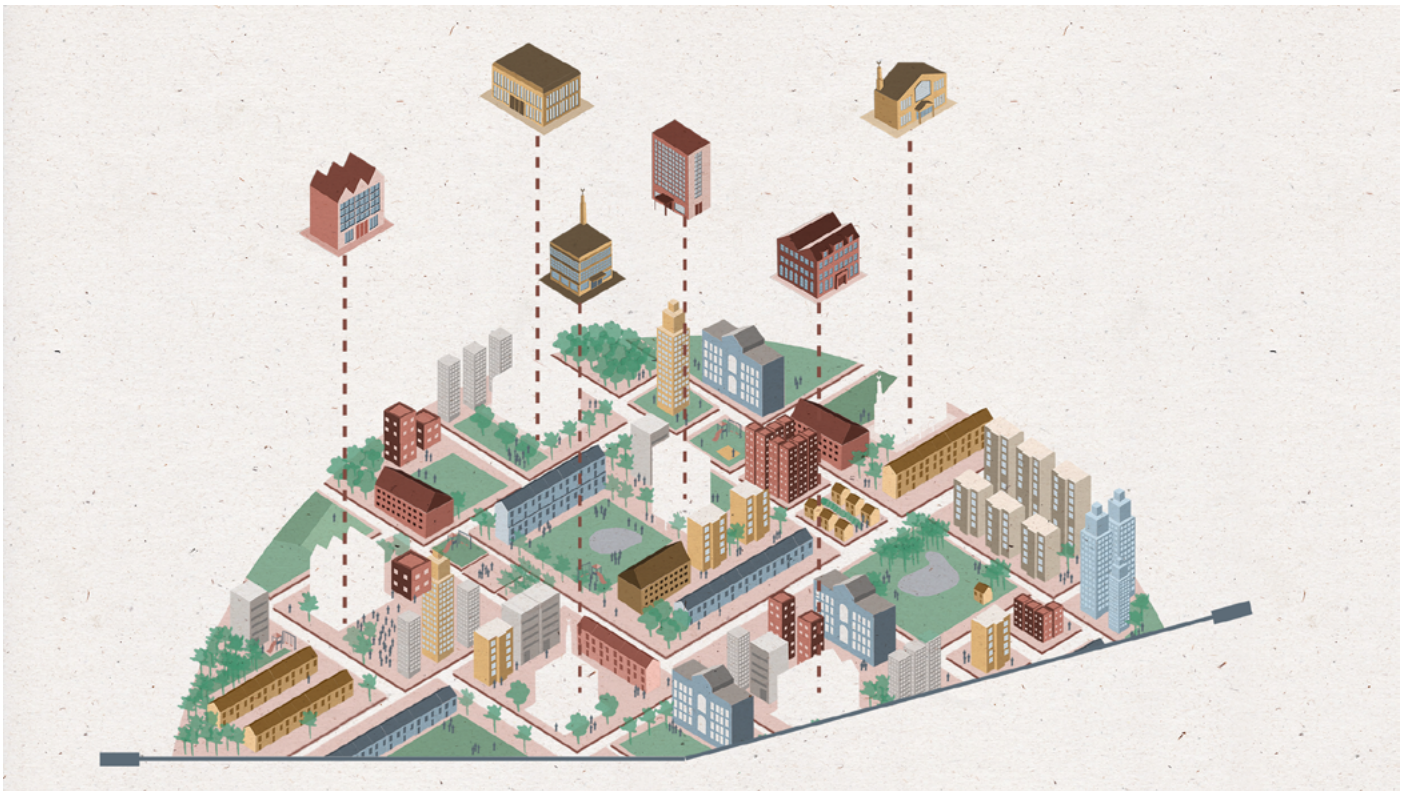




We conducted a survey with over 2,000 students attending around 90% of UK universities



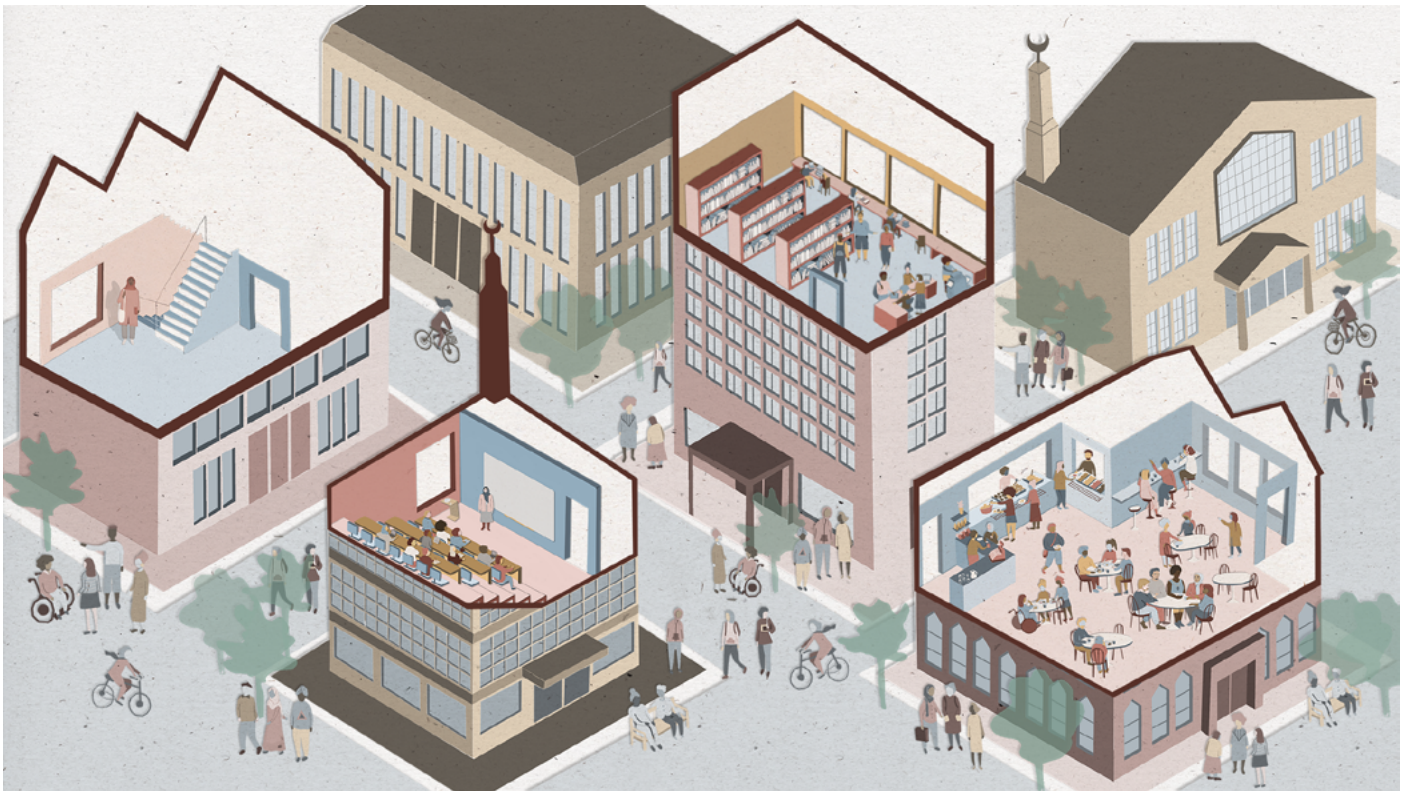
...and we interviewed over 200 students and staff,



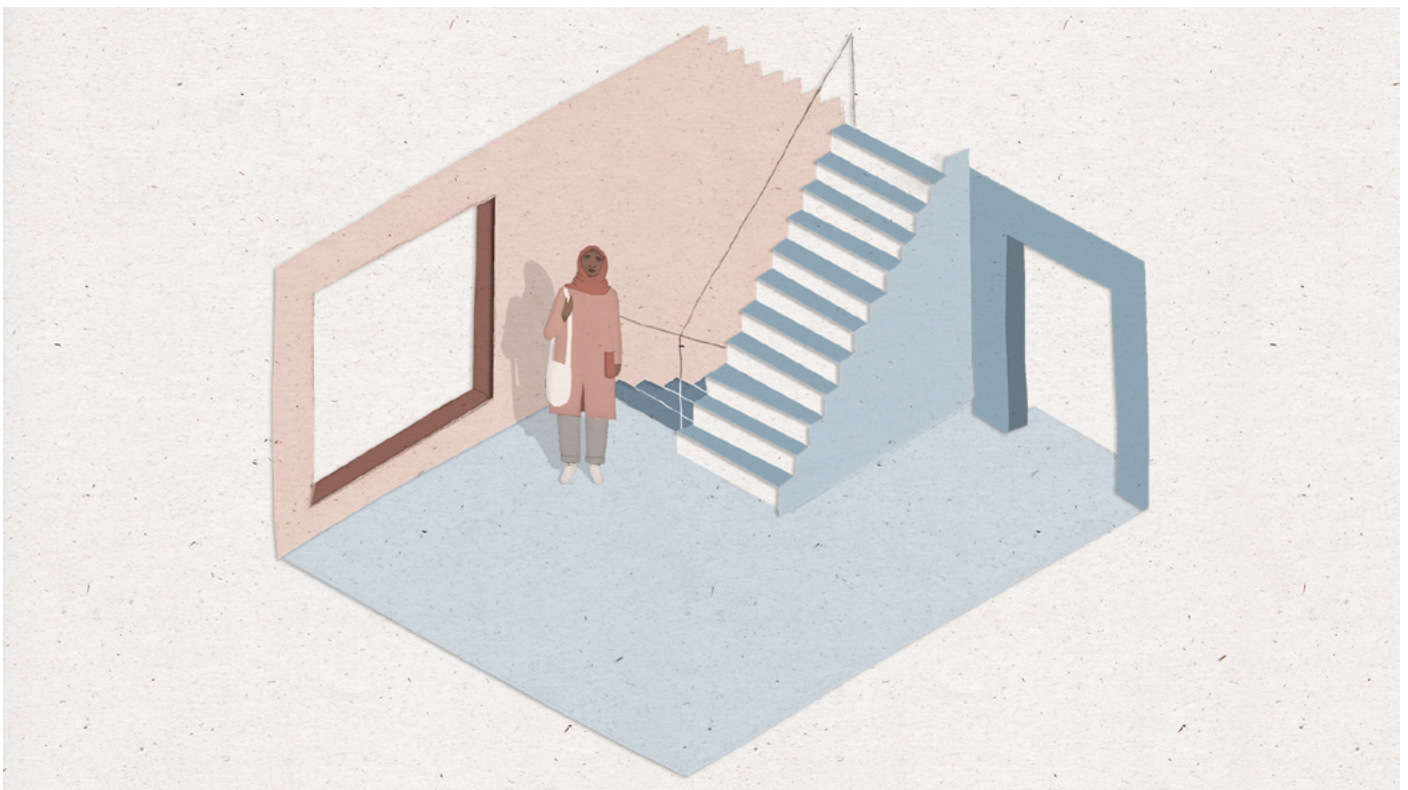
where we asked:



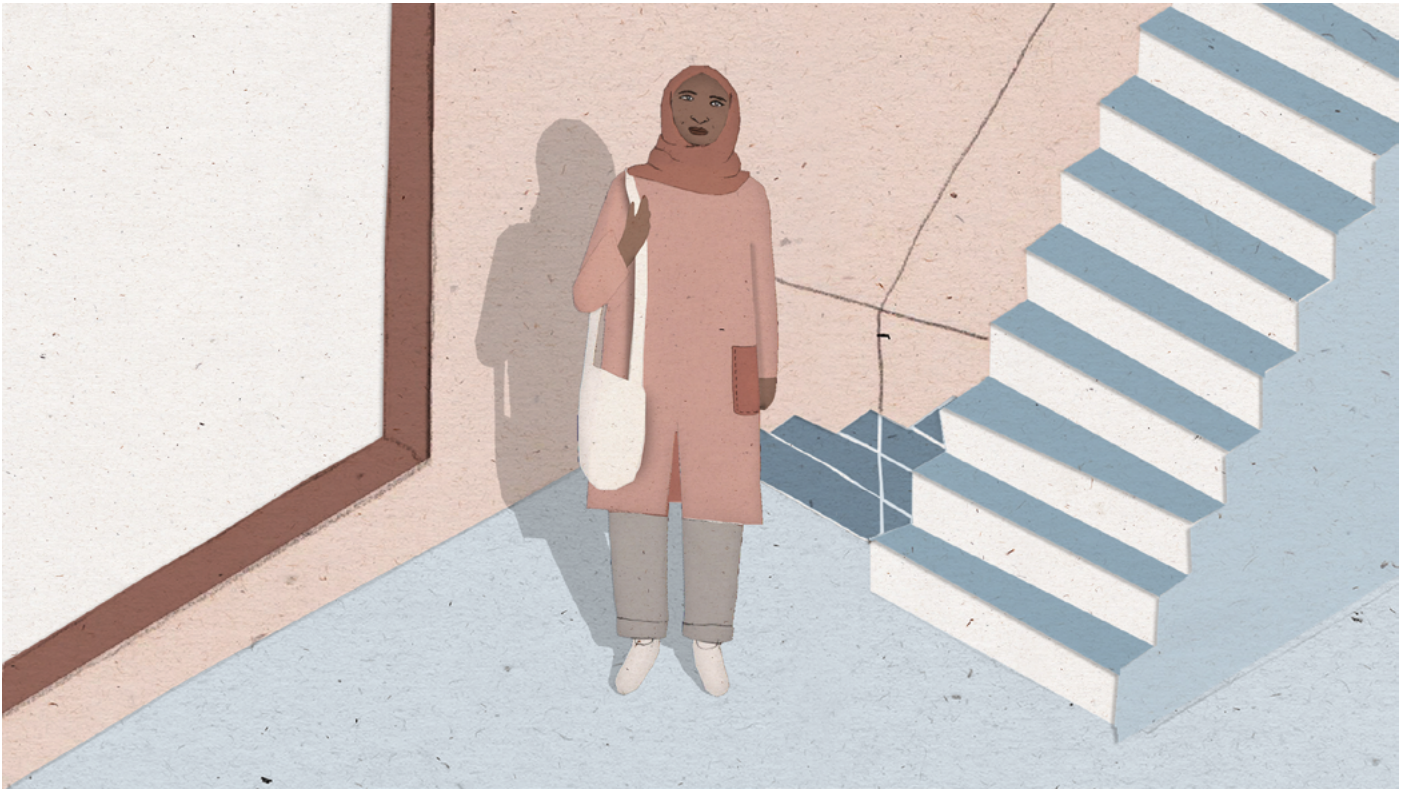
What is your experience of Islam on campus?



These are their words...



Mariyam: All the things that society tends to put on Muslims...manifests itself on campus...



Mariyam: I originally thought it was down to a lack of diversity... but I came to this university... and people say the same things... just more eloquently.



Mariyam: People think either I've been forced to wear it,



Mariyam: or I don't have an understanding,



Mariyam: or I need to be liberated by someone else....



James: It' s an oppressive article of clothing

Julie: The first thing that comes to my mind?

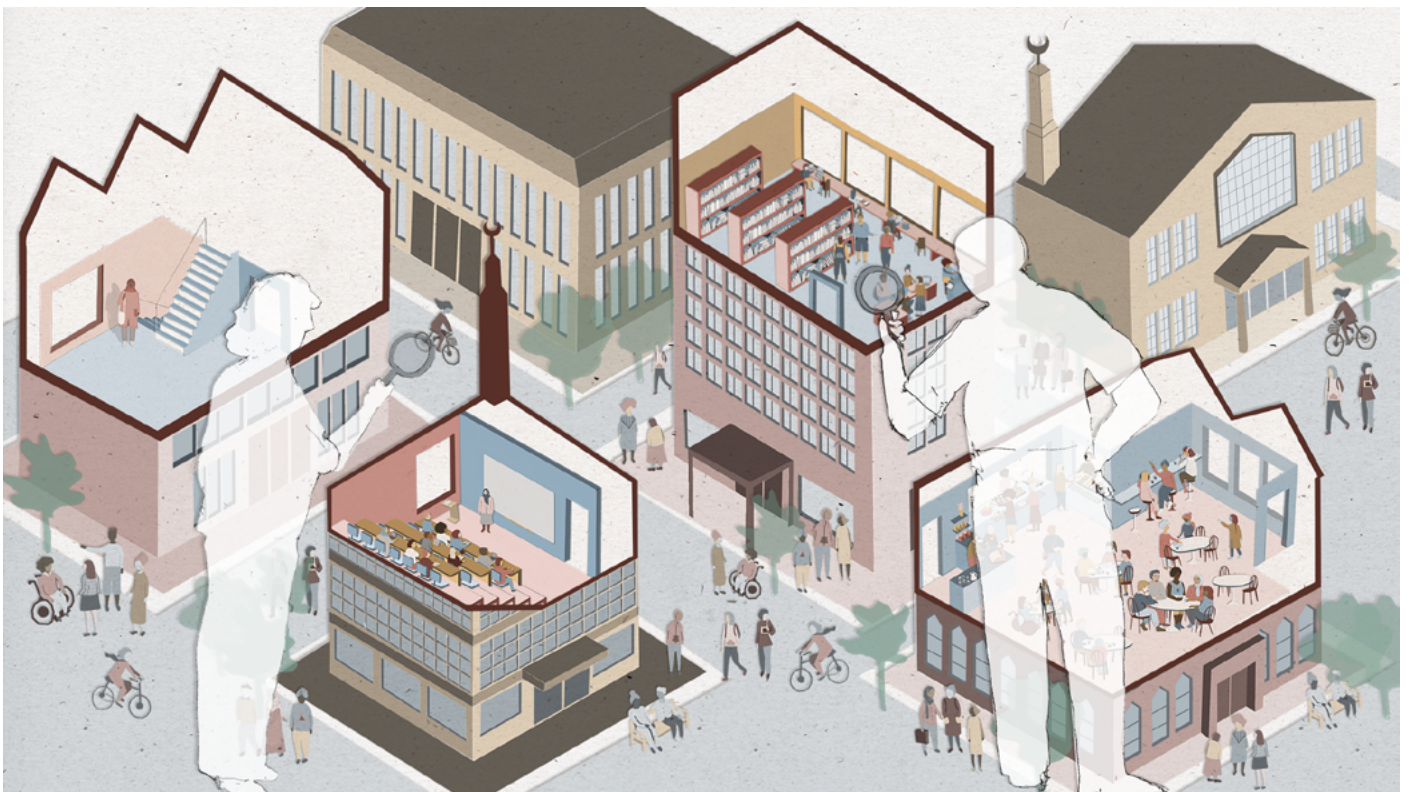


James & Julie: A bomb thrower.

Elizabeth: Arab equals Muslims, Muslims equal terrorists



Mariyam: STOP! I've reached a point where it's tiring to constantly justify my spiritual practices, like why I pray or cover... I love my abayas and dresses, they are a part of how I choose to express my identity. People should be able to accommodate that.



Launched in 2003, Prevent, one strand of the UK government's counter-terrorism strategy, aims to address the underlying causes of terrorist acts and radicalisation.



It has been criticised for targeting and demonising Muslims.



How does this play out on campus?



Ahmed: The irony for me is... you're asked to look for signs of change under Prevent.



Ahmed: We're in a university. That's what students come here to do.



Hawa: I wanted to take out some books on Islam,



Hawa: just to explore my religion.



Hawa: But I decided against it in case I get in trouble.



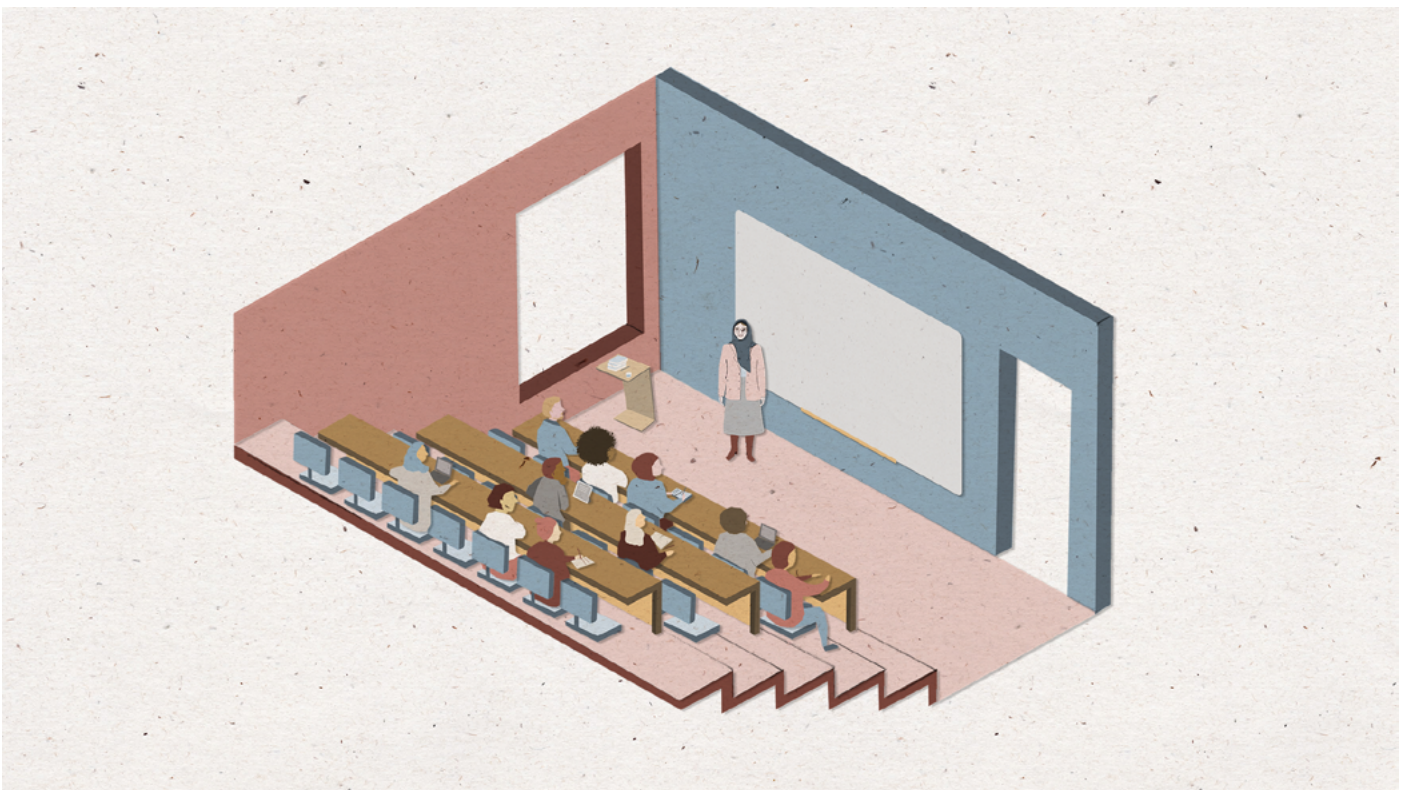
Hawa: I got my friend, who is white, to take them out for me instead.
It just felt safer that way.



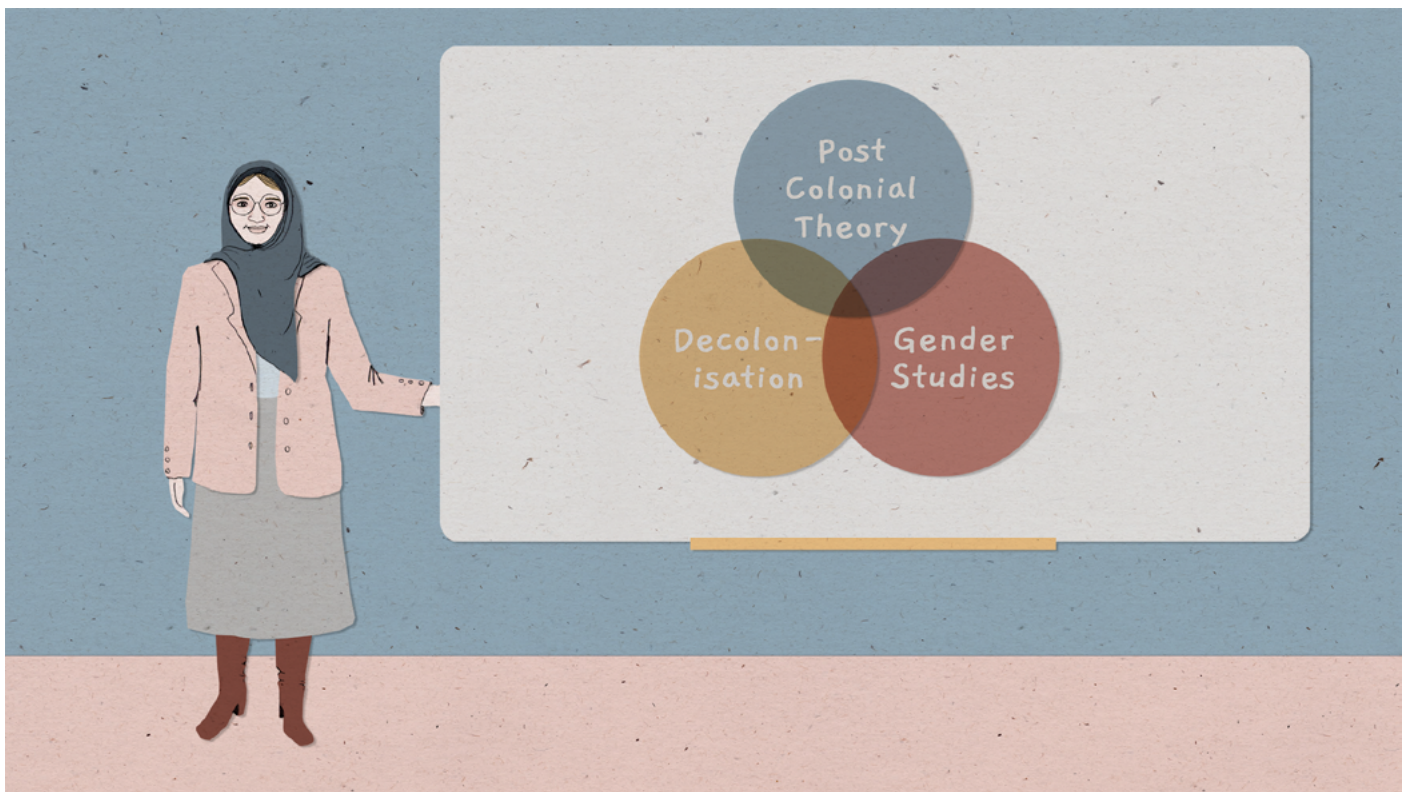
Sara: It's not just about Islam either, people who may be beginning to express questions



Sara: about authority, about foreign policy, wider political issues... one of the things a university provides is a forum for debate... or at least it should do.



Professor Khadijah: Radicalised thinking happens only when you have a very narrow understanding of Islam.



Professor Khadijah: In academic institutes this is less likely to happen. When you talk to your lecturers they broaden your understanding of religion.



Hasna: This has been my best seminar so far. She's a Muslim academic who teaches gender studies and sexual equality.



Hasna: For the first 8 weeks, she set a reading curriculum of mostly Muslim writers. I was like, hallelujah, alhamdulillah!



Hasna: Gosh, she is so inspiring, in her class you can discuss religion and its cultural proliferation... you can discuss these things!



How can we understand one another?



Richard: So...



Richard: if I ask you why you wear the hijab and what it means to you, I'm not trying to say that you shouldn't. I'm just trying to find out why it is important for you...



Zulekha: If you ask me why I'm wearing it, then I should be able to ask why you are wearing jeans...



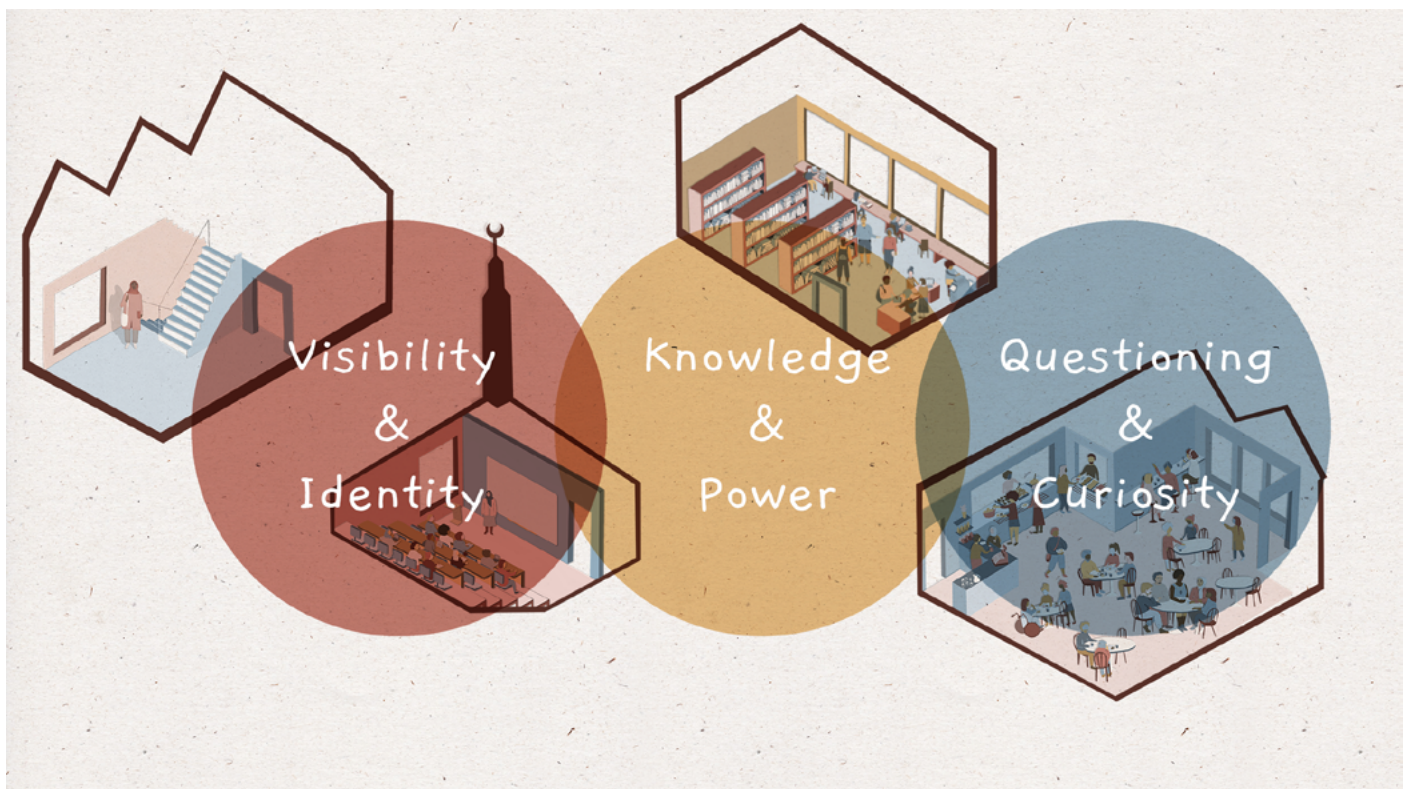
Martin: Also, it's not as straightforward as simply being curious. If you're asking why, as if this doesn't look like it belongs here, then that's not a neutral question and it's moving toward prejudice.



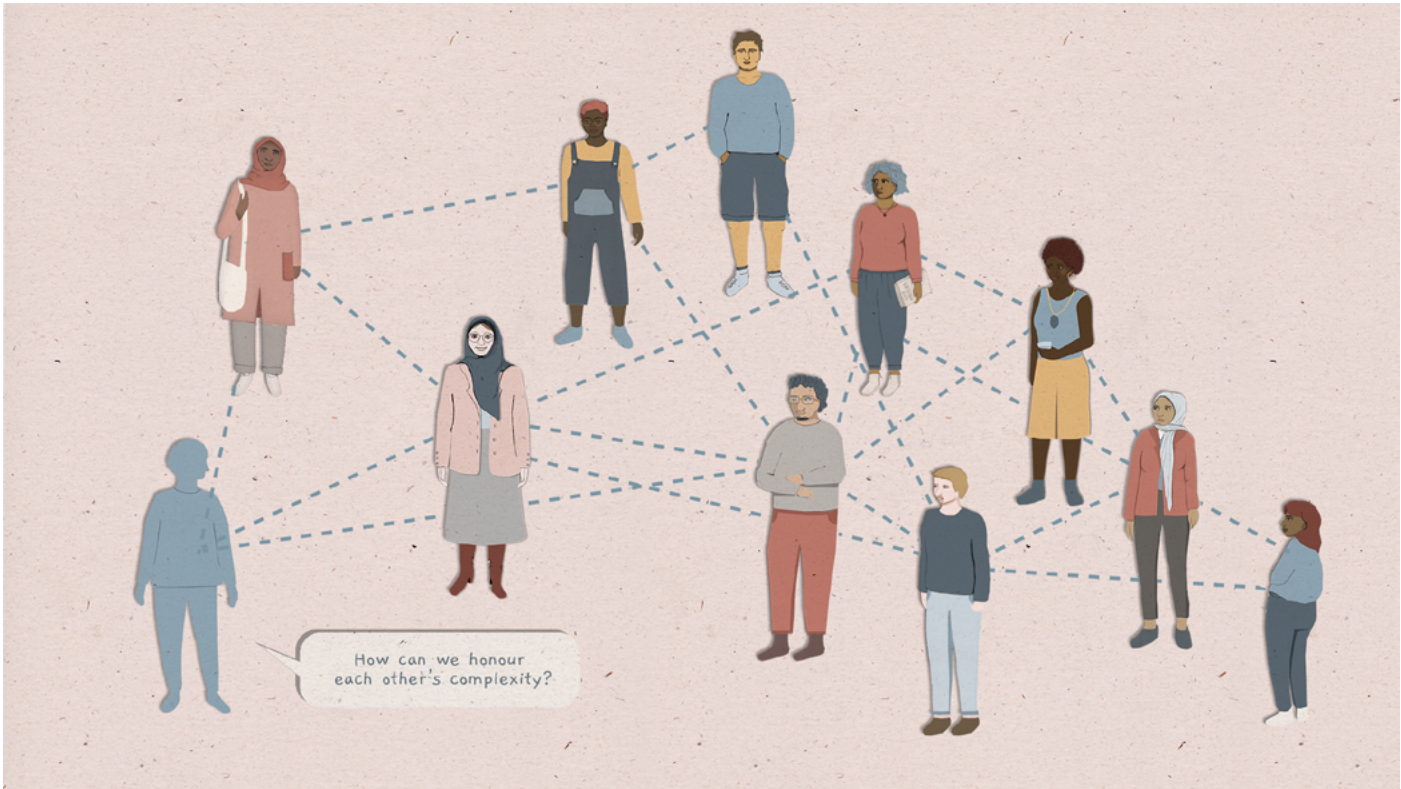
Martin: I would not ask after two or three lunches together, I'd ask after breaking bread maybe 10 times. Religion is a very personal thing for a lot of people. It gives them strength... It's the reason they're surviving, or why they're waking up every day.



The current media representation of Islam that surrounds us is very simplistic.



And if students can't hear the complex version of religions and culture at university, then where else will they hear it?





For more ways to listen visit
www.soas.ac.uk/representingislamincampus/

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