Living apart together

British Muslims and the paradox of multiculturalism

Munira Mirza, Abi Senthilkumaran and Zein Ja'far

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Terminology

There is sometimes disagreement and confusion over the use of terminology relating to Muslims and Islam. To clarify, this report makes a distinction between 'Islam' as a religion practiced by Muslims worldwide, and 'Islamism', 'radical Islam' or 'Islamic fundamentalism', which are terms that refer to a political ideology that aims to create a state and society in strict conformity with religious doctrine. Most British Muslims – even those who are devout – are not Islamists. Likewise, we make a distinction between Islamists and Islamist terrorists. Many Islamists reject the use of terrorism to achieve their goals.

Executive Summary

This report explores the attitudes of Muslims in Britain today and the reasons why there has been a significant rise in Islamic fundamentalism amongst the younger generation. It argues that the growth of Islamism in the UK is not solely a foreign problem, but something that must be understood in relation to political and social trends that have emerged in *British* society over the past two decades. It also examines the impact of public policy on the Muslim population and suggests that the way the Government is responding to Islamism is making things worse not better.

Our research into the attitudes of Muslims in Britain showed that there is a growing religiosity amongst the younger generation of Muslims. They feel that they have less in common with non-Muslims than do their parents and they show a stronger preference for Islamic schools and *sharia* law. Religiosity amongst younger Muslims is not about following their parents' cultural traditions, but rather, their interest in religion is more politicised. There is a greater stress on asserting one's identity in the public space, for example, by wearing the *hijab*.

- 86% of Muslims feel that "my religion is the most important thing in my life".
- 62% of 16-24 year olds feel they have as much in common with non-Muslims as Muslims, compared to 71% of 55+ year olds.
- 60% of Muslims would prefer to send their children to a mixed state school, compared to 35% who would prefer to send their child to an Islamic school. There is a clear age difference. 37% of 16-24 year olds preferred to send their children to Islamic state schools, compared to 25% of 45-54 year olds and 19% of 55+ year olds.
- 59% of Muslims would prefer to live under British law, compared to 28% who would prefer to live under *sharia* law. 37% of 16-24 year olds prefer *sharia* compared to 17% of 55+ year olds.
- 36% of 16-24 year olds believe if a Muslim converts to another religion they should be punished by death, compared to 19% of 55+ year olds.
- 7% "admire organisations like Al-Qaeda that are prepared to fight the West'. 13% of 16-24 year olds agreed with this statement compared to 3% of 55+ year olds.
- 74% of 16-24 year olds would prefer Muslim women to choose to wear the veil, compared to only 28% of 55+ year olds.

> "The majority of Muslims feel they have as much, if not more, in common with non-Muslims in Britain as with Muslims abroad"

However, there is also considerable diversity amongst Muslims, with many adopting a more secular approach to their religion. The majority of Muslims feel they have as much, if not more, in common with non-Muslims in Britain as with Muslims abroad. There is clearly a conflict within British Islam between a moderate majority that accepts the norms of Western democracy and a growing minority that does not. For these reasons, we should be wary of treating the entire Muslim population as a monolith with special needs that are different to the rest of the population.

- 21% of Muslims have consumed alcohol. 65% have paid interest on a normal mortgage. 19% have gambled. 9% have admitted to taking drugs.

- 59% of Muslims feel they have as much, if not more, in common with non-Muslims in the UK as with Muslims abroad.

Our research shows that the rise of Islamism is not only a security problem, but also a cultural problem. Islamism is strongly coloured by anti-Western ideas. Yet, these views are not exclusive to Muslims and can also be found in wider society. There has also been a weakening of older collective identities, notably the undermining of Britishness and the decline of working class politics, which has led to a feeling of disengagement amongst young people more generally. Some Muslims are therefore turning to religion as part of a search for meaning and community. They increasingly look to the abstract and global *ummah*.

> "The authorities and some Muslim groups have exaggerated the problem of Islamophobia, which has fuelled a sense of victimhood amongst some Muslims"

- 41% named foreign policy as an important issue to Muslims but they are not necessarily more informed or engaged than the wider population. Only 18% of Muslims could name the president of the Palestinian National Authority and only 14% could name the Prime Minister of Israel.
- 58% believe that "many of the problems in the world today are a result of arrogant western attitudes" – 30% of the general population agrees.
- 37% believe that "One of the benefits of modern society is the freedom to criticise other people's religious or political views, even when it causes offence". 29% of the general population believes the same.

The emergence of a strong Muslim identity in Britain is, in part, a result of multicultural policies implemented since the 1980s, which have emphasised difference at the expense of shared national identity and divided people along ethnic, religious and cultural lines. Islamist groups have gained influence at local and national level by playing the politics of identity and demanding for Muslims the 'right to be different'. The authorities and some Muslim groups have exaggerated the problem of Islamophobia, which has fuelled a sense of victimhood amongst some Muslims.

- Despite widespread concerns about Islamophobia, 84% of Muslims believe they have been treated fairly in this society.
- 28% of Muslims believe that authorities in Britain go over the top in trying not to offend Muslims. We asked them to give their opinion about the actions of authorities in two different scenarios. 75% believe it was wrong for a local council to have banned an advertisement for a Christmas carol service in 2003 for fear it would cause tensions. 64% believed it was wrong for a council to have banned all images of pigs from its offices (on calendars, toys, etc) in 2005, for the reason that they might offend Muslims' feelings.

Paradoxically, Government policies to improve engagement with Muslims makes things worse. By treating Muslims as a homogenous group, the Government fails to see the diversity of opinions amongst Muslims, so that they feel more ignored and excluded.

- When asked to name an organisation that represented their views as a Muslim, only 6% named the Muslim Council of Britain. 51% felt no Muslim organisation represented their views.
- 75% believe there is more diversity and disagreement within the Muslim population than other people realize.

We argue that the Government has to change its policy approach towards Muslims. It should stop emphasising difference and engage with Muslims as citizens, not through their religious identity. The 'Muslim community' is not homogenous, and attempts to give group rights or representation will only alienate sections of the population further. People should be entitled to equal treatment as citizens in the public sphere, with the freedom to also enjoy and pursue their identities in the private sphere. The authorities should also try to present a more realistic and balanced picture of disadvantage and discrimination in the UK, as 'victim politics' can contribute to a sense of alienation. We should also recognise that the negative effects of multiculturalism are particularly acute for Muslims, but are also experienced by many other minority groups.

More generally, we need to revive a sense of direction, shared purpose and confidence in British society. Islamism is only one expression of a wider cultural problem of self-loathing and confusion in the West. One way to tackle this is to bring to an end the institutional attacks on national identity – the counterproductive cancellation of Christmas festivities, the neurotic bans on displays of national symbols, and the sometimes crude anti-Western bias of history lessons – which can create feelings of defensiveness and resentment. We should allow people to express their identity freely and in a climate of genuine tolerance. At the same time, we must also recognize that the Government and policy-makers cannot address this sense of disengagement alone. We need to work together, as a society, to develop a renewed sense of collectivity that asserts our shared British identity and Western values in a way that will inspire the younger generation.

Part 1

1

Introduction

"It's a diverse group that you can't put together and label as one thing. A lot of people think they know what young British Muslims think, but they don't." Male, Muslim, 21, London

"What do Muslims want?" is a question that has increasingly preoccupied Western policy-makers over the past five years. Since the attacks on the United States on September 11th 2001, Muslims and Muslim communities have been scrutinised to try and understand the mindset of terrorists who claim to act on their behalf. The public demand for answers has been intense and has fuelled a prodigious output of books, websites, lectures, pamphlets and television documentaries about Islam and its adherents. In late 2001, post 9/11, sales of the Qu'ran went up as people grappled with the concept of "*jihad*".[1]

Nowhere has this search for answers been more intense than in Britain. The London bombings of 7th July 2005 raised challenging questions about how radical Islamist terrorist acts could be planned and executed on British soil. The 30-year old ring-leader of the bombers, Mohammed Sidique Khan, was an apparently mild-mannered and respected classroom assistant from Yorkshire, who had lived a comfortable life with his young family. Speaking from his grave in his so-called 'martyrdom video', released two months after the attack, Khan wore a red and white checked *keffiyah* – an Arabic headscarf – but spoke in a startlingly familiar Yorkshire accent. Why would a man with such an apparently contented life in Britain declare himself at war with his fellow citizens?

On one level it is obviouly impossible to get inside the minds of the London bombers and pinpoint the exact motivations or life events that led them to carry out their atrocities. What we can do, however, is try to understand the ideas and values that were already forming in these young minds, and that eventually made them susceptible to radical Islamist propaganda. The aim of this report is to ask why some British-born Muslims have become attracted to Islamic fundamentalism and the different social and cultural factors that give credence to such ideas.

"For many, the growth of radical Islamist terrorism has raised serious questions about the relationship between Islam and the modern Western world, and whether the two can co-exist."

A homegrown problem

For many, the growth of radical Islamist terrorism has raised serious questions about the relationship between Islam and the modern Western world, and whether the two can co-exist. It was the Harvard political scientist, Samuel Huntington, who first coined the term 'clash of civilisations' in 1993 to describe the cultural and military threat posed by the Muslim world. He prophesied an era of global division – between the modern secular West, and the Muslim, religious East, each pulling in

1. 'UK sales boost for Afghan books', BBC Online, 28th September 2001 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/arts/1568788.stm (last accessed 13.01.07)

their own separate ways. The rise of Al-Qaeda dramatised an inherent clash between Islamic fundamentalism and the modern world. When the London bombings happened, this 'clash of civilisations' seemed even closer to home. Some observers pointed to the four British-born bombers as further proof that Muslims living in this country are simply unable to adapt their strict values to the British way of life.

> "But how accurate is this picture of 'us and them'?"

Many commentators have argued that the rise of Islamist terrorism is caused by a fundamental tussle between cultures and that more is needed to encourage Muslims to adopt British values. This was reinforced by comments made by the Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, Trevor Phillips, who warned in September 2005 that Britain was 'sleepwalking into segregation' and that cities were becoming increasingly divided along ethnic or religious lines. In recent years, the Government has introduced citizenship tests and citizenship ceremonies to ensure foreign nationals have a greater understanding of the culture, language and political requirements of being British.

But how accurate is this picture of 'us and them'? The terrorists who bombed the London underground in 2005 were not shaped by a conservative Arabic education, or brought up in a rural South East Asian culture. They grew up in the streets of Britain, attending state schools and watching British telelvision. It is true that some of them may have learnt the Qu'ran by rote from an early age, but these individuals also spoke fluent English, listened to pop music, watched football and shared many other cultural reference points with non-Muslims.

Of course, radical Islam has a global reach and any explanation for its rise must look at geo-political trends. A major factor in the increasing religiosity of Muslims in the UK has been the influence of Islamist groups operating from abroad and funded by the oil profits of countries like Saudi Arabia.[2] There is a proliferation of propaganda targeting young Muslims through literature, DVDs, the internet, student societies and charitable organisations. A Channel Four Dispatches documentary, aired on 15th January 2007, revealed how imams trained abroad in puritanical Wahabi ideology are now preaching in prominent British mosques, such as the Green Lane Mosque in Birmingham. An inevitable part of Britain's counter-terrorism security strategy must be to track the influence of such organisations and individuals.

But the absorption of ideas cannot be explained simply by their profusion. Why should the reactionary ideology of Wahabism appeal to modern, secularised Muslims in Britain? Contrary to expectations, the rising interest in religion amongst second and third generation British Muslims is not an outcome of parental or community influence. In particular, if one looks at young Islamists in the UK, they are not responding to familial or broader community pressure. They are returning to the Qu'ran and reading about religion of their own volition, often having experienced the modern, secular lifestyles available to most people of their age. To suggest that imams or Muslim elders are exerting an undue influence on youngsters is perhaps missing the fundamental point – today's religious extremists in Britain are largely the products of *British* society.

The starting point of this report is recognition that the rise of radical Islam in Britain is not simply a 'foreign problem' which we can shut out; rather, it is partly fuelled by cultural and political

2. GLEES, A. (2005) *When Students Turn to Terror: Terrorist and Extremist Activity on British Campuses,* London, Social Affairs Unit.

trends that have their origins in the West. The homegrown terrorists we have seen in the UK are not alien to the British way of life, but are, at least in part, derivative from it. Why does Islamism appeal to some young people who are mainly, but not exclusively, of Muslim origin? What need does it answer within them, and what social, political and institutional factors may have encouraged this? How has this new form of Muslim consciousness emerged, what drives it and to what extent does broader British society need to engage with it?

The more one looks at today's self-proclaimed *jihadists*, both in Britain and elsewhere, the harder it becomes to see them principally as products of traditional Muslim society. Marc Sageman's study of 172 Al-Qaeda operatives around the world indicates that most Islamic extremists have not been brought up with a strong religious influence. Nor are they the products of economic deprivation. In fact, many come from relatively wealthy homes. Only 9.4% had a religious education, whilst 90.6% had a secular education. 17.6% were upper class, 54.9% were middle class and only 27.5% were lower class. 9% had a postgraduate degree and another 33.3% had a college degree. Significantly, 70% joined the *jihad* while away from home, many after being sent to study in foreign universities, often in the West.[3]

Sageman was able to identify three major consistencies, all of which appear counter-intuitive: the *jihadists* were usually radicalised in Western countries; they were likely to have had a relatively secular upbringing; and the majority were not recruited 'top down' but actively sought out terrorist networks. Such findings suggest that we cannot isolate the factors that create a *jihadist* to a single country, lifestyle or religious denomination. Even where the radicalisation process is assisted by Islamist propaganda and networks, the contemporary *jihadist* is also a product of wider cultural forces.

These findings gain credibility when we look at the backgrounds of some of the terrorists who have emerged in Britain:

- The four London bombers, Mohammad Sidique Khan, Shehzad Tanweer, Jermaine Lindsay and Hasib Hussain were all British-born Muslims. Lindsay was a convert.
- Omar Khan Sharif and Asif Mohammed Hanif who carried out a suicide bombing in Israel, killing people at a Tel Aviv pizza parlour in April 2003, were from Derby. Sharif went to King's College, London
- Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh, arrested in 2002 in connection with the murder of journalist Daniel Pearl in Pakistan, was educated at a fee-paying school in Essex and at the London School of Economics.
- Saajid Badat, the would-be second 'shoe-bomber' who changed his mind, attended a Church of England school in Gloucester.

A Muslim upbringing is a common factor in almost all cases, but even that is not a prerequisite for becoming a *jihadist*. A small number of converts have become radicalised in western countries.[4] In Britain, for instance:

- Andrew Rowe, who was convicted in London after being caught with dangerous materials to be used for terrorist attacks and was also suspected of trafficking arms to Chechen militants, was born to Jamaican parents and had dabbled in petty crime before converting to Islam in the 1990s.
- Richard Reid, the so-called 'shoe-bomber' who tried to blow up a plane, had a Jamaican father and English mother and grew up in a middle class suburb, later joining the Brixton mosque.

3. SAGEMAN, M. (2004) *Understanding Terrorist Networks,* Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press.

4. TOBIAS, M. D. (2006) The Falcon and the Falconer. *Policy,* 22. For detailed discussion about American converts who have joined the *jihad*, see KHATCHADOURIAN, R. (2007) Azzam the American. *The New Yorker.* 15th January 2007. The most striking example of this phenomenon is Adam Gadhan, the first American in fifty years to be charged with treason. Gadhan grew up in Oregon, rural California, converted to Islam at the age of 17, and is now one of Osama Bin Laden's senior operatives, acting as a key member of Al-Qaeda's 'media committee'.

- Don Stewart-Whyte who was charged, together with co-conspirators, with plotting to blow up airplanes on transatlantic routes is the son of a Conservative Party agent, now deceased, and converted to Islam after being a drug and alcohol abuser.
- Dhiren Barot, who was convicted for planning a variety of attacks using chemicals and explosives and had travelled to Pakistan to meet senior Al-Qaeda operative Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, was born a Hindu and converted to Islam at the age of 20.

Most, if not all, of these individuals would have seen propaganda videos, attended lectures and visited websites that nurtured their interest. A number of them would have made links to terrorist cells operating abroad and received encouragement from more experienced figures. However, we cannot assume they were all personally 'brainwashed' by senior Al-Qaeda operatives. According to the Government's official report, 'The Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005', there is little evidence to prove that the bombers had links to an Al-Qaeda 'fixer' and the authors stated that "their indoctrination appears to have taken place away from places with known links to extremism".[5] In other words, they may have become attracted to radical ideas without any direct influence from abroad. Although planning a terrorist act would probably require a degree of training, support and assistance from other experienced and connected individuals, the first crucial steps of radicalisation – reading books, surfing the net, talking with like-minded friends – do not have to be masterminded by a terrorist network. Individuals can start the journey alone, or within a small group of friends, say at a local sports club, youth centre, or in a student society at university.

It is almost impossible, therefore, to develop a robust profile of the kind of individual who will become a terrorist. They come from a range of religious and ethnic backgrounds, and vary from university students to high school drop outs. Some have clean records, while others have been in and out of jail. They do not have to be poor or have experienced racism. Like the London bombers, they can be "well integrated into British society".[6] Although almost all radical Islamist terrorists to date have been men and there may be a 'macho' or sexualised element to the psyche of the *jihadist*, women are not excluded. Muriel Degauque was a Belgian female convert who married a Moroccan Muslim and then carried out a suicide mission in Iraq in 2005.

The attempt to understand the contemporary terrorist threat through the study of theological writings or "the Muslim mindset" therefore tends to overlook another important factor – the cultural and political influence of living in the West.

A cultural problem, not just a security threat

Only a minority of people described as 'radicalised' or 'extremist' Muslims is likely to commit or plan terrorist attacks. This group is extremely small and there is little evidence to show that radical Islamist terrorist groups constitute a *mass* social movement in Western society. In surveys conducted in Britain after the London bombings, the majority of Muslims fully denounced the attacks and disputed the religious legitimacy of *jihadist* groups.[7] Gilles Kepel, a renowned authority on political Islam, points out that today's Islamism is qualitatively different to former incarnations of political Islam, which tended to be less ideologically rigid and once formed the basis for popular social movements in the Middle East. The vast majority of Muslims are not going to become terrorists or support them.[8]

However, there has been a rise in what the French scholar, Olivier Roy, calls 'reli-

5. HOME OFFICE (2006) Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005. London, Home Office. p 26

6. Ibid.

7. We know from numerous surveys commissioned that the terrorists do not enjoy widespread support amongst Muslims in the UK. In a YouGov poll carried out in the immediate aftermath of the 7/7 attacks, only 6% thought they were justifiable, YOUGOV (2005) YouGov survey results. A year later, in a Populus survey in June 2006, only 7% believed that suicide attacks on civilians in the UK were ever justified, although this figure rises to 16% if the target is military. Whilst this is still cause for concern, it shows that terrorists had no right to claim they were acting on behalf of the majority of Muslims. Nearly two thirds of Muslims believed that no more than a tiny minority of their community sympathised with the 7/7 bombers, POPULUS (2006) Muslim 7/7 Poll. A more recent survey conducted for Channel Four's programme, Dispatches, found that 22% of respondents felt the London bombings were justified, but it was young Muslims who were most likely to take this view (31% of 18-24 year olds, compared to 14% of those over 45) GFK (2006) 'Attitudes to Living in Britain - A Survey of Muslim Opinion', A Survey for Channel 4 Dispatches.

Surveys often ask whether there may be some sympathy for the suicide bombers, which can be a confusing question. Some polls have shown that sympathy for their motives can be as high as 20-30% YOUGOV (2005) YouGov survey results. It is possible that respondents express sympathy with some of the views of the bombers (or even human sympathy towards people so deranged as to kill themselves) but still condemn their actions. The people who express sympathy for the bombers are not necessarily future terrorists. Nevertheless, it does indicate a degree of social validation, albeit limited, for the bombers actions in Muslim society at large. Interestingly, very few surveys ever ask non-Muslims whether they sympathise with the bombers or their motives.

8. KEPEL, G. (2004) *Jihad. The Trail of Political Islam,* London, I.B.Taurus & Co Ltd.

giosity' amongst younger Muslims in the UK, of second and third generation immigrant origin.[9] Whilst the number of actual or potential terrorists remains small, it can be construed as an extremely acute expression of a broader shift towards the 'Islamicisation' of identity throughout Europe, and a growing interest in neo-religious ideas. Various indicators demonstrate this: increased wearing of headscarves amongst Muslim women; greater cultural identification with transnational Muslim identity – the *ummah*; growing membership of Islamist political groups and youth associations; an increase in anti-Western and anti-Semitic attitudes in Muslim literature and websites; and greater demands by Muslim groups for *sharia*-compliant education, and financial and legal frameworks. Many more young Muslims are said by Muslim leaders to be going on pilgramage to Mecca, which is considered to be a duty for all Muslims before they die.[10] Numerical estimates of Muslims going to fight abroad in conflicts such as Afghanistan or Bosnia have been as high as two thousand a year.[11]

While such indicators of religiosity rise and fall in different European countries according to the social and political context, they do suggest a cultural shift is taking place among second and third generation Muslims. This is particularly important when taking into account the key fact of demography: Britain's Muslims are much younger than the UK population as a whole. Approximately one third of Muslims in Britain is under the age of sixteen. Unlike their parents, they are more likely to identify with their religion than with an ethnic or national label.

Although many younger Muslims will not ever support terrorism or express radical views, in general the rise of radical Islam points to a growing disillusionment with what is perceived to be the problems of 'the West'. In this sense, the influence of Islamism is not just a security problem, but also a cultural problem. In Britain, the aggressive, anti-Western strain of Islamism seems to be stronger even than other European countries. A study by the Pew Center, based in America, noted in 2005:

"While publics in largely Muslim countries generally view Westerners as violent and immoral, this view is not nearly as prevalent among Muslims in France, Spain and Germany. British Muslims, however, are the most critical of the four minority publics studied – and they come closer to the views of Muslims around the world in their opinions of Westerners".[12]

It has been argued that this negative perception of the West is a straightforward response to grievances over Western foreign policy, and the way that Muslim feel about the suffering of the *ummah* – the worldwide Muslim community. Numerous authors have linked the London bombings with the war in Iraq, using as evidence the testimonies of two of the London bombers in their valedictory 'martyrdom' videos. In summer 2006, key Muslim public figures sent an open letter to the government in which they argued that Britain's foreign policy was fuelling extremist ideas and pushing people towards terrorism.

However, this supposed causal link between terrorism and foreign policy does not fully explain the *jihadists*' motivations. The Madrid attacks on March 11 2004 were already being prepared in 2000-2001 – long before the coalition forces invaded Iraq or Afghanistan. And, of course, the September 11th attacks were a cause of the Iraq war, not a consequence of it. France and Belgium refused to support the war in Iraq but have both been targeted in subsequent terrorist planning.[13]

The appeal of radical Islam is more than an angry response to Western foreign policy. It appears to reflect a more fundamental shift in cultural attitudes. For instance,

9. ROY, O. (2004) *Globalised Islam. The Search for a New Ummah*, New York, Columbia University Press.

10. AKBAR, A. (2006) 'Young Muslims alienated at home find solace on haj', *The Independent.* 29th December 2006

11. MCROY, A. (2006) *From Rushdie to 7/7*, London, The Social Affairs Unit. p 40.

12. THE PEW GLOBAL ATTITUDES PROJECT (2006) 'Europe's Muslims More Moderate', *The Great Divide: How Westerners and Muslims View Each Other,* Washington, The Pew Research Center, (5-6).

13. MONIQUET, C. (2005) The radicalisation of Muslim youth in Europe: The reality and the scale of the threat, Testimony of Claude Moniquet, Director General of European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center at the Hearing of the Committee on International Relations Subcommittee on Europe and Emerging Threats, United States House of Representatives.

in the 'supergrass trial' in 2006 (in which the Al-Qaeda operative Mohammed Babar was a key witness) seven British defendants were accused of planning attacks on 'binge drinkers' and 'football hooligans'. Their targets included nightclubs, pubs and bars, including London's Ministry of Sound. One of the defendants allegedly stated, "no one can even turn round and say 'oh they are innocent' – those slags dancing around".[14] Such targets reflect a deep hatred of the supposed 'decadence' of Western society, which goes far beyond concerns about foreign policy.

If the motivations are partly cultural, perhaps we can find an explanation in the religion of Islam? It has been argued by some that the scriptural tenets of Islam pose an essential conflict with modernity in the West. These analysts have adopted the 'cultural essentialism' approach, which seeks to explain Islamism as an outcome of a static, durable culture that is inherently prone to violence. But Islam is not a fixed monolith. While readers can search the Qu'ran and find several lines that will legitimise the use of violence, others will find several more that will condemn it. The interpretation of religion is never constant, but always subject to social and cultural change. There are clearly strands of Islam that are more literalist and revivalist such as Wahabism, whereas others are far more rooted in folk cultural tradition and in keeping with 'popular Islam', e.g. Sufism. Indeed, counter to the claims of Islamists, many Muslims seek to practice their religion and culture in co-existence with modern, democratic forms of governance and lifestyle, in countries such as Malaysia, Turkey, Egypt and Indonesia. Most importantly, the interplay between religion and changing political circumstances is crucial. At the height of pan-Arab secularism in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Muslim women throughout parts of the Middle East removed the headscarf in a spirit of feminist liberation. Today, their daughters may wear it as a statement of identification with their religion.[15]

In this sense, a distinction should be made between Islam and Islamism. The former refers to a world religion with diverse and changing cultural practices and customs, many of which can and do co-exist with western lifestyles. The latter refers to the politicisation of religion; an ideology which draws upon religion but pursues a particular political programme and set of goals.[16] It is much more productive to explore the origins of Islamism in relation to a specific historical and cultural context, rather than simply as an interpretation of religious texts written almost fourteen centuries ago.

More crucially, although Islamism appears otherworldly to our modern sensibilities, we should consider the way in which its animosity towards the West chimes with certain ideological trends that have long been fashionable amongst the Western intelligentsia. For instance, prominent members of the anti-globalisation movement attack the 'greedy' consumerism and materialism of capitalist society; culturally relativist social theory bemoans the dominance of 'euro-centric' scientific and cultural knowledge; environmentalist groups celebrate the spiritual richness of pre-industrial, rural life; and certain strands of radical feminism condemn the sexualisation of women in the West, leading to the bizarre claim by one Muslim feminist that "just about everything that Western feminists fought for in the 1970s was available to Muslim women 1,400 years ago".[17] To understand the appeal of Islamism, we should think about how it feeds off a number of broader cultural trends in our modern age.

The politics of identity

Muslim consciousness in Britain has grown steadily with the arrival of new migrants from countries such as Pakistan,

14. 'London club bombing plan taped' BBC Online. 25th May 2006. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/5016274.stm (last accessed 21.01.07)

15. For an illuminating description of the current fashion for headscarves in the Middle East, see STRATTON, A. (2006) *Muhajababes*, London, Constable & Robinson.

16. TIBI, B. (2005) *Islam Between Culture and Politics*, Hampshire and New York, Palgrave Macmillan..

17. RIDLEY, Y. (2006) How I came to love the veil. *WashingtonPost.com.* 22nd October 2006. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/20/AR2006102001259_2.html (last accessed 21.01.07)

India, Bangladesh, East Africa, and latterly, Iraq, Afghanistan, Turkey, Africa, and parts of Eastern Europe. According to the Census 2001 there are approximately 1.6m Muslims living in the UK today – 2.7% of the total population.[18] Many cities now boast a sizeable number of mosques, around which Muslim communities live, work and pray.

However, the increased prominence of Muslim lobby groups and the nature of their demands have also been shaped by wider political trends in Britain. In the era of multiculturalism diversity policies at local and national levels have encouraged different ethnic and religious groups to organise politically and fight their corner for extra resources. The competition emerging between groups – a sort of tribal thinking – has reinforced a wider feeling of social fragmentation, in which each group is encouraged to look after 'their own'. More generally, in the past few decades, there has been a weakening of older, collective forms of identity, such as nationalism, political parties, or trades unions. Younger Muslims are more likely than their parents to feel connection to their religious community as opposed to their country, ethnic group or a political movement.

The kind of demands made by minority groups has also changed. In the 1970s, anti-racist groups campaigned largely around issues of material and political equality. In recent years, this has given way to the demand for 'difference', and cultural issues such as clothing, halal meat and blasphemy have come to dominate Muslim politics. In this context, younger Muslims are much more conscious of their difference to the mainstream and more aggressive in asserting their identity in the public space.

In light of these shifts, it is important to consider the response of Government policy, and the impact it has made on the feelings and attitudes of Muslims. For the past decade, and particularly after the London bombings, Government policy towards Muslims has been to engage with them as a distinct community whose special needs qualify them for particular policies and privileges. In 2005, the Government assembled a group of Muslim representatives and leaders, entitled the 'Preventing Extremism Together' taskforce, which recommended increased funding of religious groups and projects to bolster Muslim community needs.

> "The emphasis on difference has been a long-standing tenet of multiculturalism, but despite concerted efforts to make Muslims feel included and protected in British society, the opposite has occurred"

However, despite good intentions, this approach has often seemed inadequate and muddled. Trying to do 'community engagement' with Muslims has proved difficult because they are not really a coherent and unified community. The Muslim population is ethnically, linguistically and culturally diverse;[19] and while some younger Muslims are growing more religious than their parents, others are becoming more secular or 'Westernised'. Therefore, what 'community strategy' would fit all the diverse needs and expectations of this group?

The emphasis on difference has been a long-standing tenet of multiculturalism, but despite concerted efforts to make Muslims feel included and protected in British society, the opposite has occurred. Muslims, particularly amongst the younger generation, continue to feel vulnerable, isolated and anxious about experiencing Islamophobia. The Government has set up numerous schemes to 'listen' to younger Muslims but they feel no less alienated and disengaged. The experience of British Muslims suggests that the multicultural experiment – in some ways at least – has failed to deliver the kind of

18. According to the 2001 Census, Muslims are a relatively young population - a third are under the age of sixteen compared to a fifth of the general population. The majority live in cities and towns; London, Birmingham, Manchester, Blackburn and Bradford. A significant number also live in Dewsbury, Glasgow, Leeds, Manchester and Oldham. The Muslim population is relatively disadvantaged in terms of employment, educational attainment, housing and health. Half of Pakistanis and Bangladeshi households live in the 10% most deprived wards in England. 28% of Muslims live in social rented accommodation, the largest proportion of any religious group and only 52% of them are homeowners, the lowest proportion of any religious group.

19. According to the 2001 census, two thirds are of South Asian origin, whilst about 8% are African and 12% are white.

unity that many expected. So where do we go from here?

> “This issue cannot be dealt with through one-off schemes or projects run by the Home Office”

The aims of this report

This report aims to explore the attitudes of Muslims in Britain today and to analyse the growing religiosity amongst the younger generation. It outlines the emergence of a Muslim consciousness in Britain, and explores some of the key cultural and political themes that preoccupy Muslims. It also examines the impact of public policy in the rise of Islamism and suggests that the way the Government is responding to radical Islam risks making things worse. We argue a number of points:

- The growth of Islamism amongst some young Muslims cannot be understood solely as a foreign or religious problem, but also needs to be understood in relation to political and social trends that have emerged in *British society* over the past two decades.
- There are certain foreign influences shaping Muslim consciousness in the UK but the growth of Muslim politics has also been strongly nurtured by multicultural policies at local and national level since the 1980s.
- More generally, many younger Muslims are turning to religion as part of a search for meaning and community which also exists in wider society. The weakening of older political identities in Britain means they increasingly look to the abstract and global *ummah*.
- Religiosity amongst younger Muslims tends to be more politicised and there is a greater stress on asserting one's identity in the public space.
- Muslim consciousness is dominated by a 'culture of victimhood', which has bred feelings of resentment and defensiveness. Paradoxically, this has been fuelled by Government policies to improve engagement with Muslims.
- Contemporary Islamism is strongly coloured by anti-Western ideas but some of these sentiments can be discerned in the political and cultural climate of the West itself.

We do not offer any quick fix solutions or a handy list of policy recommendations to deal with the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. This issue cannot be dealt with through one-off schemes or projects run by the Home Office. Rather, we hope to widen discussion about the experience of Muslims in Britain today, how Government policy might change direction overall, and the broader cultural and political battle that all of us need to fight. We make a number of suggestions:

- Stop emphasising difference and engage with Muslims as citizens, not through their religious identity. We should recognise that the Muslim 'community' is not homogenous, and attempts to give group rights or representation will only alienate sections of the population further.
- Stop treating Muslims as a vulnerable group. The exaggeration of Islamophobia does not make Muslims feel protected but instead reinforces feelings of victimisation and alienation.
- Encourage a broader intellectual debate in order to challenge the crude anti-Western, anti-British ideas that dominate cultural and intellectual life. This means allowing free speech and debate, even when it causes offence to some minority groups.
- Keep a sense of perspective. The obsession of politicians and the media with scrutinising the wider Muslim popula-

tion, either as victims or potential terrorists, means that Muslims are regarded as outsiders, rather than as members of society like everyone else.

Structure of the report

The first part of this report outlines the historical development of the Muslim consciousness in Britain, drawing on secondary and primary sources. It highlights the drivers leading to a more visible Muslim political identity since the late 1980s.

The second part of the report outlines findings from original research conducted between July 2006 – January 2007. The polling company, Populus, conducted a quantitative survey of 1,003 Muslims in the UK, through telephone and internet questionnaires. Telephone interviews were generally conducted in English but in a minority of cases the interview was conducted in a different language if requested by the respondent. The answers were weighted to represent the demographic of the Muslim population in the UK. Some further questions were asked to 1,025 people from the general population in an omnibus survey for points of comparison.

We also conducted 40 semi-structured, hour-long interviews with younger British-born Muslims, exploring their attitudes towards religion, British society and values. The respondents were either university students or recent graduates, were of either Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin, and came from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. This smaller sample was not intended to be demographically representative of the entire Muslim population, but it provided useful data about the complex attitudes of younger Muslims. The interviews took place in London, Birmingham, Rochdale, and Manchester. 17 of the respondents were female, 23 were male. The respondents demonstrated varying degrees of religiosity; 13 stated they 'prayed rarely or not at all' and 27 'prayed regularly or quite often'. 12 interviews were also conducted with non-Muslims of similar age to provide points of possible comparison. The interviews were transcribed and then analysed using computer assisted data analysis software. We also consulted a range of experts, academics and practitioners about the experiences of Muslims living in Britain and the effects of policies.

The third and final section of the report reflects on the research findings and their implications for policy development.

2

The emergence of Muslim conciousness in the UK

Islam plays a significant role in the political and cultural life of large parts of the Middle East, South and Central Asia, the Balkans and parts of Eastern Europe, North and Sub-Saharan Africa, and now increasingly in the UK, where approximately 1.6m Muslims reside.[20]

Great efforts have been made in recent years to improve the public understanding of Islam and how it shapes the lives of the Muslim population. A large number of books, television documentaries and public events have helped the British public become reasonably knowledgeable about the second largest religion in the UK. However, along with this understanding there has been a tendency from some quarters to make untested assumptions about the 'Muslim community' and what it believes. In particular, policy-makers sometimes take for granted the view that the *ummah* is automatically the most important concern for Muslims in Britain. As a result, the Government's engagement with the Muslim population in recent years has ended up privileging religious and cultural issues that mark them apart from the rest of the population.

After the London bombings in 2005, the Government called together a taskforce of Muslim representatives and community leaders up and down the country to talk about Muslim youth. The premise of its report, 'Preventing Extremism Together' was that the Government needed to adopt special measures to help the Muslim community integrate, and which also recognised their sense of connection with other Muslims around the world. Among its 37 recommendations, it suggested more Muslim 'youth MPs' to help young Muslims express themselves politically, more information about Islam translated into English, and a moderate Islamic scholars' roadshow, to teach about the 'true' version of Islam. The report also recommended the funding of specific Muslim-led organisations, such as the Federation of Society of Islamic Students (FOSIS), and the Waqf al-Birr Educational Trust, as well as increased monitoring of public services in order to "analyse how much of these resources benefit and advance the Muslim community, Muslim organisations and Muslim women". There were also recommendations to empower Muslims through greater awareness of their culture, such as teaching young Muslim women Arabic, and establishing a unit at the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to encourage a more balanced representation of Islam in media, popular culture and sports sectors. What these report recommendations implied are that young Muslims in Britain should primarily be engaged with through their religious identity. The taskforce assumed that the Muslim identity is a historically constant monolith, and that the 'Muslim community' has always been conscious of itself as such.

20. According to the 2001 census there are 1.6m Muslims in Great Britain, accounting for 2.8% of the total population. Some estimates are slightly higher, around 1.8m-2m. This makes Islam the second largest religion in the country, but still vastly outnumbered by Christians who are 41m. Around 50% of Muslims are born in the UK. 50% are under the age of 30, compared to a quarter of Sikhs, 21% of Hindus, and 18% of Christians. 34% of Muslims are under 16.

Muslims are ethnically diverse, especially compared to Sikhs and Hindus. 74% of Muslims are from an Asian ethnic background. 686,000 Muslims are of Pakistani origin (43%), 261,000 of Bangladeshi origin (16%), 137,000 of Indian origin (8%). Muslims are mainly concentrated in the main cities of the UK, London (where 38% reside), the West Midlands (14%), the North West (13%) and Yorkshire and Humber (12%). 7% are from another white background including Turkish, Cypriot, Arab and Eastern European, and 6% are from black African origin, including Somalia.

Outside the realm of policy-making, many academics and commentators have also discussed the importance of Muslim identity, and point out that younger Muslims are angry about British foreign policy because they perceive it to be harmful to the *ummah* to which they feel strongly attached.[21] Some authors argue that the tensions between the Muslim world and West today stem partly from the Muslim mindset, which, they claim, has been humiliated over the centuries by economic and military defeat by the West.[22] This interpretation of the current wave of political Islam views it as part of a long tradition of Muslim grievance dating back to the end of the Caliphate under the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, and possibly even further back to the holy crusades in the Middle Ages.

It is undeniable that the Muslim identity in Britain is strong and it draws upon the reservoir of historical memory. But at the same time, we should also remind ourselves of how relatively novel this identity is, at least in the political space in Britain. Although Muslims have lived in Britain since the nineteenth century, it is only in the last two decades that we have seen the development of a strong Muslim identity in the public sphere.[23] Until the 1970s, it was ethnicity, not religion, which dominated the way Muslims perceived themselves.[24] Older migrants are much more likely to identify with their ethnic or national identity, whilst identification with Islam is much more prevalent amongst the younger generation. Arguably, the strong identification with the trans-national *ummah* is relatively new. While there is irrefutable anger today about the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, by contrast the Bosnian war of 1992-1995 had a less noticeable impact on mainstream Muslim opinion, as did the 1999 Kosovo conflict. Foreign policy has been a motor for radicalisation since the mid-1990s, but usually first amongst a smaller group of politicised Muslims who have worked actively over time to politicise mainstream Muslim opinion.

The 'Muslim identity' is therefore not an unchanging, monolithic entity, but something that has developed through a sequence of historical events and processes. This section will give a brief outline of some of the factors and events that have contributed to this development.

Secularism to religious politics

The history of Muslims in Britain goes back at least two hundred years, when small numbers of Bengali and Yemeni sailors entered the port cities of London, Glasgow and Cardiff, taking work in local garment factories and restaurants. Following the Second World War, the Muslim population grew steadily as young men from South Asia migrated to Britain to seek work as part of the post-war rebuilding effort. They settled in London, in towns and cities surrounding the capital and in specific towns in the Midlands and the North, where the main industries had a large demand for unskilled and semi-skilled labour. Often living in concentrated areas within these towns, Muslims took poorly paid, night-shift work that the local white population did not want to do. Chain migration in the 1950s and 1960s meant that friends and relatives followed from South Asia and began to settle in neighbourhoods, forming tight-knit ethnic and cultural communities. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, other factors helped expand the settlement of new Muslim migrants. Growing restrictions on immigration encouraged many migrants to settle permanently and bring their families from abroad. The 'Africanisation' policies of some East African countries also led to the forced migration of many thousands of Indian families to the UK.[25]

As families gradually settled and grew more prosperous, the Muslim population

21. See MCROY, A. (2006) *From Rushdie to 7/7,* London, The Social Affairs Unit..

22. LEWIS, B. (2004) *The Crisis of Islam. Holy War and Unholy Terror,* London, Orion Books Ltd.

23. VERTOVEC, S. (2002) Islamophobia and Muslim Recognition in Britain. IN HADDAD, Y. (Ed.) *Muslims in the West: From Soujourners to Citizens.* New York, Oxford University Press.

24. ANSARI, H. (2002) Muslims in Britain. Minority Rights Group International. p18 cited in THE INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY (2005) *The British Muslim Community in 2005,* Wiltshire, The Institute for the Study of Islam and Christianity. p.39

25. For a more detailed account of Muslim immigration, see VERTOVEC, S. (2002) Islamophobia and Muslim Recognition in Britain. IN HADDAD, Y. (Ed.) *Muslims in the West: From Soujourners to Citizens.* New York, Oxford University Press, ABBAS, T. (2005) 'British South Asian Muslims Before and After September 11th' in ABBAS, T. (Ed.) *Muslim Britain. Communities Under Pressure,* London/New York, Zed Books/Room 400. p3-17.

became a more visible presence in Britain. In the late 1960s, some Muslim communities were able to move from their makeshift mosques in private rooms, to purpose-built mosques, thereby making a mark on the landscape of some British towns and cities. New Muslim voluntary and welfare organisations also sprung up to provide services and support to first generation and second generation migrants in the major cities.

Certainly, religion was an important aspect of life for first and second generation immigrants, acting as a comforting social glue in an unfamiliar and sometimes hostile world. Muslims almost invariably settled closely together in areas and set up local organisations, mosques and services to cater to their needs, as well as provide familial and communal support. In the 1960s, for instance, Haji Taslim Ali, the imam at the East London Mosque, provided a variety of useful services for his 7,000 worshippers: he and his wife taught Arabic classes to local children, collected and distributed old clothes, looked after children if the mothers had to go to hospital and he was an interpreter in the local police station and courts. This vital support was replicated all over Britain's cities wherever a sizeable Muslim population existed. Similarly, successful businessmen would donate generously to local mosques in order to give something back to their community.[26]

Yet politically, the role of Islam was not prominent in the public domain. In the 1960s, Muslim immigrants were largely involved in secular political movements that spoke to their ethnic and national concerns (mostly related to developments 'back home' in Pakistan, Kashmir or Bangladesh) or specific problems encountered by immigrants in the UK. A number of self-help organisations flourished such as the Pakistani or Bangladeshi Workers Associations, which were primarily concerned with providing local welfare services – filling out forms, legal assistance, immigration advice and offering social and cultural amenities. The common problem of racism, encountered by most ethnic and religious minorities, also led to occasional cross-ethnic alliances, such as the Co-ordinating Committee Against Racial Discrimination in Birmingham and the Black People's Alliance which campaigned against discrimination for all minority groups.

In the 1970s this secular politics shifted to new territory as the younger generation confronted racism head-on. They struggled against racial attacks, instances of police brutality, housing discrimination and increasingly tight immigration laws. This new wave of secular, anti-racist politics had a radical edge and sought to challenge the domination of older, more traditional elites. Organisations like the Asian Youth Movement, set up in 1977, made no distinction between religious communities and were created by younger leaders who had been born and educated in Britain. They often defied conservative attitudes in their own ethnic communities and tackled issues such as domestic violence. They chose to focus on problems relating to their particular communities in the UK, rather than in their homelands. While many of this generation of activists were probably Muslim, they did not tend to define themselves by their religion but instead by their political allegiance.

The shift to religiously oriented politics took place over the 1980s and 1990s for a number of reasons. The first was a shift in the intellectual climate on the political left, away from the traditional emphasis on class struggle and economic equality and towards a new politics of identity and group rights. Inevitably, this fed through into the activism of radical groups and led to new kinds of political demands being made. Parts of the anti-racist movement began to reframe their political demands from equality of provision and treatment, to diversity, which entailed greater recogni-

26. HIRO, D. (1992) *Black British, White British,* London, Paladin. p.134

tion of cultural issues. Whereas in the 1970s these organisations had campaigned largely around cross-cultural issues – police treatment, immigration laws, housing – by the mid 1980s, they had moved to new issues, such as the provision of halal meat in schools, faith education, positive images of ethnic groups and Islamic clothing.[27] Many activists in the anti-racist movement also began to work in the local authorities and services around which they campaigned.

At the same time, more strident Islamist groups emerged and started to exert an influence on the younger generation. They capitalised on the perceived failures and shortcomings of secular groups; many of which were seen to be increasingly irrelevant or tied to the local state and political parties. Picking up on the shift in anti-racist discourse since the early 1980s, the newer Muslim activists framed their lobbying in terms of recognition for their cultural rights. They were often more dynamic at the grassroots level and attracted disillusioned youngsters whose future seemed otherwise overshadowed by local crime and drugs problems. Thus Islam emerged as a new vehicle of political identity.

Multiculturalism

Importantly, this shift towards cultural issues from the 1980s onwards was facilitated by the state, through the introduction of multicultural policies at local and national level. Urban riots and unrest during the 1970s and 1980s provoked concern about how to engage ethnic minority communities in the political process and give them some direct political involvement in their areas. As a bastion of the new left, the Greater London Council under the leadership of Ken Livingstone was among the first institutions to give concrete expression to the importance of identity and diversity in its policies. It pioneered numerous multicultural initiatives to appeal to a new 'rainbow coalition' of groups such as ethnic minorities, gays and lesbians, and the disabled. Even less obviously radical organisations such as the Home Office began to reflect the new intellectual fashion. The Scarman Report following the 1981 Brixton Riots called for a multi-racial, multi-cultural approach, which would recognise the different needs and ethnic communities in society.

> "The privileging of diverse identities in race relations discourse meant that people were gradually demarcated into visible cultural and religious 'communities'"

The policies that followed emphasised the importance of different cultural backgrounds in determining people's identity, and the need to engage with community groups on this basis. This entailed a shift from the liberal tradition of dealing with people in a 'colour-blind' way in the public space, towards differential treatment according to their cultural identities. The privileging of diverse identities in race relations discourse meant that people were gradually demarcated into visible cultural and religious 'communities'. In particular, the idea of cultural assimilation was attacked by certain parts of the political left because it was considered likely to marginalise ethnic minorities. In its place, 'cultural diversity' and the recognition of difference was welcomed as an alternative way of including people in society. For the political left, an additional driver behind this effort was a desire to connect with new constituencies of people beyond the white working class, which had traditionally formed the basis of left-wing politics.

Since the 1980s, official support for 'diversity' has moved from being a marginal preoccupation of activists to being a central concern of all institutions. The idea of diversity has spawned a massive infrastruc-

27. MALIK, K. (2005a) Born in Bradford. *Prospect.* October 2005

ture of policies, funding streams, services, voluntary and semi-governmental organisations and professional occupations. In the UK, a range of services – housing, healthcare, arts and cultural provision, voluntary support, public broadcasting, and policing – have been restructured to accommodate the supposedly different needs of ethnic users. There are dedicated ethnic housing associations, voluntary bodies, arts centres, radio channels, and policing units. This emphasis on diversity was articulated most clearly in the 2000 report of the Commission for Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, chaired by Lord Bikhu Parekh, which argued that equality also required "cultural recognition and respect".[28] If a person's culture is not affirmed and given status, this is considered to be denial of equality.

However, some people now argue that the official drive to recognize diversity has been counterproductive because it has prevented migrants from fully integrating into Britain. Zia Haider Rahman, a Bangladeshi-born human rights lawyer has argued that many new immigrants are discouraged from learning English, pointing out that the government spent £100m in the past year on translation services: "We are telling them they don't have to learn English, let alone integrate. Worse, by insulating them, we have created communities that are now incubators for Islamo-fascism".[29] The growth in translation services has coincided with a broader shift in education towards recognising different cultures. In 1985, Ray Honeyford, a head-teacher in Bradford, warned about the growing segregation in nearby schools and how the fear of offending minority groups was thwarting the teaching of English as a first language – something he believed most Asian parents were also concerned about. His stance against multiculturalism provoked consternation from local authorities and Honeyford was pushed into early retirement. Today, we can see how his dire predictions have been borne out. Schools throughout the north of England are highly ethnically divided. Honeyford's old school, Drummond Middle School, has been renamed Iqra School and is now 100% Asian.[30]

The privileging of cultural difference means that multicultural policies have often ignored the needs of less powerful sections of ethnic communities. Organisations like the Muslim Women's Network have argued that community leaders silence their own women and prevent the criminal justice system from tackling problems such as domestic violence, honour killings and forced marriages. Although such crimes are not specific to any culture and have been carried out by Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and Hindus, the patronising – even racist – view of some multiculturalists that these crimes are part of 'their culture' has led some critics to argue that the issue of domestic violence in ethnic minority homes is not tackled with the same force as in white people's homes.[31]

The logic of diversity and multiculturalism has also led to a shift in political culture, whereby ethnic and cultural groups are encouraged to make demands based on their differences and cultural exclusion from the mainstream. In order to gain resources from the public purse or even garner media attention, particular groups have to claim they are unfairly disadvantaged. The effect over the past two decades has been the emergence of ethnically or culturally specific lobby groups, each arguing their own corner for more money, resources and support for their particular identity.

The danger of this growing tribalism was belatedly recognised in the official report into the riots in the northern towns of Bradford, Oldham and Burnley in 2001, which raised concerns about apparently increasing ethnic segregation and people living 'parallel lives'. The Chair of the Independent Review Team, Ted Cantle criticised the entrenched divisions between

28. THE RUNNYMEDE TRUST (2000) *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, The Parekh Report,* London, Profile Books Ltd.

29. RAHMAN, Z. H. (2006) Hope of escape lost in translation. *The Sunday Times.* 17th December 2006

30. For more detailed discussion of the Honeyford affair, see WEST, P. (2005) *The Poverty of Multiculturalism,* London, Civitas.

31. GUPTA, R. (2003) A veil drawn over brutal crimes. *The Guardian.* 3rd October 2003

communities caused by ethnically based regeneration funding from local and central government. He argued that such structures encouraged groups to compete against each other. The Review Team also noted that habits of self-censorship had developed, which had made cooperation between groups more difficult: "In our anxiety to eliminate forms of insulting behaviour and language, we have created a situation in which most people are unwilling to open any subject which might possibly lead to uncomfortable differences in opinion."[32]

Finally, the defining moment of British race relations in the past decade was the Macpherson inquiry into the Stephen Lawrence investigation, published in 1999. The murder of the black teenager in south London, and the substandard police operation into the incident led to a major shift in the national conversation about race issues in Britain. It brought to public attention the concept of 'institutional racism', which the Macpherson report defined as "the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people." The report's seventy recommendations included an increase in ethnic monitoring, the adoption of race awareness training, targets for ethnic minority recruitment and promotion, and greater attention given to 'hate crimes'.

Although the use of the term 'institutional racism' ostensibly emphasised structural factors behind racism (such as employment, institutional practices, and statutory policies), the effect of Macpherson was to focus authorities' attention on the everyday, low-level experience of racism in the workplace. Today anti-racist measures concentrate on changing the organisational culture, and rooting out 'unwitting prejudice', which is unintentional and can lead to feelings of disrespect towards ethnic minorities. Macpherson's highly subjective definition of a racist incident, as anything "perceived to be racist by the victim or by *any other person*" (emphasis added) has turned any act of aggression, or even criticism, into a potential racial offence.[33] Despite its high-minded aim, the preoccupation with monitoring racism seems to coincide with increased racial tensions between groups.[34]

Muslim identity

The shift towards multicultural policies has had a profound impact on the Muslim population at local and national level. Since the 1980s, the authorities have sought to engage with Muslims on the basis of their cultural difference, presuming a common identification based on religious, ethnic or cultural needs. For the last twenty-five years local politicians from all the mainstream parties have made efforts to befriend Muslim community leaders in order to secure 'the Muslim vote' in urban areas. Numerous local authorities have set up representative bodies to consult with Muslims over local issues. In Bradford, the council helped set up the Bradford Council of Mosques, while in Leicester a Federation of Muslim Organisations was established.

Local authorities have found new partners in religious institutions and recruited them to help with public service delivery. For instance, some people in the 1980s argued that the Muslim community's religiosity should be encouraged because it helped maintain relatively low crime rates of young Asian men compared to their Afro-Caribbean counterparts.[35] These partnerships with the authorities endowed religious institutions with extra prestige. They

32. HOME OFFICE (2001) Community Cohesion: A report of the Independent Review Team chaired by Ted Cantle. London, Home Office. p.20

33. See also, GREEN et al. (2000) Institutional Racism and the Police: Fact or Fiction? London, Civitas

34. Prior to the summer riots in Oldham in 2001, the police were so keen to demonstrate their commitment to dealing with racism, that officers went into local communities and actively encouraged people to report racially motivated crimes. Indeed, the police treated all crimes between whites and Asians as racially motivated, even when they were not reported as such. It borrowed Macpherson's open-ended and highly subjective definition of a racist incident as 'any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person'. As a result, the number of racial incidents recorded in Oldham for 1997-1998 was 238, almost twice as much as the next highest, 122 in Rochdale and over four times higher than in any other division in Greater Manchester. Oldham was also unique in that the majority of victims were in fact white, 116 out of 204. The local British National Party (BNP) was strongly vilified in the media for pointing to this figure as evidence of white victimisation by ethnic minorities, but it was the police who encouraged such skewed statistics in the first place. In light of this and other 'anti-racist' measures that reinforced the perception of hatred and tension between Asians and whites, it is possible to see why Oldham experienced an explosion of racial tension in the summer of 2001. See O'NEILL, B. (2001) Oldham: Unasked questions. *spiked.* 9th July 2001

35. This theory has been somewhat discredited in recent years, as today Muslim males are adequately represented in UK prisons at 9% - over 2.5 times more than their proportion of the total population. 'Why Muslims make Britain a better place' Commission for Racial Equality website. 16th November 2004. http://www.cre.gov.uk/Default.aspx.LocID-0hgnew03s.RefLocID-0hg00900c002.Lang-EN.htm (last accessed 22.01.07). This over-representation is partly accounted for by the population's relative youth and its concentration in deprived urban areas.

affirmed the status of religious leaders as representatives of the local population, often hiding the tensions between religious and secular factions beneath the surface.

Local state support, which has become increasingly organised around the perceived needs of those with distinct communal identities, has created a fierce competition for resources in some places. In many cases, well-organised and dynamic religious organisations have played the 'cultural identity card' better than some less well-resourced secular groups. The new status awarded to certain Muslim organisations by local and national government has arguably given more strident elements the confidence to challenge the dominance of older, secular traditions.[36]

> "During the 1980s and 1990s radical Muslim organisations began to cohere into a national voice and exert a more powerful presence than apolitical or localised Muslim groups"

The shift at local level from secular to religious partners is demonstrated in East London, where during the 1990s, funding declined for secular Bangladeshi community organisations but rose for religious organisations, such as the increasingly prominent East London Mosque.[37] Over the years, tensions between different religious and secular factions have arisen. For example, local Islamist groups have criticised longstanding local Bangladeshi New Year celebrations for being 'syncretic', because they include Hindu symbolism and encourage boys and girls to mix. Meanwhile, many secular activists have criticised the visits to the East London Mosque of Islamist politicians from the Jamaat-I-Islami party in Bangladesh, who allegedly committed crimes against humanity in the war of independence in 1971. The notion of a singular 'Muslim community' belies the internal tensions that exist in places such as these.

The 2001 summer riots in Oldham, Bradford and Burnley also suggest a growing politicisation of religion. The riots were largely discussed in terms of an old framework of racial tension and discrimination, but there is evidence to show that some of the aggression was characterised by Islamist sectarianism.[38] Prior to the riots, there were reports of vandalism and violent confrontations at local churches, graffiti including slogans of support for the Palestinian militant group, Hamas and Osama Bin Laden (this *before* 9/11), and harassment of other religious groups in the area.

At a national level, during the 1980s and 1990s radical Muslim organisations began to cohere into a national voice and exert a more powerful presence than apolitical or localised Muslim groups. In 1988, the UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs (UKACIA) was set up to campaign against the novel, *The Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie, which eventually led to a *fatwa* by the Ayatollah Khomeini "condemning to death" Rushdie. The issue drew together diverse Muslim groups who recognised the need to work together. The anti-Rushdie campaign was led primarily from Pakistan by disciples of the late Islamist ideologue Abul A'la Mawdudi, who founded the Jamaat-e-Islami party in 1941. The campaign combined grassroots mobilisation on the streets of the UK through demonstrations and petitions, with diplomatic pressure on the British Government through Saudi-linked networks. The carefully orchestrated book-burning on the streets of Bradford raised the profile of Islamism amongst younger Muslims, who were more literate than their parents and easily provoked into anger by an affront to Islam.[39] For the first time, anxiety emerged that some Muslims would refuse to obey British law, wedded as they were to a trans-national belief system.

36. HUSSEIN, D. (2006) Bangladeshis in East London: from secular politics to Islam. *Open Democracy.* 7th July 2006

37. EADE, J. & GARBIN, D. (2002) Changing Narratives of Violence, Struggle and Resistance: Bangladeshis and the Competition for Resources in the Global City. *Oxford Development Studies,* 30.

38. MCROY, A. (2006) *From Rushdie to 7/7,* London, The Social Affairs Unit. p.29-36.

39. For more detailed analysis of the Rushdie affair, see HIRO, D. (1992) *Black British, White British,* London, Paladin. p.182-193 KEPEL, G. (2004) *Jihad. The Trail of Political Islam,* London, I.B.Taurus & Co Ltd. P. p.186-190.

The discomfort about the loyalties of Muslims became even more pronounced during the first Gulf War, and later, the Palestinian intifadas in the early 1990s and later, in 2000. In 1992, the Muslim Parliament led by the late Kalim Siddiqui launched its own *Muslim Manifesto*, promoting *jihad* as a basic duty of any Muslim, regardless of their place of birth.

In the face of the growing number of Muslim groups competing for attention (and resources) the British Government helped to establish the single umbrella body, the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) in 1997. This followed a demand by the then Conservative Home Secretary, Michael Howard, for Muslims to develop a single representative body. The MCB represents 350 mosques around the country and its staff work on a voluntary basis, although it has received public money from time to time (for instance, the government awarded it £140,000 to help publicise new religious discrimination legislation).[40] The MCB has been an important influence in strengthening the political identity of Muslims in the UK, commenting openly on British foreign policy, religious discrimination and the problems facing Muslims. In 2001, its 'Electing to Listen' document was part of a move to encourage tactical voting amongst Muslims in the General Election. It highlighted issues such as Islamophobia (especially in the media), religious discrimination, and international concerns in Palestine, Chechyna and Kashmir.[41]

However, in recent times the aims and methods of the MCB leadership have been called into question, particularly since the London bombings. Some argue that the organisation does not adequately represent the diversity of cultural and religious beliefs of British Muslims, particularly the majority group of Sufi Muslims in the UK (which has since established its own representative organisation, the Sufi Muslim Council). The MCB has responded by stating it has only ever claimed to represent its affiliate organisations, but there is little doubt that the Government has tended to treat it as a proxy for mainstream Muslim opinion in general.

More pointedly, others have expressed concern at the 'extreme' opinions of some of the MCB leadership who are linked to politically radical organisations abroad, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Jamaat-I-Islami.[42] Whilst there is little serious suggestion that the MCB endorses the aims of organisations such as Al-Qaeda, its views on issues like homosexuality, arranged marriage, the causes of radicalisation of Muslims in the UK and the Holocaust Memorial Day have provoked controversy. The MCB's first appointed leader, Iqbal Sacranie was formerly the head of the UKACIA and once famously said of the novelist Salman Rushdie, "Death, perhaps is a bit too easy for him". This has created doubts about whether it should be considered a viable representative body for Muslims. Other groups, such as the Muslim Public Affairs Committee (MPAC) and the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), and its offshoot the British Muslim Initiative (BMI), are even more under suspicion of having extremist links and attitudes.

Political Islam in the UK has, of course, developed under the influence of Islamist groups operating from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Middle East. As the Muslim voice in Britain was beginning to develop political coherence, it was energised by the Shia-led Iranian revolution in 1979, and later *The Satanic Verses* affair. By the late 1990s, Muslim groups had built an effective national lobbying machine. The strength of Islamist groups was significantly bolstered by the flow of money from Saudi Arabia and Pakistan for new religious facilities, buildings, publishing and education resources. This shifted the balance from more traditional and apolitical Muslim organisations, towards more inter-

40. APPLETON, J. (2005) Why the Extremism Taskforce Will Fail. *Spiked* 21st July 2005

41. MCROY, A. (2006) *From Rushdie to 7/7,* London, The Social Affairs Unit.

42. BRIGHT, M. (2006) When Progressives Treat with Reactionaries. Policy Exchange, WARE, J. (2006) MCB in the dock. *Prospect.* December 2006

nationalist and politically radical groups with Wahabi ideologies, as mentioned previously. It has been noted by numerous commentators that London (or 'Londonistan'; a term originally coined by the French secret service) became a centre of refuge for Islamist groups in the 1990s, as various governments squeezed their operations out abroad. Three prominent Islamist clerics – Abu Qatada, Abu Hamza and Omar Bakri Muhammed, operated out of London until recently.

Since 2001 – Muslim *self-consciousness*

Most decisively, the terrorist attacks on the US in 2001 have given new significance to being a Muslim. Al-Qaeda's strike significantly raised the profile of both the organisation itself and its cause worldwide. On 9/11 violent *jihad* entered a new phase of spectacle and attention, and turned the eyes of younger Muslims towards the Middle East.

The attack on the twin towers increased concerns about whether Muslims can live at peace with the West – and *in* the West. A series of episodes in Europe have further ignited passions and exacerbated the feeling of division – the murder of Dutch film-maker Theo Van Gogh in Amsterdam in 2004 by a Dutch-Moroccan; the controversy over the Danish cartoons that caused deep offence to many European Muslims in spring 2006; the provocative remarks made by Pope Benedict XIV in September 2006 about Islam and violence; and, in Britain, the comments made by Jack Straw MP expressing his concern about the choice of Muslim women in his constituency to wear the veil. These incidents have all brought Muslims into the spotlight and provoked anxiety about their relationship to the West.

This increased attention has occurred at a time when the next generation of British Muslims is maturing and starting to consider questions of personal identity. Many are doing so in a context in which they feel they are seen as Muslims, and little else. This is emphasised by the way the media and politicians, as well as Muslim groups, talk about the 'Muslim community'.

"If I'm honest, the stuff in the news after 9/11 but especially 7/7 made me think about my community more in terms of the Islamic community. ***I started looking at things in a different way because people started looking at me, at us, in a different way.****"* (emphasis added), Male, Muslim, 22, Rochdale

Even less religious Muslims are conscious of belonging to a group:

"I didn't really feel like I belonged to any community apart from the London community, but as soon as the events like 9/11 and 7/7 threw the spotlight on Muslims, I thought 'oh yeah, I have a Muslim background, what's it all about?'" Female, Muslim, 22, London

The events of 2001 marked a major turning point in Muslim identity in another way. For the first time, non-Muslims echoed Muslim feeling about foreign policy issues. The grievance of Muslims was given wider legitimacy by sympathetic commentators in the media. In the weeks following 9/11, numerous commentators interpreted 9/11 as an outcome of legitimate Muslim anger. In the *Guardian* on 15th October 2001, the columnist, Gary Younge wrote:

"Three weeks ago it was considered a mixture of heresy, naivety and plain bad taste to raise the issue of American foreign policy; now it is widely accepted that without a just settlement in the Middle East, networks like Al-Qaeda will always be able to prey on disaffection in the Arab world".[43]

Although such commentators condemned the methods of the terrorists, they accepted that Al-Qaeda's attack was a response to

43. YOUNGE, G. (2001) We are all victims now. *The Guardian.* London. 15th October 2001

dispossession and suffering in the Middle East, particularly in Palestine. The rapid growth of the anti-war movement, spearheaded by the Stop the War coalition, was an alliance of left-wing groups, Islamist, and anti-globalisation factions.[44] They walked together on demonstrations, and, through the creation of the Respect party, fought targeted electoral seats. Radical Islam's narrative of the victimised *ummah* has drawn sustenance from broader public anger at US and UK foreign policy.

This brief history of Muslim identity shows that it has not been constant. It has developed out of a combination of factors, and in recent years, it has become markedly *self-conscious*. No doubt, one of the effects of the increased scrutiny of the 'Muslim community' is that the more we talk about it, the more likely Muslims perceive themselves to be part of it. Economists use the term 'informational cascade' to describe how people give answers based on what they think other people in their group believe. Muslims, who are undoubtedly diverse in their opinions, may well tend to give similar answers because they are influenced by this kind of group-think. When Muslims are asked questions about 'their' community, there may be a sense of not wanting to let the side down, and feelings of defensiveness. The Muslim identity, therefore, has, to some extent, become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Muslim organisations today – their concerns and aims

The emergence of the Muslim community as a political presence has taken place over two decades. However, up until the late 1980s, this presence was fragmented, localised and concerned with minor issues regarding accommodation for the practice of religion – such as facilities for halal slaughter, clothing for female schoolchildren, planning permission for mosques and funding for voluntary groups and services.

Since the 1990s, the Muslim voice has gradually become more politicised and unified, largely under the influence of proponents of radical Islam with links to groups abroad. This has moved the attention of activists away from purely local issues, to concerns that relate to Muslims as a community in the UK, and the worldwide Muslim community – the *ummah*. The shift towards the politics of recognition has shaped many of the demands made by Muslim groups since the 1990s. *The Muslim Manifesto – A Strategy for Survival* (1990) launched by the Muslim Parliament, argued for the recognition of Islam in the legal and constitutional structure of the UK, including a revision to the blasphemy law to include all religions.[45]

The theme of religious persecution and hatred of Muslims – Islamophobia – has been an important one for galvanising support from younger Muslims. Crucially, the issue of Islamophobia provided a route into the existing framework of race relations practice, with its growing interest in the protection of cultural identities and 'respect' for minority groups. It was actually a generic race relations body, the Runnymede Trust, rather than a Muslim lobby organisation, that first popularised the term 'Islamophobia' in 1997, in a major report on British Muslims.[46] After the publication of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, the Muslim Magazine *Q News*, asked "Where's the Muslim in Macpherson's Black and White Britain?'[47] Non-Muslim anti-racists, perhaps stung by such criticism, answered the call and incorporated Muslims into their work. Official anti-racism laid the foundations on which Muslim groups would build their own campaigns.

Following 9/11, Muslim representative organisations framed their concerns in terms of feelings of vulnerability and the perceived backlash against Muslims. The

44. MCROY, A. (2006) *From Rushdie to 7/7*, London, The Social Affairs Unit. p.41.

45. THE INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY (2005) *The British Muslim Community in 2005,* Wiltshire, The Institute for the Study of Islam and Christianity. p.50

46. RUNNYMEDE TRUST (1997) Islamaphobia: A Challenge for Us All. London, Runnymede Trust.

47. RUNNYMEDE TRUST (2000) *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, The Parekh Report,* London, Profile Books Ltd. p.62

Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) called for greater protection by authorities, claiming that:

"Muslims in the United Kingdom feel particularly vulnerable, insecure, alienated, threatened, intimidated, marginalized, discriminated and vilified since [the] 11 September tragedy".[48]

Today a range of Muslim-led organisations actively lobby about Islamophobia. These groups include the Muslim Council of Britain's Media Committee, the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC), the Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism (FAIR), MPAC, BMI and the Muslim Safety Forum (MSF).[49] Their campaigning efforts helped to secure new legislation in 2006, banning the "incitement to religious hatred".

Many of these Muslim lobby groups have actively campaigned for greater recognition of the Muslim community in the law and in public service provision, arguing that the Race Relations Act of 1976 does not protect religious communities, only racial ones. In 2001 the national census featured a question about religion for the first time, largely in response to lobbying. The Human Rights Act 1998 and European Union laws have also created a new space for legal discussion about the role and rights of Muslims in the UK. It remains to be seen how the Government's new Commission on Equality and Human Rights will progress further the agendas of Muslim lobby groups.

The Government has accepted the role of Muslim representative organisations with regards to welfare provision and possible changes to the law. In August 2006, representatives from the Union of Muslim Organisations in the UK and Ireland asked Ruth Kelly, the Secretary of State for Communities, for holidays to mark Muslim festivals and Islamic laws to cover family affairs which would apply only to Muslims. The Secretary General, Dr Syed Aziz Pasha, said she told him she would "look sympathetically at all the suggestions" and also agreed "it should be a partnership approach".[50]

It is important to recognise that British Muslim groups are far from uniform in outlook. Apart from the historic theological differences between Sunnis and Shias, Muslims espouse a range of political and religious views, often in contradiction to each other.

Some are avowedly Islamist and political (Hizb u-Tahrir, MPAC, Al Muhajiroun) whereas others are more culturally and religiously orientated (Tablighi Jamaat).[51] The largest organisations like the MCB and the MAB straddle an uneasy line between mainstream political engagement and the imperatives of Islamism. More recently, there has been a growth in secular Muslim organisations which seek to find points of connection with the non-Muslim majority, such as Progressive British Muslims, Muslims for Secular Democracy and the City Circle.

Despite claims about the 'Muslim community', Muslim organisations are deeply split over the appropriate way to pursue Muslim aims. Some Islamist organisations such as Hizb u-Tahrir and Al-Muhajiroun (a group that, despite being banned, mutates and resurfaces) denounce democratic politics and consider voting to be un-Islamic. Meanwhile, MPAC strongly criticises this rejectionism, and argues that younger British-born Muslims are neglecting their Islamic duty if they do not vote and harness the political system to Islamist ends. MPAC preach a uniquely British brand of radical Islam and have campaigned vociferously against MPs who they see as demonstrating a pro-Israeli bias. They actively supported the election of the Respect Party in East London in 2005.

Whatever their differences, these overtly political organisations tend to share a disdain for more mainstream groups like the

48. MUSLIM COUNCIL OF BRITAIN (2003) Memorandum from the Muslim Council of Britain (404) - Minutes of Evidence. *House of Lords - Religious Offences in England and Wales.* Parliamentary copyright., cited in THE INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY (2005) *The British Muslim Community in 2005,* Wiltshire, The Institute for the Study of Islam and Christianity. p 65.

49. MSF is an umbrella group comprising national and regional Islamic organisations including: MAB, IHRC, IFE, MCB London Affairs Committee, YMO UK, Muslim College, FAIR, Amal Trust, The London Central Mosque, London Muslim Centre, Muslim Parliament, FOSIS, ISB, Muslimaat UK, Avenues School, Somali Muslim Community, UKIM, MPAC, Stop Political Terror, Muslim Directory, Ershad Centre, BanglaMedia, Iqra Trust, Association of Muslim Police, Al-Khoei Foundation, UMO, Muslim Welfare House, Women's Relief.

50. BROWN, C. (2006) Let us adopt Islamic family law to curb extremists, Muslims tell Kelly. *The Independent.* 15th August 2006

51. The largest Muslim group in the UK, Tablighi Jamaat, claims to be a purely apolitical movement which preaches strict religious practice, although the leader of the London bombers, Mohammed Sidique Khan is reputed to have attended its lectures.

MCB. For more radical groups, the MCB is associated with the Government and therefore fails to address the demands of younger Muslims who are attracted to Islamism precisely because it fiercely opposes government policy. After the London bombings, over forty Islamic scholars and leaders organised by the MCB produced a statement calling the attacks 'absolutely un-Islamic', and representatives from the 500 strong Muslim Forum stood outside Parliament and issued a *fatwa* in response to the bombs saying that suicide bombs were 'vehemently prohibited'. It is uncertain how seriously this proclamation would have been taken by Islamist hell-bent on committing terrorist acts.

The MCB has also been criticised by some younger Muslim organisations for being out of touch with their generation. They would prefer to develop a British Islam which is more 'relevant' and they see the MCB as a barrier to this. Secular Muslim groups have complained about the failure of the MCB to discuss the modernisation of Islam and religious practice.

The meaning of modernisation is itself confusing, and for some, it can mean a return to Qu'ranic injunctions rather than a relaxing of rules. For instance, MPAC has run a campaign to encourage mosques to open their doors to women – something that has traditionally been denied on both religious grounds (regarding the strict segregation of men and women during prayer times) but also practical grounds because of the limited space available in most mosques in the UK. MPAC's campaign has been presented in terms of 'Women's Power', and borrows heavily from the language of contemporary feminism, making it highly appealing to commentators who long for a reformed Islam. Yet, the 'women's power' promoted by MPAC is also highly religious. MPAC has supported women who wear the full veil (*niqab*) and the headscarf (*hijab*), saying that "they should not be proscribed but treated with greater dignity and respect than most"[52]. The 'women's power' it promotes is about protecting women's rights only insofar as they are justified in terms of the Qu'ran.

> "Young British Muslims may be hostile to an older generation's way of doing things, but there is no consensus on what a 'British Islam' should look like"

Finally, a feature of some Muslim organisations is the association with anti-Semitic, homophobic, anti-British and anti-Western ideas. The literature and websites of groups like Al-Mujahiroun are vitriolic in their disdain for non-Muslims. Even more apparently mainstream groups such as MPAC have been accused of stoking up hatred of Jews, gays and non-Muslims. MPAC denies these accusations strenuously, but its reputation was severely damaged when it was revealed by *The Observer* newspaper in November 2006 that one of MPAC's founders, Asghar Bukhari sent a donation of sixty pounds in 2000 to the historian David Irving, well known as a Holocaust-denier. The majority of Muslims do not subscribe to such views and most Muslim lobby groups are openly condemnatory of them, but this kind of sentiment seems to be on the rise.

The considerable range of organisations presented here suggests that British Muslims are not responding to the current climate in a uniform way. Young British Muslims may be hostile to an older generation's way of doing things, but there is no consensus on what a 'British Islam' should look like. While some organisations reject the 'Western' mode of democracy and political participation, others push for greater involvement and even celebration of 'Western' ideas. Some Muslim groups wish to enjoy the cultural or 'folk' aspects of their religious upbringing and keep

52. See MPAC website, 'Jack Straw's Veil of Deceit', 6th October 2006 http://www.mpacuk.org/content/view/2796/39/ (last accessed 20.01.07)

them as a valued part of their heritage, while others wish to 'purify' Islam of such traditions. British Islam might be changing, but how remains to be seen.

Crisis of identity

As outlined above, the growth of Islamism in the UK over the past two decades has been encouraged by a series of political events and, indirectly, by official policies. However, it also reflects a deeper yearning amongst the younger generation of Muslims growing up in Britain. Tanveer Ahmed, an Australian Muslim psychiatrist, has written about the way in which young Muslims growing up in the West may feel caught between two different cultural systems with competing values. He argues that the turn towards a religious identity is partly a response to a sense of cultural alienation in the West. This might sometimes be fuelled by experience of racism, or by a sense of incompatibility with the cultural mainstream. According to this thesis, the Muslim is a 'marginal man' who feels rejected by, and alienated from, one or both parents, wider family or school. This confusion of identity may then lead to higher levels of deviance, excessive anxiety and psychiatric instability. Ahmed writes, "In lay terms, they cannot carry their inconsistent selves through to adulthood…This often involves a dramatic shift to either side of the cultural divide, perhaps committing to an arranged marriage or seeking refuge in deep religiosity. Or it can occur in the opposite behaviour, such as eloping with a partner against their parents' wishes."[53]

It seems embracing religion can help some Muslims overcome this sense of alienation from the mainstream, and give them a sense of belonging, which neither Britain nor their parental homeland provides:

"The people who I spend time with at the mosque and the people who have influenced me – we go through the same thing… they understand what it's like for me to grow up here without any real sense of belonging. The imams of my parent's generation don't understand, our parents generation belonged to Pakistan, or India or whatever, that was their identity." Male, Muslim, 20, Birmingham

Certainly, young Muslims can feel torn between the culturally strict expectations of the home, and the more permissive, morally relaxed environment of school and friendship groups. This is an experience known to many new immigrant groups. But it should be remembered that the appeal of Islamism is not limited to young Muslims who have been brought up in culturally strict homes. Some react against their parents' attempt to 'fit in' to British society and many converts from a range of backgrounds have been lured by the strict ideology. A range of personal factors may contribute to their interest in Islamism, but what seems to be a common factor is the attraction of a morally absolute vision of the world and the sense of belonging to a community.

In this sense, the appeal of Islamism as a kind of identity may also reflect a wider cultural shift within society. As older forms of political and national identity come under attack or have diminished, people search for new forms of meaning and belonging. This growing inclination to retreat into exclusive cultural or religious identities is certainly not confined to Muslims, and we should consider the extent to which younger people more generally feel a sense of detachment from society as a whole.

"I don't feel particularly anything – not British, European or English." Female, non-religious, 23, London

Some commentators have observed a small growth in Sikh and Hindu youth organisations which suggests a tendency towards

53. AHMED, T. (2005) The Muslim 'Marginal Man'. *Policy,* Vol 21.

exclusive identification amongst non-Muslim minority communities too.[54] Other people are turning to regional or local identities, away from the nation state. In a 1979 poll in Scotland, in answer to the question, "What nationality best describes you?" 56 per cent of people said 'Scottish' and 38% said 'British'. In 2003, in answer to the same question, 73% said Scottish and 20% said British.[55] The same trend can be discerned in Wales. In 2004, 60% of people described themselves as Welsh only and this was higher for younger respondents.[56]

It is not only people in Scotland and Wales who are reverting to ancient identities. In the last 15 years, Englishness has gone from being a rather quaint and gentle concept, embodied by cultural totems such as parish churches, boat races and Morris dancers, to a much more assertive, populist identity. Football has been the most high profile manifestation of this change but not the cause. Although none of these identities – English, Scottish, Welsh – are racially exclusive they are inevitably more ethnically based and nativist, closer in character to national identities in many other parts of Europe. The inclusiveness of British identity, with its (UK wide) multinational and Commonwealth roots, is unusual.

Similarly, the rise in religiosity amongst younger Muslims and the search for meaning it represents reflects a growing trend in the wider population. Spirituality is on the rise in Britain. 76% of people admit to having a spiritual experience (such as a 'strong sense of God's presence' or an answered prayer), which is up 59% in just ten years and 110% in 25 years. According to the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance, there has been a remarkable 21% rise in students taking religious studies at 'A' level between 2000 and 2004, and a 67% rise in students taking Philosophy 'A' level. Whilst aspects of established religion are declining (for instance, on a typical Sunday, church attendance fell from just over 4.7 million in 1980 to an estimated 3.3 million in 2005), more personalised forms of religiosity and spirituality seem to be on the rise.[57] The Chaplain for Evangelism at Coventry Cathedral, Yvonne Richmond writes:

"Whether through gods or gurus, mediums or mysticism, alternative therapists or spiritual guides, more and more people are becoming 'spiritual seekers', such that prayer rooms or sacred spaces are springing up at airports and service stations, industrial and commercial chaplains are in demand and even the media, which has for decades been unrelentingly hostile to faith, is picking up on spirituality and speaking favourably of it".[58]

Young Muslims may be becoming more religious but if they feel increasingly detached from Britain, it is not primarily because their religion is pulling them away but because there is considerable confusion in wider society about what belonging to Britain actually means. Recent attempts by the government to introduce citizenship tests and education have become mired in controversy about the meaning of Britishness itself and what it ought to stand for.

For many observers, one of the principal factors in undermining British identity has been the rise of the politics of multiculturalism. Intellectual fashion has dictated that right-minded people should feel shame and guilt about Britain's imperial past and embarrassment about overt manifestations of national pride. In recent years, there have been many incidents that reveal the degree of discomfort the authorities feel about many aspects of 'Britishness'.

At Aberdeen University, army cadets were asked by the Officer Training Corps (OTC) to remove their uniforms when marching past a mosque after abuse was shouted at one cadet from a car. This sent two apparently officially sanctioned messages to Muslims; first, British Muslims

54. 'The Sikhs are at it too', Sunny Hundal, *Pickled Politics*, 27th May 2006 http://www.pickledpolitics.com/archives/552 (last accessed 13.01.07)

55. FRY, M. (2006) Scotland Alone. *Prospect.* December 2006

56. OFFICE FOR NATIONAL STATISTICS (2002) Annual Local Area Labour Force Survey 2001/2002.

57. For further details and sources, see the Tomorrow's Project web-based report published April 10th, 2006 http://www.tomorrowproject.net/pub/1__GLIMPSES/Individuals__identity_and_values/-187.html (last accessed 21.01.07)

58. RICHMOND, Y. (2005) A Spiritual Snapshot. IN AL, S. C. E. (Ed.) *Evangelism in a Spiritual Age.* London, Churchhouse Publishing. p 8

may legitimately object to being exposed to the uniforms of their country's armed forces; second, that this objection will take precedence over the desire of cadets to wear their uniforms or the wishes of the majority to see them. A leading community figure and a worshipper at the mosque, Habib Malik said, "I am very surprised the OTC has done this…the Moslem community respects soldiers and thinks the Army is doing a wonderful job."[59]

When the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) released details of the new history curriculum to be taught in secondary schools it was revealed that prominence was to be given to one of the darkest incidents in the history of the British Empire, the Amritsar Massacre of 1919, regarded even by critics of the Empire as atypical.

The Chief Executive of the QCA, Ken Boston, did not seek to justify the inclusion on historical grounds: "Given the mix of nationalities in England, it is important to foster understanding through learning", he said.[60] History teaching that starts from the assumption that pupils have no common nationality is unlikely to foster any shared sense of British identity.

British identity has been undermined for political reasons but other institutions that provided previous generations of Muslims with a sense of collective identity have declined through more natural causes. Political parties and trades unions have hemorrhaged members over the last decade. The anti-racism movement that a previous generation of young Asians was involved in has been largely co-opted into official race relations bodies. Older ways of engaging collectively have declined and in such a vacuum, a politicised religious identity has emerged.

59. 'No uniforms warned army cadets' *Aberdeen News*. 16th December 2006. http://www.thebestof.co.uk/aberdeen/news/27046 (last accessed 21.01.07)

60. See the QCA website, http://www.qca.org.uk/2586_17908.html (last accessed 20.01.07)

Part 2

3

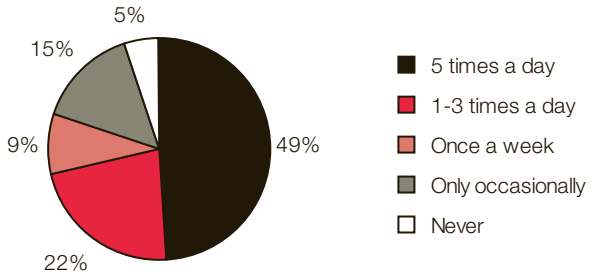
Identification and belonging

In September 2005, the Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, Trevor Phillips, warned that Britain was in danger of "sleepwalking into segregation". His statement encouraged a long period of reflection in the media about the impact of multiculturalism and whether it had made Britain a more divided society. In October 2006, Jack Straw MP wrote in his local Lancashire newspaper that he was worried that an increasing number of Muslim women in his constituency were choosing to wear the *niqab* (full veil) as a "visible statement of separation and difference".[61] His comments provoked heated debate, and reflected an anxiety amongst some people that Muslims are consciously choosing to live apart from non-Muslims. Others, however, have argued that fears about segregation are exaggerated, and that Muslims are integrating well into the mainstream. The reality is that both sides, to some extent, are correct. The Muslim identity in the UK is more contradictory and complex than it first appears.

First, it is clear that the majority of Muslims strongly identify their religion as important to them. Our research showed that nearly half (49%) pray five times a day, whilst 22% pray at least 1-3 times a day (Fig 1). This figure did not vary significantly across age groups, socio-economic class or region.

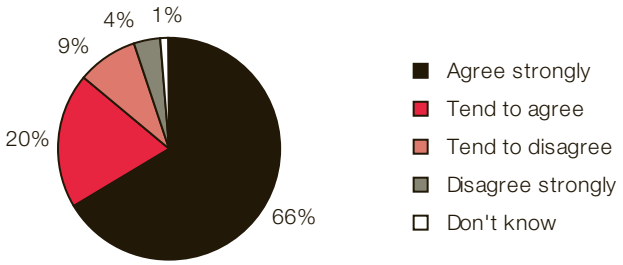
86% of respondents also believed that their religion was the most important thing in their life (Fig 2). When asked the same question, only 11% of the wider British population felt the same.

Figure 1: How often do you pray?*



* Percentages in figures throughout this report may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding

Figure 2; "My religion is the most important thing in my life"



The importance of religion marks Muslims out from the wider population, but their response is comparable to other religious or ethnic minority groups. According to a National Office for Statistics (NOS) report about religion in the UK, compiled in February 2006, more than half of Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Hindu adults living in England and Wales in 2001 said that their religion was important to their self-identity. The same NOS report pointed out that most Muslims think of themselves as British. 93% of Muslims born in the UK described them-

61. STRAW, J. (2006) I want to unveil my views on an important issue. *Lancashire Telegraph*. 5th October 2006. http://www.lancashiretelegraph.co.uk/blog/index.var.488.0.i_want_to_unveil_my_views_on_an_important_issue.php (last accessed 19.01.07)

selves as British, English, Scottish or Welsh, compared to 94% of Buddhists, 90% of Sikhs, and 91% of Hindus.[62]

In terms of social and political attitudes, British Muslim opinion is also often in line with wider opinion. On the controversial subject of integration into British society, some surveys show that Muslims are more demanding of immigrant groups to integrate than other Britons. In a MORI survey conducted in August 2005, 90% of Muslims felt immigrants should be made to learn English (compared to 82% of the main public). 76% of Muslims said immigrants should be made to pledge their primary loyalty to Britain, compared to 73% of the main public. 65% of Muslims believed that imams should be made to preach in English – a much higher figure than 39% of the main public. 95% (compared to 96% nationally) said immigrants should accept the rights of women as equal citizens.[63]

62. 'Country of birth and national identity', National Office of Statistics: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=1383 (last accessed 20.01.07)

63. MORI (2005b) Multiculturalism poll for BBC.

64. Certainly some migrant groups are living in concentrated areas, for instance, the Jewish population (52% live in North London) but these are not seen as a threat: THE ECONOMIST (2005) One man's ghetto. *The Economist.* 24th September 2005

65. GFK (2006) Attitudes to Living in Britain - A Survey of Muslim Opinion, A Survey for Channel 4 Dispatches. p.8

Figure 3: "I feel more in common with Muslims in other countries than I do with non-Muslims in Britain"

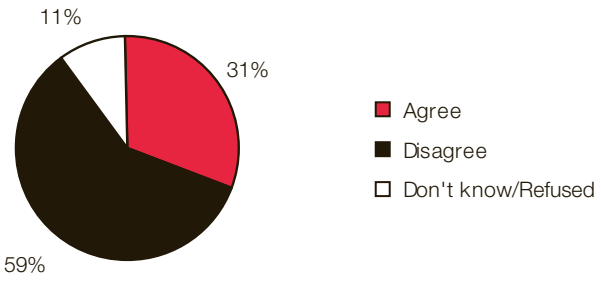
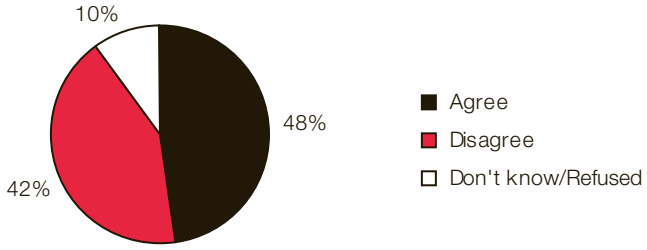


Figure 4: "Younger people living in my area are more religious today than ten years ago"



Fears about geographical segregation are also disputed. As one article in *The Economist* explained, "The commonly used index of segregation, which measures the number of people who would have to move in order to spread themselves evenly over a city, shows that every large ethnic minority group became less segregated between 1991 and 2001….Far from cowering in their inner-city enclaves, black and Asian Britons are racing to the suburbs'.[64] Surveys show that the vast majority of Muslims do *not* wish to live apart from non-Muslims. According to a survey conducted for the Channel 4 television programme, *Dispatches* in 2006, 94% of Muslim respondents did not believe that Muslims should keep apart from non-Muslims.

Yet, at the same time, the politics of multiculturalism have encouraged a greater consciousness of difference amongst Muslims so that they increasingly think of themselves at odds with wider society. They are much more conscious of their identity, which differentiates them from others. Younger Muslims are far more likely to identify with the *ummah* than their parents, who are more attached to their ethnic or cultural identities. The Dispatches survey in 2006 found that when asked whether Britain was "My country or their country", 55% of those Muslims aged 45+ said "my country", compared to 44% of 18-24 year olds.[65]

Likewise, although the majority of respondents disagreed with the statement, "Younger people living in my area are more religious today than ten years ago", older respondents were much more likely to agree (56% of 55+ years olds agreed compared to 38% of 16-24 year olds (Fig 4)).

Whilst the MORI poll conducted in August 2005, cited earlier, showed Muslim opinion to be in line with non-Muslim opinion on most things, there were major divisions regarding Muslim-specific issues. The most divisive issue was clothing for Muslim girls in schools. A higher propor-

tion of Muslims did not think schools have the right to force Muslim girls to remove their headscarf (17% compared to 35% national response).[66]

There has been much soul-searching in recent months over whether British Muslims feel 'British' and have an emotional connection to the nation beyond a formal identity. There is no single answer for this diverse group. Some feel extremely attached to Britain, others feel more attached to their religious identity. Many feel comfortable with being both British and Muslim and do not feel there is a conflict between the two. This finding has been shown in other studies.[67]

"I do actually feel strongly attached to being a Muslim – culturally though, in that it does define part of my identity – and British. Islam gives me a sense of belonging but I do see myself very much as British – England is my home." Female, Muslim, 22, Manchester

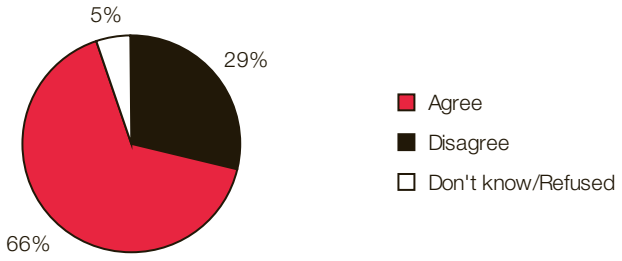
"British. I don't feel attached to the 'Muslim community' at all, if such a thing exists. I think that the experiences of Muslims are so varied that you can't group them into a community. Hmm, about the ummah…I don't relate in that way, because I'm not religious enough". Female, Muslim, 21, London

"Muslim. I belong to that community and that should be the only community there is". Female, Muslim, 23, London

The majority of Muslims feel they have as much in common with non-Muslims as with Muslims (Fig 5).

However, this is less likely for younger respondents. 62% of 16-24 year olds agreed with the statement, compared to 71% of 55+ year olds. 33% of 16-24 year olds disagreed compared to 20% of 55+ year olds. Thus, while religion is important to the Muslim population, there is also a difference between generations. Younger Muslims are more likely to identify and feel a greater connection with their religious community.

Figure 5: "I feel that I have as much in common with non-Muslims as I do with Muslims"



Search for meaning

Our conversations with younger Muslims suggested they are also more interested in studying their religion than their parents are, having spent more time reading the Qu'ran and attending lectures. Some of the respondents we talked to explained that their parents had arrived in Britain as poor migrants and probably had had less time to reflect on spiritual issues. Some actually mentioned that their parents disapproved of their increased religiosity, preferring their children to concentrate on educational achievement and getting a good job. One respondent from Rochdale said typically:

"If you were to ask all the teenagers or people my age what their parents will concentrate on, they are probably asking them to study more than to go towards religion or start praying." Male, Muslim, 19, Rochdale

The discord between parents and children shows that the rise in religiosity is not really about parental, or even community pressure, but arises spontaneously amongst many in the younger generation. There is a desire to belong to a community and identify with others.

What propels this turn to religion? It would seem that many younger Muslims

66. MORI (2005b) Multiculturalism poll for BBC..

67. ETHNOS (2005) Citizenship and Belonging: What is Britishness? London, Commission for Racial Equality, FOSIS (2005) The voice of Muslim students. A report into the attitudes and perceptions of Muslim students following the July 7th London attacks. Federation of Student Islamic Societies.

take an interest in Islam during their teenage years, as they are maturing and beginning to reflect about the meaning of life. They have 'returned' to religion in a search for answers. Although they may have observed religious practices when they were younger, many admit that this was simply to follow their parents' wishes and was an inherited aspect of their cultural upbringing. It was only on their own initiative, when they had grown older, that they wanted to properly understand the meaning of the various rituals and traditions. The turn to religion is sometimes about inquisitiveness and a desire to think critically, not just to 'follow the crowd':

"I sort of came to a cross section in my life where you have to question why you are here. Just being here and then you die can't possibly be it, there has to be a purpose to your life. And I felt that society wasn't providing that, the answer. And the answer that it was giving wasn't very good, you know, 'don't worry about it we'll deal with it later, you're young do what you want.'" Male, Muslim, 22, London

Many young Muslims who have become interested in Islam feel that it offers answers to existential questions – answers that are not offered elsewhere. For these youngsters, the attraction of religion is that it satisfies their quest for meaning.

Their interest in religion, however, does not always lead them to the mosque or to the traditional community elders who usually hold authority. Many of these are regarded as moribund, particularly by younger, more radical Muslims. As Dr Ghayasuddin Siddiqui, the head of the Muslim Parliament told a conference of 3,000 Muslims in Birmingham in 2005, "most mosques are not equipped to deal with young people…Our mosques are largely tribal and controlled by old men on the dole with no understanding of the changing world around them".[68]

Many of the younger Muslims we spoke to regard their local mosques as irrelevant. The imams often do not speak English, rarely encourage any critical discussion about aspects of the Qu'ran, and tend to be more concerned with local social and community problems, rather than political or spiritual issues. In the case of violent Islamists, such as the London bombers, we know that their radicalisation often takes place in private spaces, and their religious interest can actually encourage a move away from traditional community ties and social networks. Radicalised Muslims might shun their local community mosque in favour of attending lectures in more radical mosques.[69] They may even meet in smaller 'clique' structures, such as university organisations or private meeting places like gymnasiums, or even the internet.

Another major difference between generations is the desire of younger Muslims to return to a 'purer' Islam, which does not rely on received cultural traditions inherited over the generations. This has led to a rejection of certain culturally or ethnically distinct aspects of their upbringing. Some respondents we spoke to complained that Islam had become 'Pakistanised' and that they wanted to identify with something unadulterated, and not tied to the received ideas of their parents.

"I don't really accept culture being much of a factor in Islamic ethics and sometimes if you are too cultural it takes you away from Islam." Male, Muslim, 22, Manchester

It is tempting to interpret the desire of some younger Muslims to return to a purer version of Islam as 'old-fashioned' or out of date. However, the injunction to follow Qu'ranic teachings can sometimes appear confusingly reformist too. Take for instance, the role of gender in Islam. One respondent explained that his mother, who was brought up in Pakistan, had a much more relaxed view about male-female

68. "Siddiqui tells Muslim conference: Confront extremism" Press Release 2005, Muslim Parliament website, http://www.muslimparliament.org.uk/confrontextremism.htm (last accessed 21.01.07)

69 According to Muslim residents in his neighbourhood, the ringleader of the London bombers, Mohammed Sidique Khan, had never been seen in his local Daulim mosque in Dewsbury. JENKINS, R., KENNEDY, D., LISTER, D. & MIDGLEY, C. (2005) The London Bombers. *The Times.* 15th July 2005. He was said to have been a regular visitor to the larger Tablighi Jamaat mosque in Dewsbury. TAHER, A. (2006) Veil teacher was obeying a fatwa. *The Daily Telegraph.* 29th October 2006.

interaction at social events, and that she preferred women not to wear the *hijab*. He took a more strict view:

"…my mother has a very secular understanding of Islam in the sense that she's all for praying and fasting and reading the Qu'ran, and all the personal worships, but when it comes to public life like weddings she's not keen on having segregated weddings, she would prefer the mixed weddings. Or in public life in terms of women covering she's not too keen on that. I think part of that is because the Pakistani version, she's understood that to be Islam. That's the extent to which she follows Islam. Personally I think that weddings should be segregated and that women should wear hijab." Male, Muslim, 23, Rochdale

However, at the same time, he disagreed with his mother about whether women ought to work.

"But what I understand is according to Islam and the texts…even in terms of other areas, for example when it comes to the marriage relationship, I wouldn't expect a wife to always have to cook and clean, whereas maybe my mother does because that's what they're used to in Pakistan – maybe that's what they see as the role of the woman – where I see it as if a woman wants to work, she can work."

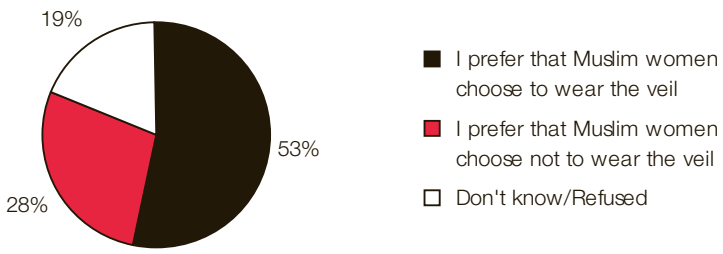
Therefore, the rejection of old cultural traditions and regulations means that the new interpretation of Islam can appear to be both in keeping with modern secular values, and yet also opposed to them. Likewise, many of the respondents we spoke to defended the *hijab* as a Qu'ranic injunction for women to wear, for the sake of modesty. Yet, their explanations were very often framed by the belief that "it's the woman's choice". What can sometimes appear to be a feminist interpretation of Islam is what many young people believe to be a purer interpretation of their religion. Clearly, many younger women wearing the *hijab* or *niqab* are not being forced by their families, but do so out of personal choice.

So, in summary, the "return to Islam" has led to a rejection of certain cultural traditions and habits. This can appear, on the one hand, as a more modern and open interpretation of religion. On the other hand, the cutting loose from community or cultural traditions also means younger Muslims take a more strict or puritanical approach to religious practice which pits them against the culture of the mainstream of British life.

A visible illustration of this trend is clothing. 74% of Britain's Muslim population is of south Asian origin, but many commentators have observed how the younger generation seems to be more 'Arabised', meaning that they are adopting the religious habits, clothing and customs of Middle Eastern culture. The most striking expression of this shift is the growing prominence of Arab clothing for girls, such as the *jilbab* (a full-length gown) or the *niqab* (full veil). Although only a minority choose to wear these items, they are noticeably on the increase in Britain's towns and cities.

In our survey, respondents were asked to choose between one of two statements relating to the issue of Muslim women wearing the veil (Fig 6).

Figure 6: Wearing the veil



Younger respondents expressed a much greater preference for Muslim women to choose the veil; 74% of 16-24 year olds chose this statement, compared to only

28% of 55+ year olds. There was no significant difference between men and women on this issue. The response to this question is very surprising, considering how few women actually do choose to wear the veil. One possible explanation for the gap may be that respondents are making a political statement of support, rather than expressing a genuine desire to see women wear the veil. Alternatively, some respondents may have taken the word 'veil' to refer to the headscarf more generally, which is far more commonly worn. Either way, it seems that younger Muslims consider religious clothing to be more important than older Muslims.

This suggests that the interest in religion is not simply about 'keeping one's culture' and may, in some instances, imply a partial repudiation of inherited cultural norms. The turn to religion is not shaped solely by an individual's cultural upbringing. Instead, it seems in part to be a more personal search for meaning and identity. It is a quest to make sense of the world and find values by which to live.

Hijab and the assertion of identity

Another aspect of Muslim religiosity is the way in which it has become about making a visible statement of belonging to a group. In many respects, it is about forging a political identity; to say "this is who I am, these are my values, and this is the group I identify with". The issue of the *hijab* is an important illustration of this point, as it seems to be more about making a political statement than preserving a cultural tradition.

Muslim women who arrived in the early waves of immigration from Pakistan or Bangladesh did not typically wear the type of headscarf that is currently fashionable in the UK. Some wore no head covering, others wore the '*dupatta*' which is a lighter, often colourful cloth, used to cover the head while praying in the mosque or elsewhere. Yet since the early 2000s, many more Muslim girls have begun to wear the headscarf. The reason is rarely family pressure, though this may be a factor in some cases. It might be a mixture of other reasons, perhaps a newfound interest in religion, or a way of coping with the slowly changing feelings of womanhood and the anxiety of being an object of interest to men. But considering how modish the headscarf has become the most influential factor is probably peer behaviour or pressure and a sense that the headscarf marks out one's identity as a Muslim. This is a statement of difference, perhaps more than a desire to be religious. To view it as an old cultural tradition, which some observers have tended to do, is to miss a fundamental point – in some families the headscarf is novel and can even be counter-cultural. Some respondents we spoke to explained that their parents did not want them to wear it as they worried it might bring them unwanted attention.

The choice of the *hijab* is therefore not a straightforward sign of cultural identity – a legacy of one's heritage – but is often a politicised identity, which is designed to deliberately make a statement of belonging and difference. It is a public expression of private belief that expects recognition. One of the reasons some Muslim women choose to wear the *hijab* is that it connects them to the *ummah*. It is not simply about modesty, nor a sign of vulnerability and oppression, but about projecting one's image quite confidently in public.

"I have a better understanding of Islam now, just growing up. The 7/7 and 9/11 events did make me think more about my identity, and although it didn't change the strength of my faith, I've always been a strong believer, it made me want to assert my alliance…Now I wear the headscarf to say, 'yes I am a Muslim and it is an important part of my identity and it shouldn't be threatening to you…'" Female, Muslim, 21, Birmingham

A key factor in wearing the *hijab* is undoubtedly the effect it will have on oth-

ers. As the academic, Andrew Calcutt, observes wryly about the young Muslim women in his home of East London:

"There is knowingness, too: 'I know you will find it shocking that I want to be identified by covering my face (or part of it), the bodily signature of individuality'. And of course, there is the sense of community which the wearer achieves by positioning herself away from the majority and therefore in proximity to a small number of fellow-fashionistas, and by connecting to an apparently ancient tradition of true believers".[70]

Put more bluntly, the reverence of policy-makers towards the *hijab* as 'religious' tends to overlook the way in which is has become an exotic brand identity for many teenage girls who want to mark themselves out from the crowd. The shock factor of certain religious clothing and the way it draws attention is more akin to vanity than piety. It might be more appropriate to see the *hijab* as part of that long-established, counter-cultural tradition of bright mohicans and nose studs, rather than traditional religious observance.

Although adolescents have always experimented with their appearance, sometimes in a manner that verges on the narcissistic, the *hijab* has also acquired political appeal because of the confused way that the authorities have responded to it. Recent high profile court cases have encouraged young Muslims to believe that their choices should be respected and affirmed by others, *no matter what*. Because the act of wearing the *hijab* is now highly politicised, it has become a deeply divisive issue. Schools today have become battlegrounds for identity politics.

In 2006, seventeen-year old Shabina Begum won her legal case against Denbigh High School in Luton in the Court of Appeal, over its refusal to allow her to wear the *jilbab* (full length Islamic robe) in school. Her barrister, Cherie Blair, presented it as a fight for human rights, although Begum was probably one of only a handful of girls in the country who wanted to wear such untypical clothing and she could have very easily gone to a different school which would have allowed her to wear it. Begum's goal, it seems, was not simply to be able to wear the *jilbab* – she could have done this without recourse to the law – but to highlight perceived discrimination. For her, the school's decision was a sign of intolerance of her identity, despite the fact that 79% of the students were Muslim, the headteacher was also Muslim, and that many Muslim scholars do not consider such apparel to be mandatory. The school's governing body had previously consulted local religious groups and had adopted the *shalwar kameez*, a garment worn by women of different faiths on the Indian sub-continent.

The case attracted much attention and some have pointed out the intimate involvement of the schoolgirl's older brother, who was linked to Hizb u-Tahrir. In 2006, the school appealed the decision in the House of Lords and was successful, but the overall effect of the case reaching court was that it implied that there was some legal and political legitimacy to Begum's demand. Begum's claim was that her religious identity was an inalienable part of her, and she argued – with some limited success – that she had been treated unfairly because this had not been respected.

Because of the recurrent demand for 'respect', anyone who publicly criticises such clothing runs the risk of being labelled an Islamophobe or even a racist. Going back to Jack Straw's comments about the *niqab*, these were seized upon as an example of intolerance and "stoking up fears". In fact, Straw's comments did not use lazy stereotypes, and he was the first to admit that the *niqab* was worn by articulate, career-minded, educated British Muslim women. His argument was more profound than the usual feminist criticism of the veil, and it was certainly not a xenophobic rant about foreigners. He made the

70. CALCUTT, A. (2006) Hijab in the hood: Religion, Pop Culture and Public Policy. *Rising East.* May 2006

honest point that some Muslim women are choosing to deliberately mark themselves off from the mainstream, and he felt this could be alienating.[71]

As a free society, we should not ban the wearing of the *niqab*, but nor should we feel we have to be neutral about it for the sake of a quiet life. It would be wrong (not to mention highly impractical) to ban religious clothing and restrain people's freedom to practice their religion as they please, but we should also be willing to interrogate the motives and rationale of such choices, and feel able to challenge people who defend it. When some politicians come over all sensitive about the *niqab*, it is because they believe the *niqab* is about 'keeping tradition' or respecting a religious community, and therefore cannot be questioned. As long as we refrain from questioning these choices, court cases like Shabina Begum's offer a route to narcissistic self-aggrandisement and go unchecked.

71. Ironically, as Labour spokesman on Education in 1989, Jack Straw was one of the few MPs in Parliament to argue for the same rights and privileges for Muslim schools as Catholic schools on the grounds that controversy about them usually stemmed from ignorance and racist stereotypes about women in Islam. HIRO, D. (1992) *Black British, White British,* London, Paladin. p.190. Indeed, Straw is widely acknowledged as one of the main proponents of the multicultural approach; to give recognition and respect to different cultures in the public space.

4

Cultural attitudes

So far we have argued that there is a growing trend amongst younger British Muslims to identify with their religious community. Many show a greater interest in their religion and choose to assert their religious identity in public. Although this trend is by no means uniform (and our research suggests that many other young Muslims feel less attached to their religion than their parents generation), there is certainly an overall growth in religiosity.

This interest in religion has led to a shift in attitudes regarding morality and personal behaviour. Although usually one expects younger people to be more socially liberal than the older generation, for British Muslims, the opposite seems to be the case. Younger Muslims tend to hold more culturally conservative views regarding issues like sexuality, gambling and alcohol. Religion clearly plays a more important role in their life and shapes their choices. Again, this is by no means uniform, and our research suggests that some younger Muslims feel more relaxed about adhering to religious rules than their parents and other peers.

The perceived lack of values

A major factor in the appeal of Islamism today is the way it seems to express young people's ambivalent feelings towards modernity, especially in the West. Bassam Tibi, a renowned Muslim scholar who has written widely about international relations in the Islamic world, argues that contemporary Islamism does not reject modernity outright, and is itself attracted to the use of modern science and technology (as evidenced by many Islamist groups' sophisticated use of the internet and satellite television). However, he explains that contemporary Islamism is ill at ease with the cultural consequences of modernity and that Islamists seek instead to "Islamicise modernity" or achieve "semi-modernity" – adopting the technological and material benefits of modern life, yet at the same time, keeping the cultural and social framework of pre-modern Islamic culture.[72]

> "The moral disdain for the West is a widely acknowledged factor in Islamist thinking"

The moral disdain for the West is a widely acknowledged factor in Islamist thinking. It is well illustrated in the writings of the father of modern Islamism, Sayyid Qutb, the Egyptian scholar and chief ideologue of the Muslim Brotherhood who was executed in Egypt in 1966. Qutb famously visited America in the 1950s and was impressed with the cultural sophistication and material prosperity he saw. However, his writings reveal disgust at many features of post-war America; the sexually libertine atmosphere, the dominance of material consumerism and, to a lesser extent, the experience of racial segregation. In reaction to this secular hedonism and the percieved damage it would do the Islamic world, he argued for the need to re-

72. TIBI, B. (2005) *Islam Between Culture and Politics*, Hampshire and New York, Palgrave Macmillan..

impose the strict moral teachings of Islam. Today, the Wahabist strand of Islam which is dominant in Saudi Arabia and is the guiding spiritual doctrine of Al-Qaeda, also preaches a return to the 'fundamentals' of Islam, and the strict implementation of all its injunctions and prohibitions in the legal, moral and private spheres.[73]

Qutb's sense of alienation was particularly extreme, and no doubt younger Muslims in Britain today feel far more at ease with life in a modern secular society. Similarly, the puritanism of the Wahabi doctrine is far removed from the experience of the vast majority of Muslims living in Britain today. Yet our research shows that while younger Muslims are not going to such extremes, they do feel a profound unease with the culture of the West. There is a particular concern for the perceived loss of values in Britain, and a belief that Islam at least offers a moral alternative.

One way to measure attitudes to the West is to explore feelings about education. We asked respondents about whether they preferred an Islamic or mixed state school for their children, if they had the choice. The majority preferred a mixed state school (Fig 7). However, there was a significant difference amongst ages, with younger people preferring the choice of the Islamic state school. 37% of 16-24 year olds preferred the Islamic state schools, compared to 25% of 45-54 year olds and 19% of 55+ year olds. There was no discernible difference across socio-economic class or geographical location. This suggests that many younger Muslims value a religious education above a secular education.

Another way in which one might try to gauge Muslim opinion is to measure the demand for *sharia* law. The question of *sharia* law has become important in recent years and past surveys have suggested that a significant minority of Muslims is in favour of some implementation of *sharia*.[74] The Government has shown it is willing to consider this possibility. In August 2006, representatives from the Union of Muslim Organisations in the UK and Ireland discussed with Ruth Kelly, the Secretary of State for Communities, the possibility of holidays to mark Muslim festivals and Islamic laws to cover family affairs which would apply only to Muslims.[75]

Our research shows that the majority of Muslims do not want to live under *sharia* law (Fig 8). However, yet again, there was a noticeable age difference, with younger people more likely to prefer *sharia* and more reluctant to accept reform.

73. The Wahabi sect sprung from an alliance between the ruling powers of Saudi Arabia and the puritan reformer, Muhammed ibn Abd al-Wahab (1703-1792). It is an important ideological force in the development of Sunni Radical Islamism as developed by Qutb and Mawdudi. KEPEL, G. (2004) *Jihad. The Trail of Political Islam,* London, I.B.Taurus & Co Ltd. p.50

74. See for instance GFK (2006) Attitudes to Living in Britain - A Survey of Muslim Opinion, A Survey for Channel 4 Dispatches. p.16

75. BROWN, C. (2006) Let us adopt Islamic family law to curb extremists, Muslims tell Kelly. *The Independent.* 15th August 2006

Figure 7: If you had a choice, would you prefer to send your child to an Islamic state school that follows the national curriculum and achieves good results or to a mixed state school that achieves equally good results?

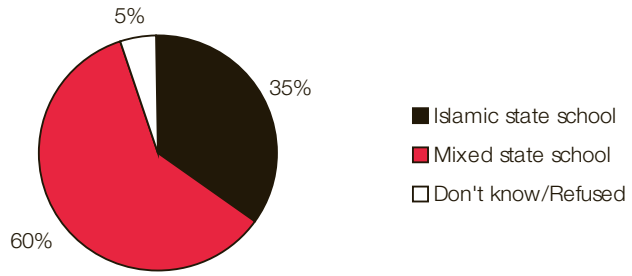
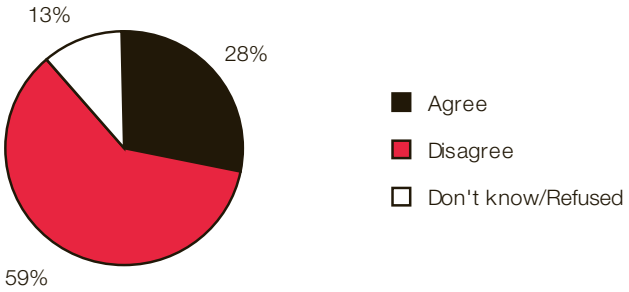


Figure 8: "If I could choose, I would prefer to live in Britain under *sharia* law rather than British law"



	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Prefer *sharia* law	37	32	26	16	17
Prefer British law	50	52	63	75	75
Don't know	12	12	11	8	7

Attitudes to specific aspects of *sharia* also vary greatly across age ranges (Table 1). We asked respondents to give their views on particular regulations and punishments, which are widely endorsed by Islamic scholars, in order to ascertain how much of *sharia* law British Muslims would be willing to adopt.[76] They were asked to decide whether they personally agreed with the scholarly interpretation or disagreed. We found that the younger age groups tended to agree with the scholarly interpretation, whereas the older age groups were more likely to disagree.

Table 1: "The following is a list of laws that are defined in most scholarly interpretations of *sharia* law. Please say if you personally agree or disagree with the law mentioned".

That a Muslim woman may not marry a non-Muslim

%	Total	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Agree	51	56	55	50	40	42
Disagree	43	40	40	45	54	43
Don't know/refused	5	4	4	6	6	14

That a Muslim woman cannot marry without the consent of her guardian

%	Total	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Agree	43	57	47	39	25	33
Disagree	51	41	48	56	67	56
Don't know/refused	5	2	5	5	6	11

That a Muslim male have up to four wives, and a Muslim female is allowed only one husband

%	Total	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Agree	46	52	52	44	38	18
Disagree	48	43	42	52	52	74
Don't know/refused	6	5	7	3	9	8

That Muslim conversion is forbidden and punishable by death

%	Total	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Agree	31	36	37	27	19	19
Disagree	57	57	50	58	68	74
Don't know/refused	12	7	10	14	11	8

That homosexuality is wrong and should be illegal

%	Total	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Agree	61	71	65	55	54	50
Disagree	30	24	26	36	36	39
Don't know/refused	9	6	8	9	9	11

76. Islamic scholars disagree over the understanding of *sharia* law and how it should be implemented today. Some argue that *sharia* is based solely on the primary religious texts, the Qu'ran and the Sunnah, whilst others argue it should also incorporate the *fiqh* - scholarly interpretations devised through consensus and analogy over time. Although there is no consensus on this issue, we have selected injunctions that are widely recognized in *sharia* by a range of scholars, as well as enforced in some Muslim majority countries. This is intended to give a sense of which particular laws Muslims are prepared to follow today, rather than to judge the authenticity of particular interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence.

Table 2: We also asked about whether respondents would be willing to accept reform of *sharia* law.

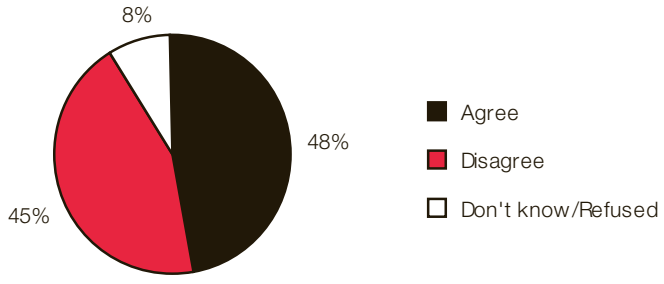
"Some Islamic scholars have called for a major reinterpretation of *sharia* law to reflect modern ideas about human rights, equality for women and tolerance of religious conversion. Other Islamic scholars disagree with this view and say that *sharia* law is absolute and should not be interpreted to fit in with western values. Which of these is closest to your opinion?"

%	Total	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Should be interpreted 45	49	37	49	49	56	
Should NOT be interpreted	39	42	44	36	30	32
Don't know/refused	16	9	19	16	21	11

There was a preference amongst AB respondents that *sharia* law be interpreted (50% compared to 39% of D1 respondents (Table 2)).

Therefore, the majority of Muslims does not want *sharia* law and is opposed to its implementation in Britain. Among those who would like to live by *sharia*, more would prefer to see it reinterpreted than not. This is important to stress, because statistics about *sharia* can wrongly give the impression that Muslims who want to live by it are in favour of the most brutal punishments and strict regulations, which many non-Muslims feel alienated by.

Figure 9: "British society offers strong moral and cultural values to young people" (Muslim population)



(There was a minor difference between different socio-economic groups. 40% of AB respondents agreed with this statement, whilst, 51% of C1 respondents, 57% of C2 respondents and 50% of DE respondents agreed).

At the same time, there is a significant strand of young Muslims who say they wish to live by *sharia* and who do not wish to see it reformed. What is the appeal of *sharia* law to these younger Muslims, who have had the benefits of living under a more liberal system? During the interviews, the respondents who favoured *sharia* law explained it was superior because it expressed stronger moral codes and was harsher on criminals, although there was little appetite to impose it on the wider British population.

"well, I think life would be better under sharia, yeah, because society would have direction… but its hard because it wouldn't work in a mixed society like the UK… but I don't know, I haven't thought about it properly. I know it's the ideal system to live under as a Muslim but I know that it wouldn't really work for non-Muslims." Male, Muslim, 22, Leeds

The appeal of *sharia* appears to stem partly from disillusionment with the legal system in Britain, and concern about declining values. A common refrain was that 'criminals have it too easy in Britain', a remark that seems to be less about carrying out the will of God, and more about lack of faith in the criminal justice system – probably a sentiment that would receive

endorsement amongst many non-Muslims. Many of the respondents we spoke to seemed to prefer *sharia* because it was seen as an antidote to the corrupting values of the West.

This concern about the immorality of the West is a recurrent theme amongst younger Muslims. We asked respondents whether they felt British society offered strong moral and cultural values to young people and 48% agreed (Fig 9).

We asked all our interview respondents about the positive and negative aspects of the West. On the positive aspects, the vast majority of respondents cited the following: good standard of living, freedom of speech, tolerance, equal opportunities, personal choice over lifestyle and values, and a chance for everyone to have their say. Many of the more religious respondents cited the freedom to practice their religion as a benefit.

However, there was also a widespread belief that the West 'lacked values', or that they did not know what they were:

"A lot of the values that used to be in Western society about fifty years ago have been lost. To me it seems there are no values left. I find that my religion at least provides us with a way of life where these values aren't lost. Whether we choose to abide by them or not is a different matter." Female, Muslim, 24, Manchester

"…the bad thing, and I don't know how we can solve this, is that they [British] don't really know what their values are. So when they are attacked they kind of seem to be making it up…" Female, Muslim, 22, Leeds

A large number of the respondents felt that school education ought to involve more teaching of values, and a stronger moral code. Some of them discussed how religion in general could be used as a helpful moral framework, and a way of living that could ensure a harmonious society.

What are we to make of this demand for greater morality amongst Muslims? Some commentators have argued that the religiosity of Muslims is a welcome trend away from the moral decadence of mainstream British society and is something to be celebrated, not feared. The Muslim writer, Sarfraz Mansoor, has even called for Britain to integrate into Muslim values, arguing that, "The moral code my parents instilled in me could help counter this country's culture of rampant disrespect".[77] Manzoor argues that the cultural prescriptions within Muslim families – to respect one's parents and not bring shame to the family – contain important lessons for wider British society.

Many of us could sympathise with the view that adult authority has been undermined to too great a degree in Britain today. A bit more respect from young people would be welcome. But how far should we accept the claim that these are "Muslim values" or even immigrant families' values? Many ordinary families in Britain adhere to the common standards of decency that Manzoor defends. To suggest that white or non-Muslim people need better values is to ignore the reality that most people do try to bring up their children with good intentions. There may well be lapses, but on the whole, people in the West live their lives and engage with others in a trusting and humane way, and are not the decadent, amoral beings that some Muslims seek to portray.

The discussion about values also leans heavily towards people's lifestyle choices, rather than socially oriented issues such as justice, equality or fraternity. When young Muslims complain about the lack of values, they reveal a remarkable intolerance for other people's personal behaviour. The overwhelming concerns for the more religious Muslims we spoke to were homosexuality, the overt sexuality of women, drugs and binge drinking.

"It is seen as good to get drunk, abuse women and live in sin". Male, Muslim, 19, Oxford

77. MANZOOR, S. (2007) Britain should integrate into Muslim values. *The Guardian.* London. 4th January 2007

"I don't like the way that women are portrayed as objects and the way they are encouraged to flaunt themselves." Female, Muslim, 19, Birmingham

"Alcohol is a big bug bear for me, it should be illegal let alone part of society… getting drunk is associated with being social and part of the culture… this is madness I just don't understand how a society formed around this culture!" Female, Muslim, 23, London

Again, while many non-Muslims would probably sympathise to some extent with such concerns, is it an accurate description of life in Britain? Are we really a nation of hooligans, louts and abusers? Such a gloomy picture seems removed from the reality of life for most decent ordinary people. Certainly Britain has a drinking culture and an open, permissive attitude to sex, but this does not mean that the majority of people have stopped behaving well or without regard for others. Many people – some Muslims included – value these freedoms and would hate to give up the right to make decisions about personal conduct.

Many young Muslims growing up in Britain may feel ambivalent about living in Western society and the temptations they have been brought up to resist. Their demonisation of Western lifestyles is perhaps an understandable overreaction. But it would be a mistake to assume that their moral disapproval is simply a result of their religion. It has been noted by a number of commentators that Muslims in the UK can appear quite strict when compared to Muslims 'back home' in Pakistan or Bangladesh. One British observer recently recounted his conversations with friends in Pakistan:

"The other puzzlement is about why Pakistanis living somewhere like Britain do not become completely 'westernised'. I'm asked regularly about how easy it is to buy alcohol, about which techno DJs I like best. There's almost a sense that, given that these delights are so readily available, surely most young people are unable to resist".[78]

78. NAZEER, K. (2006) Pakistani Puzzles. *Prospect.* September 2006

The moralism expressed by some younger Muslims seems to be a particularly British phenomenon. If older white people in Britain moralised in this way, they would be unhesitatingly labeled 'old-fashioned' and challenged about their intolerance. However, for some reason, young Muslims have been led to believe that their views should be taken more seriously. This can also create pressures on other Muslims who are less strict in their religious practice:

"Everyone is in this little community, and there is this kind of pressure almost to be…to go to these events, to go to the prayer room. If I admit that I went clubbing, they really do look down on you". Female, Muslim, 21, London

Wider ambivalence towards the West.

Younger Muslims tend to be more socially conservative than their non-Muslim counterparts (and in some cases even their parents), but it is important to recognise that such views are not alien to British society. In many ways, they are a product of viewpoints that are dominant in the mainstream of current opinion.

For instance, many of the female respondents we spoke to were very negative about the treatment of women in the West, but their vocabulary echoed that of Western feminism. They claimed that women were treated as "sex objects" and that only a proper return to Islam allowed women to be judged as true equals.

"I decided to wear hijab because I didn't like the way that women are portrayed as sex objects and that's not how God intended us to be seen anyway." Female, Muslim, 21, Oxford

Although there was wide recognition that many Islamic societies mistreat women in their own way, there was greater concern about how women in the West are treated, being made to look and act a certain way for men. This is hardly surprising when we

consider how the image of women has been a major campaigning point for Western feminists in the past three decades. So politically commonplace is the view that women are 'oppressed' in Western society that in 2000, the then Women's Minister, Tessa Jowell, hosted a 'summit' over women's body image, raising concerns about the way in which skinny fashion models might damage young girls' self-esteem. When body image and self-esteem are elevated to being major political concerns, it is perhaps understandable that young Muslim girls have come to believe that they are better off with the *hijab* on.

Therefore, we can see that negative feeling about Western society is not simply an outcome of alien cultural or religious beliefs. Very often it expresses an ambivalence which would make sense to non-Muslims. The idea that society 'lacks values' was expressed by the non-Muslims we spoke to, even those who were not particularly religious.

"Bad: there are no morals, society is too materialistic and there isn't a moral guide or sense." Male, Jewish, 22, Bristol

"I do think that society is a bit moral-less in the sense that there isn't enough being done to instill values in children and society generally is slipping in its moral standards, which is a bad thing..." Female, Hindu, 22, London

"I think there's too much irresponsibility from people. There's too much of a laddish, hooligan culture that I don't like… The way footballers and glamour models are glorified by the press and act as idols to so many people. It's detrimental to society and breeds stupidity really. If that's what people want then I think there should be some intervention. People want to smoke crack, but that's illegal. If someone wants to get a boob job then I don't see why that should be any more socially acceptable". Female, non-religious, 23, London

"There is an idea among particularly young people, that not to want to discuss sex and such things continually and openly is a sign of oddity of a person, and there is a laddish culture out there which talks about women in the most obscene ways, which can be fun on occasions but goes too far in general." Male, Christian, 24, London

Muslim respondents commented on how they felt much in common with people of other religions, who were also struggling against what they saw as the lack of values in mainstream of society:

"These people who believe in spreading religion, Christian, Jews what not, I say keep it up because nowadays to believe in God, is like 'these guys are talking crap'" Male, Muslim, 19, Salford

"This isn't because I'm a Muslim, I think that this is because I'm religious. I think if you ask any religious person this question, you will get the same answer because secular education for some reason doesn't teach morals." Female, Muslim, 21, Manchester

There is clearly a socially conservative streak within the Muslim population at large. But when we discuss the dissonance that some Muslims feel with British culture, we ought to remember that this is also likely to be experienced by other religious groups. For instance, in the Pew Global Attitudes Survey, nearly four in ten Germans and 29% of Americans say there is a natural conflict between being a devout Christian and living in a modern society.[79] It is also worth remembering that the shift towards more liberal attitudes on issues like homosexuality has occurred only relatively recently in Britain.

Importantly, it cannot be taken for granted that younger people prefer the secular life once they've tasted it. Young Muslim males in particular had often enjoyed considerable freedom in their youth (drinking alcohol, girlfriends, drugs) before choosing to become stricter Muslims. Also, there are converts to Islam who admire the certainty offered by religion, as an escape from moral confusion

79. THE PEW GLOBAL ATTITUDES PROJECT (2006) Europe's Muslims More Moderate. The Great Divide: How Westerners and Muslims View Each Other. Washington, The Pew Research Center..

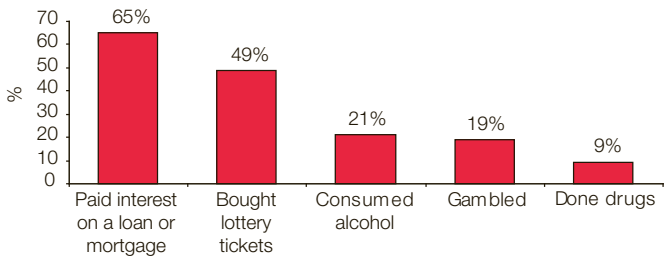
and limitless liberty in society. Religiosity, for all its restrictions, remains powerfully compelling.

When is a Muslim not a Muslim?

So far we have discussed a discernible trend amongst some younger Muslims towards a more strict interpretation of their religion. We have also argued that there is a broader ambivalence towards 'Western values' and certain types of personal freedom. However, this is countered by a trend towards secularisation and a more relaxed attitude to religious rules.

Our research shows that many Muslims have adapted religious rules to a more Western lifestyle. A sizeable number of Muslims surveyed had consumed alcohol, gambled, paid interest and even taken drugs – all of which are expressly forbidden in Islam (Fig 10). This might seem like an unremarkable finding – after all, many Catholics use contraception, despite its prohibition by the Vatican. But with Muslims, policy-makers sometimes take at face value that all Muslims feel the same way about their culture and beliefs.

Figure 10: Have you ever done any of the following?



Other research shows that Muslims are often quite flexible about their religious values. A Populus survey conducted in 2006 showed that only a narrow majority of Muslims find displays of affection between same-sex couples offensive (44% compared to 36% who don't). This compares to 30% of the general population that finds it offensive. 29% of Muslims interviewed thought that women wearing low-cut tops or short skirts was offensive, but so too did 21% of the wider population. 57% of Muslims thought that visible drunkenness in public places was offensive, but so too did 54% of the wider population.[80] Also, 70% of Muslim house owners have a normal mortgage, despite religious restrictions on paying interest.[81] This suggests that whilst certain rules are becoming more important to some Muslims, for others they are increasingly irrelevant.

How can we explain this contradictory trend towards growing secularisation and also growing religiosity? The French scholar, Olivier Roy, argues that Islam in Europe is undergoing a profound change. While religion has become more important on an individual level, at the same time it has become less important in regulating the cultural life of the community.[82] This means that older forms of religious authority – the mosque and community elders – do not exercise the kind of control that policy-makers often assume. As Muslim elders have started to lose their grip on younger Muslims this generation has developed a much more individuated, personalised approach to their religion. They are not hemmed in by community and social mores, but instead act out of personal choice. For younger Muslims, their attitude is that religion is 'between me and God', and not to be judged by anyone else.

The effect of this weakening of community authority is that younger Muslims have choices that were not available to previous generations. As some develop a deeper interest in their religion and turn away from the old cultural traditions of their parents, others adapt their religion in a flexible way and adjust to a secular society. A common remark we heard from many Muslims we spoke to – religious and non-religious – was "everyone should have their own values", or "I don't mind people being religious, as long as they don't force it down my throat". This does not mean that there is no concern about what other people in the community might think

80. POPULUS (2006) Muslim 7/7 Poll..

81. THE INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY (2005) *The British Muslim Community in 2005*, Wiltshire, The Institute for the Study of Islam and Christianity. p.102

82. ROY, O. (2004) *Globalised Islam. The Search for a New Ummah*, New York, Columbia University Press.

– there certainly is – but that there is more reflexivity involved in practicing religion and a resentment about the idea that some things should not be done because they will bring shame.

Some Muslims have a 'pick and choose' approach to religion, so that they only follow the rules that they personally value. For instance, a sizeable minority of the Muslim respondents we spoke to admitted that they drink, smoke or have pre-marital sexual relationships; all of which are forbidden in their cultural or religious upbringing. They said they preferred to follow their inner conscience, rather than a figure of authority.

"I justified it to myself; that the Qu'ran says you shouldn't drink alcohol because of the way it makes you behave. So it's not so much a problem with alcohol but the way it makes you feel afterwards. However with pork and ham it's totally unhealthy. You see so many other Muslims who will drink but not eat pork." Male, Muslim, 24, London

At the same time, some respondents believed in following everything exactly as done in the Qu'ran and wanted to be more pious. This was sometimes manifest in observing rituals or rules that parents do not follow. A good example of this is the wearing of the *hijab*, which young Muslim women choose but their mothers often do not. The majority (male and female) of people we spoke to believed that the *hijab* should also be the woman's choice. They said it was about how she feels, rather than submitting to a law or even God's will.

"It's a personal decision though… I don't think people should be made to wear hijab – that defies the point." Female, Muslim, 21, London

The degree of control means that those who become more interested in their religion are almost 'starting from scratch', trying to choose what is the Islamic thing to do, not just because that is how one's community does things:

"…because of that process of re-thinking about what it means, one becomes more scrupulous because you attach a greater significance to the entire religion and the smaller things become a bit more important." Male, Muslim, 22, London

Young Muslims today are working out their own understanding of religion, often with very different and contradictory results. Whilst some may live Westernised lifestyles and reject *sharia* law, others may wish to observe religious practices more stringently and follow *sharia*. It would be impossible to group these individuals together as they all think and feel differently about their religion.

This raises the important point of how, if at all, the authorities should attempt to 'recognise' Islam in public life. The tendency of the government to engage with Muslims as a religious group with particular attitudes and practices misses the three-dimensional, contradictory character of human beings living through cultural transition. Although many people may be 'culturally' or 'ethnically' Muslim they may not be particularly observant. For some individuals, the stereotype of how a Muslim is supposed to behave can be a straitjacket. Many feel they have to hide a part of their personal life – drinking, boyfriends, etc – from their families and local community, and it probably does not help to feel that the rest of society expects the same. The introduction of *sharia* in areas with a high concentration of Muslims (as has been proposed by some groups) would arrest the freedom of people to choose by themselves the culture they wish to live by. The willingness of the Government to even consider this sends a message to Muslims that they are presumed to act, behave and feel a certain way about their religion, even when many do not. Therefore, when policy-makers think about engaging with young Muslims, they should not underestimate the extent to which many of them are willing to adapt to their surroundings, possibly even rejecting some of the values they were brought up with.

5

Foreign policy and the *ummah*

An imagined community of victims

On 7th October 2001, Osama Bin Laden broadcast a televised message to the world, celebrating the September 11th attack on the US and calling on all Muslims to rise up against their enemies:

"These events have divided the whole world into two sides, the side of believers and the side of infidels. May God keep you away from them. Every Muslim has to rush to make his religion victorious. The winds of faith have come. The winds of change have come to eradicate oppression from the island of Mohammad, peace be upon him".[83]

For all the rhetoric, however, Muslims worldwide did not rush to join his *jihad*. As Gilles Kepel notes, "Other than an initial outburst of enthusiasm amongst certain youths in the Middle East and South-West Asia, and occasionally in the West amongst the children of immigrants from these areas, very few Muslims attempted to capitalise on these acts."[84] Despite the claims of Al-Qaeda to be at the vanguard of a global political movement, it has thus far been unable to mobilise mass support amongst the global Muslim population. Its political goals are vague and although Bin Laden has talked about the re-establishment of the Caliphate, neither he nor any of his colleagues have put forward a coherent programme for how this might be achieved. The appeal of Al-Qaeda remains confined to a minority, albeit a dangerous one. Jason Burke, the British journalist who has trailed Al-Qaeda for a number of years argues that it "does not exist", or at least not as a conventional political movement with a coherent organising chain of command. He describes it instead as a "loose 'network of networks'".[85]

In this sense, contemporary Islamism of the kind espoused by Bin Laden is very different to previous movements that shaped political life in the Muslim world. When political Islam first emerged in Muslim majority countries, it was a reaction to the anti-democratic secular regimes that predominated in the post-colonial period. It gave a religious character to what were nationally-oriented political movements, often with high levels of grassroots support. While organisations like the Muslim Brotherhood frequently resorted to violence and preached dogmatic beliefs, they also played a strong role in civil society and sustained popularity through their provision of much-needed welfare services. Their goals were tightly linked to nationalist aspirations and they sought to reform state structures along religious lines.

The strength of Islamist movements like these waned towards the end of the 1990s as national secularists began to ground in countries such as Pakistan, Sudan, Egypt, Algeria, Indonesia, Iran and Turkey. Being squeezed out of the national political framework by moderates in their own countries, some Islamist groups, for instance in France and Turkey, have pragmatically overcome their hostility to democracy and made fruitful alliances to enter elections. These groups have adjusted their goals, focusing primarily on the implementation of *sharia* in one country.[86]

83. 'Bin Laden Statement' *The Guardian*. 7th October 2001. http://www.guardian.co.uk/afghanistan/story/0,,565070,00.html (last accessed 21.01.07)

84. KEPEL, G. (2004) *Jihad. The Trail of Political Islam,* London, I.B.Taurus & Co Ltd. p.x

85. BURKE, J. (2003) *Al-Qaeda. Casting a Shadow of Terror,* London/New York, I.B.Taurus & Co. p 16.

86. ROY, O. (2006) Radical Islamism's Failure, Islamists' Future. *Open Democracy.* 30th October 2006

Meanwhile, other Islamists have regrouped around a globally-oriented, abstract struggle against 'the West'. In doing so, they have appropriated localised conflicts around the world – from Afghanistan to Bosnia to Iraq. However, their grandiose crusade has failed to generate a massive army of political supporters or soldiers. In his detailed account of the emergence of Al-Qaeda, American journalist Lawrence Wright describes how Bin Laden's ragged brigade of Arab mujahidin roamed the globe to fight Muslim wars, but they were very often despised or disregarded by local fighters who had more immediate concerns than martyrdom for Paradise or the fight against the Great Satan of America. In Bosnia, the Arab fighters quickly became unpopular with their attempts to impose Wahabist ideas on the local Muslim population which was largely Europeanised and secular.[87]

One of the most sriking features of Al-Qaeda is that despite its claims to represent the Muslim world, it seems removed from the experience and aspirations of most Muslims. Its lack of grassroots support and failure to reach Muslims through the usual channels of political engagement means that it has turned to creating spectacular atrocities that will play out relentlessly in the media, often alienating the Muslims it is supposed to attract.[88] Olivier Roy argues that the Islamist demonstrate this paradox well. They denounce Muslims in their own country as secularised apostates ('*kufr*'), who have lost the true path but at the same time, they are keen to identify with an abstract *ummah*, which is composed entirely of victimised Muslims abroad, such as in Palestine, with whom they have had probably little or no actual contact.[89]

Radical Islamist terrorism cannot be understood as part of a political movement in any conventional sense. Unlike the IRA, ETA or the PKK, Al-Qaeda is not driven by the pursuit of concrete and achievable political demands but instead by an extreme religious ideology which precludes all possibility of rational negotiation.[90] It is not dissimilar to extreme-left terrorist groups who operated in Europe in the late 1960s and 1970s, such as the Italian Red Brigades or the Baader-Meinhof Gang in Germany, or more recently, the Japanese Aum Shinrikyo cult which launched the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway in 1995. These groups, famous for spectacular one-off stunts that would bring them media attention, lacked any coherent objectives apart from the destruction of the state. The lack of social base also meant that these groups operated without any structures of moral accountability to hold their actions in check. Indiscriminate violence characterises groups that answer to no one but themselves, especially when they have convinced each other that they are acting on behalf of the deluded masses.

If groups do not feel compelled to persuade others of their message, their actions can become terrifyingly destructive, self-serving and self-righteous. They care nothing of what others think because they ultimately believe that history or God will judge them. Their actions are not instrumentally thought through, in the sense of trying to gain strategic military advantage or galvanise public support behind a specific policy. The American historian, Faisal Devji, argues that Al-Qaeda takes actions but without any serious plan for how they might achieve change. It only hopes that a sufficient combination of terror and faith will deliver a Muslim uprising, with whatever consequences that might bring:

"Hence the actions of this jihad, while they are indeed meant to accomplish certain ends, have become more ethical than political in nature, since they have resigned control over their own effects, thus becoming gestures of duty or risk rather than acts of instrumentality properly speaking. This might be why a network such as Al-Qaeda, unlike terrorist or fundamentalist groups

87. KEPEL, G. (2004) *Jihad. The Trail of Political Islam,* London, I.B.Taurus & Co Ltd. Also see COOK, D. (2005) *Understanding Jihad*, Berkeley, University of California Press: "the fact that the majority of contemporary Muslims do not actively participate in jihad demonstrates a decisive rejection of which the radical Muslims are keenly aware". p 165.

88. Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda still enjoy greater support amongst Muslims in the Muslim-majority countries than those living in the West. However, there are indications that this is falling, especially in countries like Jordan which have been targeted by suicide bombers. THE PEW GLOBAL ATTITUDES PROJECT (2006) Europe's Muslims More Moderate. The Great Divide: How Westerners and Muslims View Each Other. Washington, The Pew Research Center.

89. ROY, O. (2004) *Globalised Islam. The Search for a New Ummah,* New York, Columbia University Press.

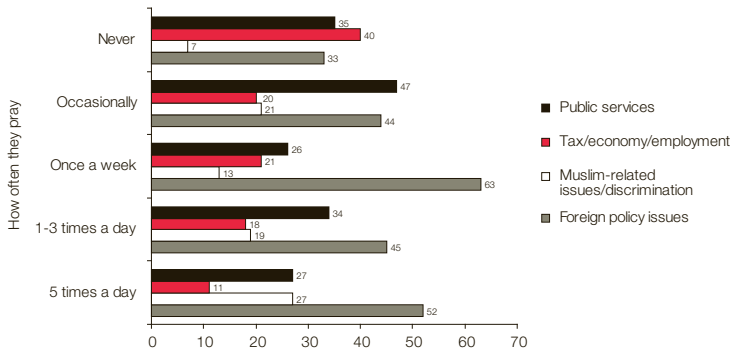
90. REID, A. (2005) Introduction. IN REID, A. (Ed.) *Taming Terrorism.* London, Policy Exchange. p.15.

of the past, has no coherent vision or plan for the future."[91]

Al-Qaeda is only a small minority within the Islamist movement worldwide, but it represents well the contradiction at the heart of the movement more generally. It has suffered setbacks in trying to build political support in Muslim majority countries; yet on the other hand, it has a growing abstract or spiritual appeal for Muslims in the West who wish to identify with the *ummah*. Islamism offers a potent identity that allows people to express their feeling of alienation from modern life, and connect their own personal story to a larger, global struggle. Younger Muslims who are becoming increasingly detached or 'loosened' from the ties in their own communities feel emotionally connected to the suffering Muslims they see on their television screens. While feelings of empathy and solidarity have always characterised transnational political movements, they are particularly pronounced in contemporary Islamism. Foreign policy has become a major focus for Muslims in the West, as it concerns the persecution of fellow Muslims – the "imagined community" – worldwide.

91. DEVJI, F. (2005) *Landscapes of the Jihad, London,* C. Hurst & Co (Publishers) Limited. p 3.

Figure 11: Thinking about the issues that really matter to you in terms of politics, world affairs and how you may vote at the next general election, what are the two or three issues that matter most to you?



The preoccupation with foreign policy

Our survey showed that the highest ranking issue for Muslims overall was foreign policy. 41% of all Muslim respondents cited a foreign policy issue as one of the issues that matter to them most, even those who did not pray very often (Fig 11).

Many Muslims are angry about foreign policy because they believe it is targeted at Muslim states and involves "double standards". Predictably, most of the Muslim respondents we spoke to cited conflicts involving Muslims abroad.

"But I go back to foreign policy, all you need is to see one image, one picture on the internet and it can snap you". Male, Muslim, 22, London

Some argued that the motivation behind foreign policy was greed or selfishness on the part of the US, UK or Israel:

"I think the West has waged war against Islam and this must stop. Actions are self interested and pro-Israel, it's not about values or ideals, its just about influence and money". Male, Muslim, 19, Birmingham

Others gave a more balanced view and said that they were angry about foreign policy but not just because they were concerned about other Muslims. They said they were concerned about human suffering in general. Some believed that the conflicts could not reduce everything down to cynical motives, even if things appeared that way.

"Israel/Palestine is a difficult issue and I know it's not as easy as UK supports Israel and wants to wipe out Muslim states but to be honest, that's how it seems". Female, Muslim, 22, London

Muslim anger about foreign policy has been confirmed in numerous surveys over the past few years. However, while emotions run high, our survey suggested a surprising lack of knowledge about basic facts relating to international issues. We asked

respondents to name two influential figures in the Israel/Palestine situation – an issue widely accepted to be a cause of Muslim anger – but only a small minority could answer correctly (Fig 12).

The same questions were put to the general population and only 7% correctly answered both questions. The Muslim response was higher but not as much as one might expect.

This relative lack of knowledge about foreign policy raises an interesting question about the extent to which Muslims genuinely are engaged with the politics of conflicts abroad. Many surveys in the past few years have shown that Muslims are angry about international affairs, but it cannot be assumed that they are much more engaged and informed than the wider public. In some cases, the anger over foreign policy may even be rather superficial. This is particularly worth noting when considering younger Muslims. They are supposed to be far more angry about foreign policy issues, but they were half as likely to know the answers to these questions (9% and 5% of 16-24 year olds knew the correct answers, compared to 29% and 30% of 55+ year olds).

In interviews, most of the Muslims expressed their concern about foreign policy but admitted they were not particularly engaged or knowledgeable about the details:

Interviewer: ***what it is about Foreign Policy that does concern you?***

Respondent: *I think sometimes over involvement in other territories and laws, the whole Iraq, Afghanistan… all that rubbish. Sometimes it's just a bit unnecessary.*

Interviewer: ***That's as far as your concerns would go?***

Respondent: *Yeah. I'm not really that interested to be honest.*

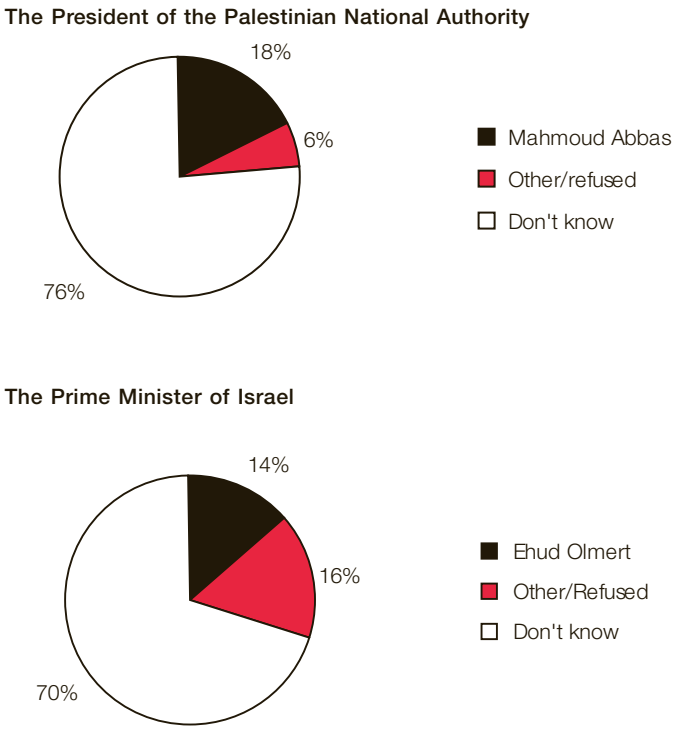
Female, Muslim, 21, London

The emphasis of people's comments about foreign policy was less on discussing the details of a precise political situation, and more about their emotional reaction to what they considered to be an unjust situation.

"I am not that knowledgeable in that area of the Israel Palestine conflict, I know bits but at the end of the day…how would the rest of us feel? If England was separated and put in Manchester, or put into a corner, and people took over the rest of the country how would we feel?" Male, Muslim, 22, Rochdale

The emotional impact of seeing victims of violence around the world triggers an understandable human impulse and probably many non-Muslims would feel the same way. On one level, we might feel relieved that although some young people are not particularly knowledgeable about political affairs, they at least feel moral outrage over the suffering of other human beings. But on another level, the emotionalised engagement in foreign issues can also hinder genuine under-

Figure 12: Can you name the following people?



standing of why conflicts occur, the complexity of events and the motivations of actors. Pity can be a distorting lens, reducing complex political struggles to a simplistic morality play of good and evil. America is an oppressor motivated by greed, whilst Muslims are innocent victims motivated by desperation. One does not need to be a neo-con hawk to see how such a framework can be highly simplistic.

One of the consequences of this diminished understanding of foreign conflicts is a tendency to explain events as the outcome of the manipulations of sinister actors. Hence, conspiracy theories are rife in Britain. According to the Pew Research Centre study in 2006, 56% of British Muslims express disbelief that Arabs carried out the 9/11 attacks, compared to 17% who do not. In a survey conducted for Channel Four in summer 2006 survey, approximately half of the Muslims aged 18-24 believed that 9/11 was a conspiracy by America and Israel (51%), and the figure is slightly higher for younger, second generation Muslims. 36% also believe that Princess Diana was murdered to prevent her marrying a Muslim (compared to 31% who believe her death was an accident). It should be noted, however, that conspiracy theories are flourishing more widely. 36% of Americans believe it 'very likely' or 'somewhat likely' that their government was involved in allowing the attacks to happen or had even carried them out itself.[92] Tickets sold out for a talk on 9th September 2006 at London's Conway Hall by the founder of the US group, 9/11 Scholars for Truth, Professor David Ray Griffin, who has suggested that 9/11 may have been an 'inside job'. 3 out of 10 of the wider population believe there was a cover up of some kind over Diana's death.[93]

"Then I thought maybe it's a conspiracy… all this media I see it's all about terrorists, conspiracies. I think 9/11 was a conspiracy. Because they would have been knocked down anyway. It's a way in, to get the oil". Male, Muslim, 22, Birmingham

While the anger about foreign policy is therefore genuine, the often superficial level of analysis upon which it is based really ought to be interrogated, tested and challenged in the court of public opinion. Is foreign policy really about a new crusade against Islam? Is the war in Iraq really about oil? Was September 11th really a conspiracy led by the CIA? Should Muslims (as opposed to any other group) have a greater say over foreign policy decisions?

Instead of subjecting these arguments to proper scrutiny, however, many commentators in the West have come to simply accept Muslim grievance without question and thus push for a foreign policy that reflects these concerns. In summer 2006, key Muslim public figures sent an open letter to the government in which they argued that Britain's foreign policy was fuelling extremist ideas and pushing people towards terrorism.[94] The 1990 Trust, a race relations organisation, press released its report on Muslim attitudes in Britain in October 2006 with the strap line 'Foreign Policy to Blame'. In its report about British Muslims and counter-terrorism entitled 'Bringing it Home', the think tank Demos recommended that the Government "open up the foreign policy-making process to greater scrutiny and provide input from all parts of British communities".[95]

There are certainly very strong political and intellectual grounds to criticise British foreign policy and it is surely right that we debate these issues rigorously in public, amongst Muslims *and* non-Muslims. But when commentators and Muslim lobby groups urge us to take Muslim anger seriously and to respect their feelings, they are effectively flatter-

92. GILLAN, A. (2006) Full House as leading 9/11 conspiracy theorist has his say. *The Guardian.* 9th September 2006

93. 'Tests 'prove' Diana was drunk' BBC Online. 8th December 2006. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/6162041.stm (last accessed 21.01.07)

94. WOODWARD, W. & BATES, S. (2006) Muslim leaders say foreign policy makes UK target. *The Guardian.* 12th August 2006

95. BRIGGS, R., FIESCHI, C. & LOWNSBROUGH, H. (2006) Bringing it Home. Community-based approaches to counter-terrorism. London, Demos. p.16

ing a worldview that is based largely on emotion, rather than a genuine political engagement founded on rational arguments. Politics involves emotion and passion, but we should not suspend reason in the pursuit of moral simplicities. In fact, the call to make foreign policy more inclusive of Muslims is really to circumvent political democracy – through which all people regardless of background should make their views known – by awarding a greater say to whichever group shouts or emotes the loudest.

In this sense, the anger amongst Muslims about foreign policy is partly about "the right to be heard" and a feeling that Westminster should be paying more attention. Some people regard foreign policy as just one more excuse amongst many to "hate Blair" who is seen to be acting without a mandate.

"Foreign policy as well… yeah, Iraq, Iran, Palestine- Israel situation… Foreign policy is not reflective of the population as a whole, what they would want." Male, Muslim, 23, Manchester

"Even though there was a lot of people against this our opinion did not matter, it was just a personal opinion from the Prime minister", Male, Muslim, 22, Rochdale

The moralisation of politics

Many Muslims have been radicalised by their anger over foreign policy, but they do not need to be brainwashed by sinister operatives using highly emotionally charged propaganda. This moralised worldview also feeds off the broader culture and ideas in society at large.

In 2005, the electoral success of George Galloway's Respect party in the constituency of Bow and Bethnal Green fused together a younger Islamic religiosity with a radical left, anti-globalisation politics. The focus on the war in Iraq brought together two camps who saw the world divided between a neo-conservative cabal in Washington and a vulnerable, victimised world population. As Galloway stated in an interview in September 2005, "it's Orwellian, it's 1984, the permanent division of the world into warring blocs, for the profit of a few at the cost of the misery of the many".[96] Bin Laden himself draws on the language and ideas of prominent left-leaning Western writers, like Robert Fisk, of whom he writes "the latter is one of your compatriots and co-religionists and I consider him to be neutral'".

The Israel/Palestine conflict is often cited as the root cause of the Middle East's problems, fuelling the anger of Muslims worldwide. But political discourse about the region can sometimes generate more heat than light. The Palestian novelist, Samir El-Youssef, complained in an article in January 2007 about the sentimental ignorance of some Western academics who "regard Palestinians as a hopelessly passive society". Writing about a proposed boycott of Israeli academics, he stated:

"As for the idea that what has been taking place in Palestine/Israel is a simple matter of victimised Palestinians struggling to free themselves from Israeli victimisers, this is a preposterously reductionist view that could never help promote peace and justice".[97]

The portrayal of Muslims as a victimised population is not only exploited by terrorist groups, but is commonly held in mainstream political culture.

For this reason anger about foreign policy has reached much farther afield than just Muslims. Up to two million people marched against the war in Iraq in February 2003. Many of the non-Muslim respondents we spoke to expressed the same feelings of disillusionment:

96. 'George Galloway MP: Elements within Government using terror provocation tactics.' *PrisonPlanet.com*. September 13 2005: http://www.prisonplanet.com/Pages/Sept05/130905Galloway.htm (last accessed 08.01.07)

97. 'A senseless cultural boycott' Samir El-Youssef, *Jewish Chronicle*, January 2007, cited on *Harry's Place*, http://hurryupharry.bloghouse.net/archives/2007_01.html (last accessed 12.01.07)

"I don't like the way America and Britain have gone into this crusade to promote democracy, which is obviously not actually anything to do with it…It demonstrates that there's something wrong with the way we are represented by our MPs and other politicians". Female, non-religious, 22, Leeds

"*We have to think about what we're doing to countries which don't have millions of people in their armies and what we're doing to them*". Male, non-religious, 21, London

Anti-Americanism

America has become a symbol of the problems of 'western society', particularly consumerism, capitalism, destruction of the environment, and cultural dominance. Some of the respondents we spoke to expressed their antipathy to American society.

"I guess Sept 11th, July 7th were all kind of acts of capitalist protests. In themselves they weren't the decided factor. But they stand out and make you think about your religion more." Female, Muslim, 22, London

"With the environment you hear about Global Warming and everything, then you hear about the U.S, they don't give a toss." Male, Muslim, 19, Salford

Muslims tend to be highly sceptical about the influence of the West in the world (Fig 13).

Some observers have interpreted the anti-Americanism expressed by Muslims as signs of a 'clash of civilisations', arguing that Muslims have values that are incompatible with the 'Western way of life'. However, the antipathy towards America and capitalism is not exclusive to Muslims. Most of these attitudes are widespread in the West itself. Our survey suggested that there was some strong feeling in this direction within the general population too (Fig 14).

Many of the non-religious and religious respondents complained about the 'materialism' or 'consumerism' of the West:

"[Good things are] ease of living, comfort of living, running water, hot water availability of food, but these could be viewed as bad things because they are taking away from the rest of the world. The celebrity culture right now, women's cosmetics, it's such a buying culture", Male, non-religious, 27, London

"I also don't like the way that everything is for sale and people's weaknesses seem to be exploited by advertising as if everything will be solved by spending money." Female, Muslim, 19, Birmingham

Figure 13: "Many of the problems in the world today are a result of arrogant western attitudes" (Muslim population)

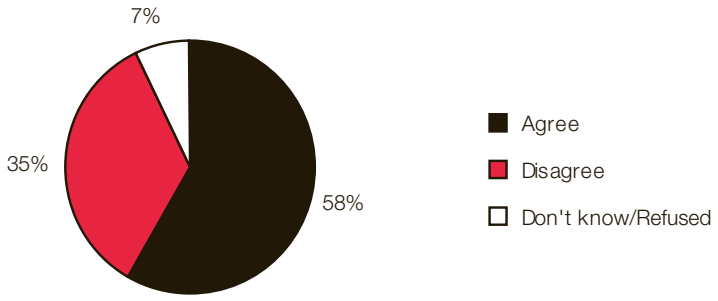
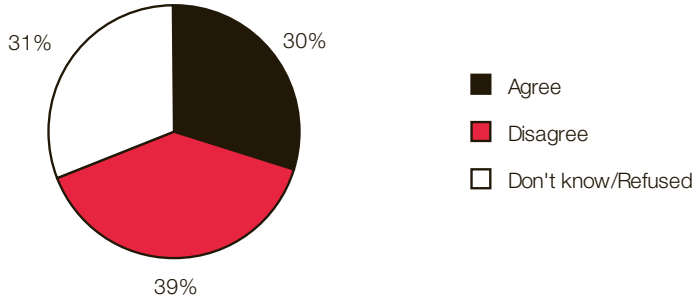


Figure 14: "Many of the problems in the world today are a result of arrogant western attitudes" (General population)



Negative views of Western life circulate in the wider culture. A few days after the attacks on the twin towers in New York, the novelist Jeanette Winterson wrote a scathing attack of America and Britain in the *Guardian* newspaper:

"American and British foreign policy is not aimed at world peace; it is intended to enforce a particular kind of capitalism. We pay poor people no money in order to produce goods to support our lifestyle, and when some of those people come to hate everything that we stand for, we shout about wiping them out.

The planes did not fly into hospitals and schools – this was not the invasion of Iraq. The planes were out to destroy a prime symbol of western capitalism, with all that its free trade has meant to developing countries.

Perhaps we should ask ourselves why we are so hated. That they are fanatics and terrorists is not answer enough."[98]

Critisism of the West often emphasises a disdain for modern life and the 'addiction to consumption'. More profoundly, it betrays a deep ambivalence to modernity and the achievements of Western culture. Such sentiments exist on both sides of the Atlantic. Michael Moore's polemic, *Stupid White Men*, about America's "pathetically stupid, embarassingly white, and disgustingly rich men"[99] was a bestseller in America and Britain in 2001. There are numerous books, articles, television and film documentaries, which rage against the arrogance of America and the capitalist West more generally, belying the suggestion that Muslim hatred of the West is unique.

Of course, anti-Western thought has been a long established feature in western intellectual life since the first half of the twentieth century. Even before the father of Islamism, Sayyid Qutb, wrote his fierce denunciations of the West in the 1950s, philosophical scepticism about Modernity had been laid down by prominent western intellectuals. The German cultural theorists Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno, who had fled to America from Nazi Germany, famously debunked the Enlightenment, claiming its end result had been the Holocaust. For them, the total achievement of western science and culture was overshadowed by human barbarism on a grand scale. Today, this pessimistic view is part of common parlance. When the Imperial War Museum in London opened its Holocaust exhibition in 2003, the poster showed the railway lines to Auschwitz with the accompanying slogan, 'See what man can do when he puts his mind to it'. If an increasing number of Muslims regard the modern, Western world as morally decadent, this may be because this has become a prevalent view within Western culture.

Attitudes to terrorism

After 7/7, numerous surveys suggested that a worrying minority of Muslims were supportive of the terrorists and felt contempt for British society. YouGov published a poll on 23rd July 2005 in the aftermath of the London bombings that showed that 16% felt some sympathy for the suicide bombers, 6% thought they were fully justified, 32% of British Muslims thought western society was decadent, and 16% felt no loyalty to Britain. In 2006, the Foreign Policy Centre asked how loyal the Muslims felt towards Britain. Nearly one in five felt little loyalty or none at all (18%). Similar findings were reported in a MORI survey for the Sun newspaper, on 23 July 2005. 86% felt they belonged to Britain, whereas 11% said they did not. Asian radio station, Sunrise, ran a much-publicised survey of 500 Muslims in Greater London, reported on 30 October. 98% said they would not fight for Britain, and 48% said they would fight for Bin Laden and

98. WINTERSON, J. (2001) Forgive but don't forget. *The Guardian.* London. 18th September 2001

99. MOORE, M. (2001) Stupid White Men ...and Other Sorry Excuses for the State of the Nation, *Harper Collins*

Islam. 91% said they believed the war was between Islam and the Christian West.[100]

Despite the shock headlines, it is important to put these statistics into perspective. The vast majority of Muslims condemn terrorism, and even those who express sympathy will probably not become violent. The 1990 Trust has pointed out that the questions asked in some surveys can be misleading, and that expressing sympathy for the bombers' motives should not necessarily be taken as endorsement of the action itself. In its own survey of 1213 Muslims, it found a rather small proportion – 1.9% – of Muslims felt it is actually justified to commit terrorist attacks on civilians in the UK[101]. This does not eliminate concern, but may put things in better perspective. The level of support shown for terrorist groups today is also not without precedent in Europe.[102]

In our survey, 7% said they admired organisations like Al-Qaeda (Fig 15).

There was no significant difference between socio-economic classes, gender or geographical regions. More women expressed support than men. (8% of females, compared to 5% of males).

What motivates the feelings of this 7%? Although it is such a small sample, we identified some unexpected results. 54% of the 72 respondents said they agreed with the statement that "British society offers strong moral and cultural values to young people". A narrow majority (55%) believed that they had more in common with Muslims in other countries than with non-Muslims in Britain. 18% of them even disagreed with the statement that "Many of the problems in the world today are a result of arrogant western attitudes", suggesting they are quite confused about what Al-Qaeda actually espouses.

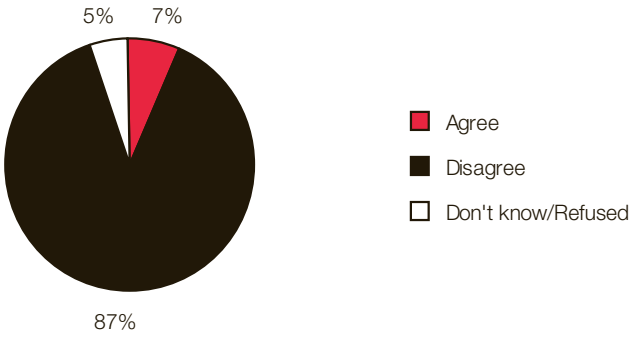
Nor were those who expressed admiration of Al-Qaeda necessarily very religious. Of the 72 people who said they agreed with the statement, (38%) either never prayed or only occasionally. 32% of them do not want to live under *sharia* law. 52% believe *sharia* law should be reformed. These are clearly not people who follow Wahabist doctrine. The majority (54%) even preferred to send their children to mixed state schools.

The majority of those who expressed support for Al-Qaeda got their news from mainstream channels (73%) or English speaking cable or satellite channels (56%).[103] Only 16% got their news from foreign language channels, and none from foreign language sites.

It has been claimed by some that support for Al-Qaeda comes from a sense of persecution in people's personal lives. But the vast majority (82%) of the group agreed with the statement "they had been treated fairly in this society, regardless of my religious beliefs". The majority (56%) said they had not experienced any hostility in the past year.

When the same question was asked of the general population, 3% said they

Figure 15: "I admire organisations like Al-Qaeda that are prepared to fight against the West"



There was a marked difference across the age groups.

%	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Agreed	13	6	6	2	3
Disagreed	80	88	87	89	92

100. YOUGOV (2005) YouGov survey results, BARNES, H. (2006) *Born in the UK: Young Muslims in Britain,* London, The Foreign Policy Centre, MORI (2005a) Attitudes of British Muslims, SMITH, M. & ROY, A. (2001) Britons who join Taliban to face trial. *The Daily Telegraph.* London. 30th October 2001

101. THE 1990 TRUST (2006) Survey, Muslim views: Foreign policy and its effects. London, The 1990 Trust

102. A famous 1971 poll by the Allensbach Institute in Germany found that 5% of Germans would give shelter to a member of the terrorist Baader-Meinhof Group for one night. 9% were undecided. In the 16-29 age group, ten percent said yes, and 11% were undecided, meaning that an incredible 20% of Germans that age would at least consider aiding the Baader-Meinhof Gang. The poll must be understood with the caveat that it was conducted before the full extent of the group's violence began, but it does indicate the extent to which its radical ideas had some popular resonance. 'This is Baader-Meinhof' http://www.baader-meinhof.com/timeline/1971.html (last accessed 21.01.07)

103. The percentages do not add up to 100% because the respondents were asked to give two options based on usage. The

"admired organisations like Al-Qaeda that are prepared to fight against the West".

It is difficult to know how to interpret such statistics. People expressing admiration for Al-Qaeda are not necessarily religious, personally victimised, or even hostile to non-Muslims. They can be men or women, and come from any background. Some respondents may even have been "playing to the gallery". What is clear is that this 7% do not constitute a coherent political movement with shared ideas or experiences. More likely is that they are expressing a vague sense of disillusionment with the West.

survey cited Al-Jazeera as an English cable or satellite news channel, but note that this service was launched only a few weeks before the survey was conducted in November 2006.

6

Victimhood

"It is now open season for attacks on Muslims. Hardly a day goes by without another lurid denunciation of the "enemy within". Salma Yaqoob, *The Guardian* 21st December 2006

A major theme in the emergence of Muslim identity in the UK is victimhood. Muslims are regularly portrayed in the media as an oppressed group in Britain, subject to virulent racism on the streets, suffering from discrimination and poverty, and targeted by the authorities. Many people argue that Islamophobia is a new form of "acceptable racism". After the Danish cartoons affair in February 2006, the Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, held a press conference at City Hall and called for an end to the media's "orgy of Islamophobia". The Government has worked actively to promote positive images of Islam and Muslims, while Muslim groups have lobbied hard for greater protections for Muslims. In a research study about Muslims in the UK, one think tank warned that the majority of Muslims identified with their "imagined community" because of their own experience of victimisation:

"…distant and global concerns can gain currency only when they are able to feed off local, everyday, personal grievances, such as those experienced by Muslims in the UK".[104]

In her article for the *Guardian*, the Respect Party's councillor for Birmingham, Salma Yaqoob, argues that Muslims in the UK today are "subject to attacks reminiscent of the gathering storms of anti-Semitism in the first decades of the last century". Such comparisons to Nazi Germany are common. As far back as 1992, during the period of the Bosnian civil war, the Muslim writer Shabbir Akhtar wrote in *Muslim News*, "next time there are gas chambers in Europe there is no doubt concerning who'll be inside them".[105] Speaking at the launch of their publication, Anti-Muslim Discrimination and Hostility in the United Kingdom 2000, the Chairman of the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC), Massoud Shadjareh, said "unless something is done urgently at governmental level, Muslims in Britain face the same fate this century as Jews in Europe in the last".[106]

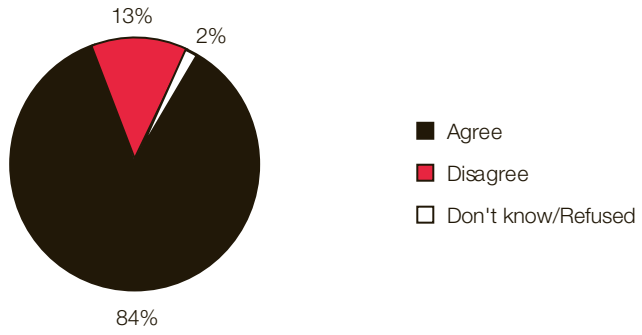
These claims can only be described as hysterical. It seems remarkable to have to point out that Jews were persecuted in Nazi Germany in a way that does not compare to the experience of Muslims in Britain today. After 1933, when Hitler came to power, the Jews became the "Untermenschen" – the sub-humans. Jewish shops were marked with a yellow star. Buses, trains and even park benches were marked with separate seating

104. BRIGGS, R., FIESCHI, C. & LOWNSBROUGH, H. (2006) Bringing it Home. Community-based approaches to counter-terrorism. London, Demos. p.13.

105. Cited MCROY, A. (2006) *From Rushdie to 7/7,* London, The Social Affairs Unit. p.23

106. Cited in Ibid. p.26.

Figure 16: "On the whole, I feel I have been treated fairly in this society, regardless of my religious beliefs"



for Jews. In 1935, under the Nuremberg law, Jews lost their right to German citizenship, and marriage between Jews and non-Jews was forbidden. On 10 November 1938 – Krystalnacht – ten thousand Jewish shops were raided, along with homes and synagogues. The violence was endemic and endorsed entirely by the authorities.

In our survey, 84% of respondents said they felt they had been treated fairly in this society – it is doubtful that such a high percentage of Jews in 1930s Germany would have given the same answer.

Indeed, the majority of respondents had not experienced direct Islamophobia in the past year. Those that had, had experienced relatively low-level incidents (Fig 17):

Of course, we know there is anti-Muslim prejudice in the UK today, some of which stems from old-fashioned racism. In a speech given on 3rd July 2006, the Labour MP for Tooting, Sadiq Khan, describes well the feeling of exclusion experienced by some Muslims because they are seen to be different:

"As an ethnically Asian Muslim, but born and bred in this country, I am unambivalently British. I have never felt a conflict between my country, my religion and my background…But somehow a British born white person is immediately accepted, whatever their parental origins, while people of colour are always different. Recently there have been British voices raised claiming that Islam is incompatible with British values. But being British and Muslim are not at odds."[107]

There are a number of examples of individuals being attacked because of their religion and instances of negative depictions of Muslims in the media. These contribute to a sense of anxiety and alienation amongst some Muslims. More observant Muslims are particularly likely to experience some form of prejudice because of their clothing or appearance.

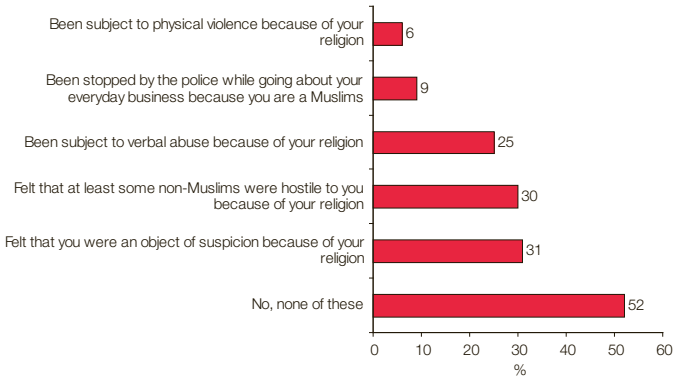
But at the same time, we should put these episodes into perspective. While Muslims may feel self-conscious because of the clothes they wear or how they live, they have not been frightened off from showing their identity in public. Most Muslims feel confident about showing their "Muslim-ness".

"yeah, well I noticed it when I started growing my beard… people look at me funny. But I like it in a way, it shows my identity. No, I never had anything serious…" Male, Muslim, 22, Leeds

Distressing as low-level incidents of racism are, they do not compare to the kind of degrading, brutal and systematic treatment of Jews, which was orchestrated by the authorities in 1930s Germany.

So why, if the picture is not desparately bleak, is there so much concern about the victimisation of Muslims? A paradox has emerged: while younger Muslims are unlikely to experience significant racism or discrimination because of their religion, they are much more conscious and sensitive about the possibility of being victimised. Muslims in Britain enjoy almost complete freedom to practice their religion and many workplaces and public amenities make provision for prayer rooms or halal meat, and yet many Muslims today feel

Figure 17: In the past year, have you yourself…?



AB respondents were more likely to say they had 'Felt like an object of suspicion because of their religion' (40% compared to 24% of DE respondents). They were also more likely to say they had felt some non-Muslims were more hostile to them because of their religion (35% compared to 25% of D1 respondents).

107. KHAN, S. (2006) Being a British Muslim.

increasingly ill at ease. Although younger Muslims show much more confidence in wearing religious clothing and have benefited from the provision of special facilities, many of them regard society as hostile.

"…who gets targeted under the terrorism laws? Of course it's not fair!! I think there is a massive problem of Islamaphobia, especially after the attacks, and I think its more institutionalised too – I mean I think we'll start seeing it in employment and everything."
Male, Muslim, 19, Oxford

"you know that it happens, you hear about it all the time on the news and stuff, it's not a secret.",
Male, Muslim, 21, Birmingham

Sadly, racism and inequality are still features in our society and there are things that Government and policy-makers could do to help address these problems. However, the preoccupation with Muslim vulnerability and Islamophobia has skewered our understanding of why such problems exist, and in many ways, has made things worse for Muslims.

The myth of Muslim victimisation (1) – Islamophobia

To what extent do perceptions of victimisation reflect the reality? Certainly, there have been a number of serious attacks on British Muslims in recent years. In the aftermath of the September 11th, the EU commissioned a study into Islamophobia and found a dozen serious physical attacks on British Muslims. It is perfectly understandable that lobbying groups seek to raise awareness of such cases. Yet, we must remember that as tragic as each attack is, these are relatively few, especially compared to the 1980s during the peak of the far-right's influence in areas like East London, Manchester and Birmingham. In that decade, there were forty-nine racist murders and it was not uncommon to hear about violent street attacks and arson attacks on family homes.[108]

The claims of Muslim lobby groups often present a misleading picture of the hostility faced by Muslims today. The Islamic Human Rights Commission claimed there was a massive rise in Islamophobic attacks, pointing to 344 recorded incidents in the year following September 11th, but the majority of these were relatively low-level – verbal, or spitting and shoving. Distressing as these may be, they do not indicate a massive backlash against a population of 1.6m Muslims. The majority of victims of reported crimes are aged between 10-24 years old. As a proportion of all race hate crimes, the proportion of victims from Pakistani and Indian backgrounds did not rise substantially between 1998/9-2002/03.[109]

In light of concerns about Islamophobia after the London bombings, politicians and the police warned about a potential backlash against Muslims. The police swiftly posted officers outside mosques and a National Community Tensions Team was set up to monitor hate incidents. Yet, in the words of the Director of Public Prosecutions, "the fears of a large rise in offences appear to be unfounded". Figures published by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) for the year 2005-2006 (which covers the period in the aftermath of the London July 2005 bombings) show that there were only forty-three prosecutions for religiously aggravated crime, and only eighteen of these related to Muslim victims. This figure actually represented a *fall* from twenty-three cases of Muslim victims in 2004-2005.[110] One in four hundred Jews compared to one in 1,700 Muslims are likely to be victims of "faith hate" attacks every year.

The gap between perception and reality is not just a result of successful lobbying or skewered statistics, but a broader shift in the way the police understand and monitor racially-motivated crime. Following the Macpherson report into the Stephen Lawrence case in 1999, there has been a widening of the definition of race hate or faith hate crime: "Any incident that is per-

108. MALIK, K. (2005b) Islamophobia Myth. *Prospect.* February 2005

109. METROPOLITAN POLICE AUTHORITY (2003) Long term trends in racist and homophobic crime performance. London, Metropolitan Police Authority..

110. O'NEILL, B. (2006) Time for a backlash against the hate-obsessed state? *spiked-online.*11 December 2006

ceived to be motivated by faith or religious hatred by the victim or any other person".[111] This highly subjective criteria means that statistics are a highly unreliable indicator of prejudice in British society. Today, people are encouraged to report to the police relatively minor incidents which they might have ignored previously, such as verbal abuse. It has been common practice for some police forces to record attacks as race or faith hate crimes if they perceive it to be as such, *even if the victim does not report it as such themselves*. Taking these factors into account, it is not surprising that racially-motivated attacks seem to rise every year.[112]

While direct experience of prejudice is not widespread, a number of high-profile incidents have certainly made Muslims feel afraid of the police. The shooting of the Brazilian, Jean Charles de Menezes on 22 July 2005, and the anti-terror raid on a home in Forest Gate on 2nd June 2006 have done severe damage to the police's reputation and made some Muslims wary of cooperation. The intrusion and violence involved in these two incidents have quite rightly been subjected to public criticism and scrutiny. However, the way in which our society reacts to these incidents, and the overall culture of victimhood have not allowed us to deal with Muslim fears. Rather, they have exacerbated them.

In a number of articles, the writer and broadcaster, Kenan Malik, has interrogated the claims made by Muslim lobby groups about police discrimination against Muslims. In one article, he discusses the impact of anti-terrorism laws on Muslims. In the summer of 2004, the Home Office released figures showing that there had been a 300% rise in the number of Asian men stopped and searched by the police. Such a figure understandably caused alarm in the media and suggested that the police were disproportionately targeting young Asian men. However, on closer inspection, Malik points out that only 3,000 men were actually stopped under the new Terrorism Act, and approximately half of these were Muslim. This is 1,500 people in a population of 1.6m Muslims – just under 0.01%. Malik goes on to say:

> *"A total of 21,577 people from all backgrounds were stopped and searched under the terror laws. The majority—14,429—were white. Yet when I interviewed Iqbal Sacranie, General Secretary of the Muslim Council of Britain, he insisted that, "95-98% of those stopped and searched under the anti-terror laws are Muslim." The real figure is 14% (for Asians). However many times I showed him the true statistics, he refused to budge. His figures appear to have been simply plucked out of the sky."* [113]

There is certainly disproportionate treatment of Asians; they account for 5% of the population, yet 14% of those stopped under the new terrorism law were Asian. However, this is likely to be skewered by the fact that two thirds of anti-terror stop and searches are carried out in London, where Asians make up 11% of the population. Asians are also more likely to be targeted because they have a younger age profile compared to the wider population.[114]

As well as inflating fears, the accusation of Islamophobia has now become a convenient way of closing down debate. The Muslim-led groups that monitor Islamophobia not only record incidents of attacks on individuals, but criticisms of Islam and Muslims in general public discourse. The IHRC organizes an annual 'Islamophobe of the Year' award, which it has given to BNP leader Nick Griffin, but also prominent mainstream commentators like Polly Toynbee. The criticism of Islam by even well-regarded journalists is conflated with personal, violent attacks on Muslims. Valid criticism of Islam or Muslims is hindered by accusations of Islamopbohia.

The myth of Muslim victimisation (2) – Discrimination and disadvantage

It is widely agreed that Muslims are a disadvantaged community compared to other

111. METROPOLITAN POLICE AUTHORITY (2003) Long term trends in racist and homophobic crime performance. London, Metropolitan Police Authority..

112. Ibid. Paragraphs 17 and 18. "The Racial and Violent Crime Task Force was first established in 1998. This and the publicity surrounding the publication of the Stephen Lawrence inquiry report almost certainly led to the increase of reporting seen in 1999/2000...The Task Force initiated high profile internal and external strategies that have continued over the five-year period to encourage victims to report crime and ensure better internal recording, " 'Long term trends in racist and homophobic crime performance'

113. MALIK, K. (2005b) Islamaphobia Myth, *Prospect* February 2005

114. See Also, MVA and Miller, J. (2000) *Profiling Populations Available for Stops and Searches*. London, Home Office Policing and Reducing Crime Unit.

groups in the UK. They tend to have poorer employment rates, live in the poorest neighbourhoods with low quality housing, suffer worse ill health and have low educational attainment. Half of Pakistanis and Bangladeshi households live in the 10% most deprived wards in England.[115] Numerous research studies and reports have been produced to demonstrate that Muslims suffer economic and educational penalties, and that specific policies are needed to address their needs.[116] However, it is far from clear why such problems are interpreted through the framework of religious difference. Policy-makers talk about helping "Muslims", but levels of social disadvantage actually relate more closely to ethnicity than religious grouping, and even more importantly, to socio-economic class. We consider here two areas – employment and education.

Employment

According to data comparing religious groups, 30% of Muslim men are economically inactive compared to 16% of Christians. 40% of Muslim men and over a quarter of Muslim women in employment work in the distribution, hotel and restaurant industries (i.e. lower paid and more part-time) compared with 17% of Christian men and one fifth of Christian women. Muslim and Sikh men are the least likely to be working in managerial or professional occupations (just under 30%) but this is not much less than the Christian percentage of just over 30%. Jews (almost 60%) and Buddhists (50%) are the most likely.[117]

However, the patterns of disadvantage do not conform strictly to religious groupings. The author of a major study, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, into employment rates for ethnic groups notes, "while Muslims, as a group, do record the lowest percentage in full-time work (half that for Hindus), the experience of the Indian Muslim minority…challenges any notion of a simple negative association between being Muslim and the likelihood of holding a full-time job".[118] 41% of Indian Muslim adults were in full-time work, compared to 26% of Pakistanis, 23% of Bangladeshis, 55% of Hindus and 43% of Sikhs.

These significant differences can be explained by a number of factors. First, there is the relative youth of the Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Sikh populations; younger people are generally less likely to be in full-time work. Also, the differences in unemployment between all ethnic groups narrow significantly for the 25-39 age group. Second, the groups with particularly high levels of unemployment (Pakistani, Bangladeshis and Sikhs) all share concentration in those geographical areas where unemployment levels are highest or industries have waned (such as the textile industries in the North). Third, there are the differences amongst the first generation of immigrants who arrived in the UK, in terms of where they came from, their educational attainment, cultural traditions, skills, and financial capital. These varying factors can exert a significant effect on the next generation.[119]

Therefore, there is little evidence to suggest a significant *direct* causal link between religion and employment discrimination. Looking at the employment statistics of all groups, it seems that socio-economic background and educational achievement exert a primary effect. Undoubtedly, personal prejudices can operate against Muslims in the workplace, but other groups also experience this. Controlled tests conducted since the 1960s, whereby white and ethnic minority applicants respond to jobs for which they are equally suitable, reproduce the same finding that at least one third of private employers discriminate against Caribbeans, Asians, or both.[120] There are also certain cultural factors that will disadvantage particular groups, for instance people's choice of clothing or adherence to

115. THE PERFORMANCE AND INNOVATION UNIT (2001) Report on Ethnic Minorities. London, Cabinet Office. para 35, p.12.

116. See for instance OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE (2004) Muslims in the UK: Policies for Engaged Citizens. London, Open Society Institute, GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY (2006) Muslims in London. London, Greater London Authority, CHOUDHURY, T. A. (2002) Monitoring Minority Protection in the EU. Open Society Institute.

117. Information drawn from data collated by the National Office for Statistics in 2003-2004 and the 2001 census.

118. BROWN, M. S. (2000) Religion and economic activity in the South Asian population. *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* 23, 1035-1061. (accessed online 24.01.07)

119. Ibid. 1048. Also MODOOD, T. (2005) *Multicultural Politics. Race, Ethnicity and Muslims in Britain,* Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press. p. 78

120. MODOOD, T. (2005) *Multicultural Politics. Race, Ethnicity and Muslims in Britain,* Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press. p. 74

prayer times. It has been argued by some that the importance of alcohol in the social networking side of the workplace is indirectly discriminatory towards Muslims. However, if they choose not to enter social spaces where alcohol is served, it could be reasonably argued this is their choice and not a deliberate exclusion.

In September 2006, a new study by the Equal Opportunities Commission reported that 68% of Muslim women are economically inactive compared to no more than a third of any other religious group (being "economically inactive" may include being a student, being disabled or performing a caring role such as staying at home and looking after children). *The Guardian* reported the findings with the headlines, "Muslim girls surge ahead at school but held back at work", and "My manager said I looked like a terrorist", hinting that widespread discrimination and prejudice is to blame. Following the report, Ruth Kelly, the Minister for Women and Communities, said she would like to see more Muslim women wearing the *hijab* in the media to boost their public image.

However, the report itself showed that the picture of disadvantage is more complex. A large number of these women *choose* not to work because women with Pakistani or Bangladeshi backgrounds tend on average to have their first child earlier than women of other ethnic groups, and they also tend to have more children. Figures from the Labour Force Survey, Spring 2005, show that only 23% or 36,000 Pakistani and Bangladeshi women aged 16–34 who are not in employment actually *want* to be in work.[121]

For those who do work, they are relatively successful and do not seem put off by negative stereotypes. 25% of Muslim women in employment are working in managerial or professional occupations, a higher proportion than Christian women (21%), though less than Hindu women (27%), Buddhist women (27%) and Jewish women (34%). 52% of young Pakistani and 47% of young Bangladeshi women employees aspire to be their own boss, a senior professional or in senior management, compared to only 4% of their white British counterparts.

Without doubt, some Muslim women will encounter prejudice and stereotypes in the workplace, but hyping up these issues will only increase the anxiety women may have about going to work. Furthermore, there are many positive things that Government can do to help women of all backgrounds enter the workplace, such as offering education and career services, especially to those women returning to work after having a family. To diagnose this as a "Muslim problem" will fail to respond to the widest need.

Education

The same process of mystification is often at work when people discuss inequality in the area of education. It is undeniable that underachievement at primary and secondary school is highest amongst Muslims. According to the census of 2001, fewer children of Bangladeshi and Pakistani parents obtained five A-C GCSE passes than any community, except for children of Black British origin.[122] But is this because they are Muslim? In education, there are major disparities between ethnic groups, but this is usually accounted for by poverty. *The Economist*, on 12th March 2005, reported that in a study of British educational statistics that took into account pupils who received free school meals (i.e. as an indication of family income) found that – contrary to expectations – of all ethnic groups it was whites who were the most underachieving.

In 2003-2004 31% of Muslims of working age had no qualifications – the highest proportion for any religious group (compared to the next group, Sikhs, at 23%, followed by Christians at 15%). Again,

121. The word 'choose' is used with caution here, as any woman's decision to pursue a career will be made in the context of family pressures, as well as wider cultural expectations.

122. MASOOD, E. (2006) British Muslims Media Guide. London, Counterpoint.

this figure is heavily skewered by the fact that a large number of older Muslims grew up abroad and had a limited education. In some respects, the situation is also improving. British-born Muslims between the ages of 16 and 30 are twice as likely as Muslims born elsewhere to have a degree or equivalent qualification. This suggests that there is a high degree of social mobility between generations. Among Muslims, half of those aged 18-30 is in post-compulsory education compared to 38% of the general population. In 40% of local authorities that monitor by ethnic origin, Pakistanis are more likely than whites to achieve five A*-C GCSEs. Tariq Modood, the leading authority on racial and ethnic disadvantage in Britain, has noted that despite evidence to show that Asian groups experience higher levels of racism in schools than other groups, they go on to have high staying-on rates and a stronger academic orientation than other groups, especially compared to Caribbean males who may suffer similar disadvantages in socio-economic background.[123]

Regardless of the complexity of the evidence, some groups have campaigned vociferously for more religion in schools, arguing that Muslims are disadvantaged by a failure to recognise their identity. In 2004, a group of Muslim academics produced a position paper entitled *Muslims on Education*, launched by Muslim Labour peer, Baroness Uddin and co-authored by the Association of Muslim Social Scientists, the education and development campaign FED, the Muslim College UK, and the Forum against Islamophobia and Racism. The report stated, "There are still major Muslim populations within the UK that are not served by any suitable education service, state or privately funded". The authors called for special classes in Islamic subjects, more single-sex education and prayer rooms in secondary schools. The report called for more Muslim faith schools, and suggested "institutional racism" was the major stumbling block. It recommended compulsory religious education from ages 14 to 16, and a new 'A' level in Islamic studies (although there is no equivalent in 'Christian studies'). All schools with a majority of Muslim pupils, they argued, should have one teacher of Islam available for collective worship and instruction in Islamic subjects.[124]

It is not just Muslim groups who are campaigning for more recognition of faith in schools. In October 2006, the GLA produced a report entitled "Muslims in London", which argued that, "Muslims in mainstream primary, secondary, further and higher education often experience intolerance towards their faith and practices and a lack of knowledge about Muslim culture."[125]

But is the lack of provision of halal food, or the absence of a prayer room really the most pressing problem facing the majority of Muslim children? Is the inclusion of religion in the curriculum a way to deal with underachievement in financially stretched schools in deprived areas? Or, like non-Muslims, are Muslim parents more likely to be worried about standards of teaching, discipline and values?

The exaggeration of Islamophobia and discrimination hides the real, complex causes of disadvantage in schooling. Muslim parents are told that their children are failing at school because they are not getting enough respect for their religious identity. The solution, we are told, is to give more attention to Islam in schools. Muslim journalist, Faisal Bodi, argues:

"In fact the solution lies in more, and better, religion. The resort to indiscriminate violence against the homeland is often a reaction to a national disconnect, a lack of identification with a country that is persecuting fellow Muslims abroad and whose institutions remain pregnant with Islamophobic attitudes cultivated by orientalists over centuries…But it is also a function of poor secular and religious education. Muslim pupils underperform nationally, and their appreciation

123. MODOOD, T. (2005) *Multicultural Politics. Race, Ethnicity and Muslims in Britain*, Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press. p.82-100

124. ASSOCIATION OF MUSLIM SOCIAL SCIENTISTS (2004) Muslims on Education. Richmond, Association of Muslim Social Scientists.

125. GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY (2006) Muslims in London. London, Greater London Authority. p.41

of Islam is prejudiced by inadequate educational provision in the state sector and the reluctance to fund their schools in the private sector".[126]

This argument rests on the notion that Muslims need to have their identity and culture in schools respected. But by emphasising the different identities of children, are we reinforcing their sense of difference to each other? Young Muslims may feel further alienated from society the more they are made to feel that "their culture" is different and must be taught separately. It is plain sense to show children aspects of their heritage and enrich their understanding of other people's cultural backgrounds, but focusing on 'respect' to the extent that some lobby groups and commentators wish might end up limiting children's horizons and curiosity about others. After all, Muslim children are part of "our culture" too.

The Qualification and Curriculum Authority, regarded by its critics as marching in the vanguard of political correctness, has devoted a chunk of the history curriculum at Key Stage Three to a rather unsubtle celebration of Islamic history and civilisation ("What were the achievements of the Islamic states 600-1600?") something not done for any other minority religion. While many aspects of British history are subjected to critical scrutiny, pupils are left with the impression that the Muslim world at the height of its power had few flaws.

The obsession with identity could have a particularly corrosive effect in schools, the one place where young people should be taught about the world beyond their immediate, familiar experience. When education becomes about promoting 'difference' and validating separate identities, it is not surprising that schools in some parts of the UK are effectively segregating along ethnic and religious lines. Parents are encouraged to believe that their children will not learn sufficiently about "their culture" or be given adequate support if they go to a school crowded by other ethnic groups. Emphasising difference will increase the sense of exclusion many Muslims already feel towards the mainstream, and even encourage the kind of self-referential identity politics that fuels the culture of victimhood.

The overwhelming focus on 'Muslims' as a disadvantaged group confuses the long-term, structural causes of inequality and reduces problems down to a 'lack of recognition'. It is not surprising that Muslim lobby groups are keen to encourage this as it gives weight to their demands for special religious and cultural provisions. It also reinforces their image as leaders of a victimised group who are marked off from society because of their religion – a claim which is highly dubious.

Victim mentality

The cumulative effect of the public discourse about Muslims has been the fostering of a victim mentality. Many of the Muslim respondents in the interviews admitted that there was a culture of victimhood amongst some Muslims, and sometimes too much sensitivity shown by Muslims.

"It's the new 'black gang culture' of our generation, the new 'alternative' struggle/identity crisis, it's the new anti-establishment thing to be. And yes, victimisation is a big thing here. Ali G's 'is it because I is black, turns into, is it because I is a Muslim' … it's the same king of thing." Female, non-religious (but of Muslim background), 21, London

"Yeah I think it [culture of victimhood] does happen. I think it happens more than Islamaphobia to be honest. Every time anybody is slightly inquisitive about the way we address issues, but because of our own insecurities we use that and say 'its only because I am Muslim'". Female, Muslim, 20, London

126. BODI, F. (2005) A dubious leap of faith. *The Guardian.* 16th November 2005

"You do see where some people are coming from. But some people just take it overboard and exaggerate, so yeah there is a slight culture of victimhood…I think some people try to use it as some kind of excuse – like 'oh just because I am a Muslim'" Female, Muslim, 21, London

As a number of respondents admitted, some Muslims probably do exaggerate their sense of victimisation in their day-to-day lives. On one level, this is fairly unsurprising and hardly a matter for concern. Playing the 'victim card' is a pretty normal part of contemporary personal politics. But what of those who genuinely feel afraid and anxious about their status in society? Their sense of victimisation is not simply paranoia or a personality defect. This victim mentality is given social credence by institutions, politicians, the media and lobby groups. It is unsurprising that young people believe they are being discriminated against when everyone tells them so. When the police hang around outside mosques, ostensibly to protect Muslims from attack, they are likely to make them feel even more afraid.

One aspect of this victim mentality is the tendency of the authorities to publicise any isolated act of injustice against a Muslim as the 'tip of the iceberg' and symptomatic of widespread Islamophobia. In June 2006, the term 'institutional religious intolerance' was coined following the inquiry into the murder of Zahid Mubarek – a young Muslim male who was attacked in his cell at Feltham Young Offenders Institution by his cell mate, Robert Stewart. The term dominated news headlines about the inquiry, and prompted widespread concern about the treatment of Muslims in British prisons. In its eighty-eight recommendations, the report suggested various provisions for Muslim prisoners, including more imams in prisons.

However, the report refused to state whether there actually was evidence of 'institutional religious intolerance' in the prison system. The authors admitted that they had not been able to investigate the treatment of Muslims in the prison system as this was beyond the scope of their inquiry. They only urged the use of the term as a "catalyst for concerns about the treatment of Muslim prisoners", as they felt that Macpherson's term, 'institutional racism', did not take religious prejudice into sufficient account. The report cited the first special adviser on Muslim issues to the prison service, Maqsood Ahmed, who said that if there had been any increased level of Islamophobia in the recent period it was "muted and low-key".[127]

Mubarek's tragic death did not prove widespread anti-Muslim discrimination as suggested in the media, but instead, multiple failures in the prison service, which might have affected any inmate. The murder itself was probably not even motivated by Islamophobia. The inquiry heard two psychologists give evidence that Stewart's mental state was so severe that he would probably have killed anyone sharing a cell with him that night, regardless of religion or ethnic background. The inquiry condemned the mishandling of information about Stewart's mental state, and also stated that Mubarek was moved into Stewart's cell because it was the only one available due to severe overcrowded and financial shortages. The failure of the guards to prevent the murder was rightly condemned as a case of extreme negligence arising from serious shortcomings in the prison service.

The prism of religion means that injustices in the system or cases of neglect are now exploited as flashpoints for anger amongst some Muslim lobby groups. A tragic, isolated incident becomes used as an anchor around which to discuss the persecution of Muslims, even though there is often little to prove that Muslims are being discriminated against. The effect of such stories in the media is to reinforce the Muslim population's feeling that it is under siege. If people who happen to be Muslims

127. THE ZAHID MUBAREK INQUIRY (2006) The Zahid Mubarek Inquiry Report. See para 62.27.

are mistreated or suffer neglect at the hands of public institutions, we should be cautious about allowing this to be co-opted into the victimisation narrative.

A race apart

The impact of Islamist terrorism has been to shine a spotlight on Muslims, and make other people afraid of them. Understandably, many Muslims feel unfairly tarnished by the actions of a small minority and dislike the way some commentators have sought to demonise their entire religion. To an extent, this feeling of being misunderstood is probably inevitable. In response, we should welcome all attempts to demystify Islam as it is practiced and understood by the majority of Muslims, and remind ourselves of the many things Muslims and non-Muslims have in common.

But instead of showing that Muslims are like everyone else, the authorities have been treating Muslims as a distinct group, and as a result, our society has come to see them as more alien than they actually are. Institutions like the police, the law courts, schools, local authorities and even hospitals, are now so conscious of Muslims' 'special needs' that they have begun to treat them like different creatures altogether.

In January 2007, the Government announced a £5m scheme implemented by local authorities to tackle Islamophobia and run initiatives to "deter people who might be attracted by Osama Bin Laden's evil message". But speaking in the local newspaper in Bradford, Bary Malik, a local Muslim group leader feared that singling out the Muslim community would only alienate other minorities.[128] Although such schemes are intended to improve community cohesion, they can inadvertently widen divisions between groups.

A particularly illuminating example of this approach at an everyday level can be found in a set of Bedfordshire police force guidelines, leaked in August 2005, on how to deal with Muslim terror suspects. They recommended that "rapid entry needs to be the last resort and raids into Muslim houses are discouraged for a number of religious dignity reasons". The guidelines also recommended that police seek to avoid looking at "unclad Muslim women", "entering occupied bedrooms and bathrooms even before dawn", and states that "the use of police dogs will be considered serious desecration of the premises".[129]

Police raids can be brutal and frightening in any family's home. It is, however, of some concern that the Bedfordshire police should consider Muslims to be more sensitive than others about being seen without appropriate clothing, and having their homes disheveled. After all, it is not just Muslim households that object to dogs pouncing around on furniture, or being spied on in the bathroom. Bizarrely, the guidelines also state that 'rapid entry' into Muslim households should always be the last resort, as if this were not always the case: "In the current climate the justification for pre-dawn raids on Muslim houses needs to be clear and transparent". Considering how intrusive house-raids are, one would have hoped this was always done with clear and transparent justification, regardless of whether the household is Muslim or not.

The way the police, or any other authority, behaves should be judged according to universal standards. Although public services should try to accommodate the different needs of users as much as possible, this should be within a framework of equal rights. It is playing into the hands of extremists to act as if Muslims should be treated differently to everyone else, because this reinforces their feeling of being outsiders. At the same time, the over-attention to Muslims can create resentment amongst other groups who feel they are not receiving the same benefits.

128. BOURLEY, A. (2007) £5m bid to turn young Muslims from terror. *Bradford Telegraph & Argus*, 10th January 2007

129. 'No shoes allowed in terrorist captures'. WorldNetDaily. 2nd August 2005. http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=45571 (last accessed 22.01.07)

Causing offence

One of the most dramatic issues for British Muslims in recent years has been freedom of speech, which surfaced most recently during the furore over the publication of controversial cartoons by the Danish newspaper, Jyllands-Posten. The cartoons, considered blasphemous by many Muslims worldwide, raised debate about whether causing offence to religious minorities is acceptable.

Figure 17: "One of the benefits of modern society is the freedom to criticise other people's religious or political views, even when it causes offence" (Muslim population)

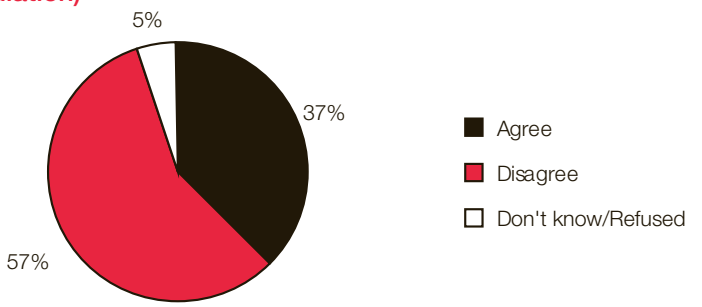
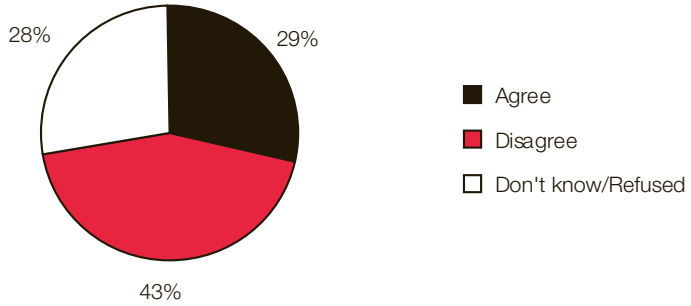


Figure 18: "One of the benefits of modern society is the freedom to criticise other people's religious or political views, even when it causes offence" (General population)



In the survey, there was no discernible difference of opinion about freedom of speech between those who pray more often and those who do not (Fig 17). During the interviews, most respondents we spoke to said they were less concerned about blasphemy, and more about Muslims being targeted unfairly and therefore needing special protection. The overwhelming concern from the wide range of respondents was to be sensitive to people's feelings. However, many respondents we spoke to felt that although the cartoons were offensive, they should not have been banned.

"A lot of people got carried way in their reaction to these cartoons. But should people be stopped from drawing these cartoons? I don't think they should be. People had a right to be angry, but it's not a good idea to express their anger they way they did. It only served to stoke up this idea of fundamentalism taking over the young British Muslim community…In a way I would have liked the papers to publish these cartoons – its news, and people want to see news." Male, Muslim, 21, Manchester

They added that some of the Muslim protesters shown in the media had been too extreme:

"I find [the Danish cartoons] quite offensive. Although I thought Muslims reacted quite badly." Female, Muslim, 21, Manchester

Interestingly, our research suggests there is even less appetite for free speech amongst the wider population (Fig 18).

In our interviews with non-religious, non-Muslim respondents, they also showed concerned about sensitivity. When asked about mocking other people's religious beliefs, a number of them were strongly negative:

"No, I don't think that it's right to mock or ridicule… I think criticism and open debate is fine, so all the opinions are out there, but mockery to no end, is just destructive…But the thing is, I don't agree with the Muslim reaction either. It's not a reason to provoke them and it's not a reason to not uphold freedom of speech, it's about sensitivity." Female, non-religious, 22, London

"No. I really don't think that's freedom of speech. It's disrespectful and ignorant. I can only really

relate to this as my experience as a vegetarian, possibly the closest thing I have to a religious belief. When people try and get me to eat meat or say things about veggies being this, that and the other, it's just offensive and rude…It's the same for religion and political beliefs, you shouldn't mock what you're not or try to convert those who aren't what you are." Female, non-religious, 23, London

The survey by the Pew Global Attitudes Project, conducted in 13 countries, found that the majority (52%) of the British general public sympathised with Muslims over the Danish cartoons affair.[130]

Muslim lobby groups have lobbied hard since the late 1990s to bring in legislation outlawing incitement to religious hatred on the grounds that certain types of speech can offend people, create tension and be unnecessarily harmful to community relations. They have privileged the 'right' of vulnerable groups not to be harmed above the 'right' to debate ideas and beliefs to their full.

Some have suggested that the demands of Muslim groups have gone too far and that we need to re-assert the tradition of free speech in Britain. But in reality, Muslim groups' demands are not the first to undermine the principle of free speech in western countries; rather, they follow a trend that has been institutionalised since the 1980s through speech codes on university campuses, diversity etiquette guidelines in the workplace, and politically correct jargon in local councils and public services. As the Canadian philosopher, Michael Neumann, points out it is Western culture's own exaggerated anxiety about giving offence that has created some of the current dilemmas regarding Muslims.

"Many graduates of the kiddie left that imploded in the early 1970s gave up on eliminating poverty and inequality. They devoted themselves to carping about hypocrisy and political incorrectness; this apparently innocuous pursuit quickly gained mainstream acceptance. Today we live with the consequences; a culture of respect incredibly sensitive to what doesn't matter, and incredibly insensitive to what does".[131]

Ironically, it was feminist and gay rights lobby groups in the 1970s and 1980s who first demanded curbs on "hate speech" to protect their particular identities. They are now seeing the way such laws can be used against them by religious groups. The modern day commandment, "Thou shalt not offend" has given rise to ever-more restrictive demands by identity groups and helped foster a victim culture. Although the demand for respect is framed in terms of tolerance, it has produced a climate of intolerance.

The see-saw effect

The overreaction of institutions towards Muslims has become highly counterproductive, creating a climate of sensitivity and tension between groups. In recent years, the media has picked up on numerous examples of measures taken by authorities not to upset Muslims (usually without checking first), which have helped foster a belief that Muslims are unduly sensitive.

In 2003 the local council in High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire banned an advertisement for a Christmas carol service arguing that religious issues could inflame tensions in the multi-ethnic community. In 2005 Dudley Council banned all images of pigs in its offices (including on calendars, cuddly toys, etc) because one Muslim complained about a consignment of pig-shaped stress toys. The Tate Modern controversially withdrew an art work by John Latham which featured a copy of the Qu'ran, although no Muslim had actually complained. The London Underground banned a poster for an American television series, which pointed out that the central hero fighting terrorism was a Muslim. The

130. THE PEW GLOBAL ATTITUDES PROJECT (2006) Europe's Muslims More Moderate. The Great Divide: How Westerners and Muslims View Each Other. Washington, The Pew Research Center. p.22

131. NEUMANN, M. (2006) Maximum Respect. *Catalyst.* May 2006

132. For further details of these examples, see 'Officer's Bin Laden Comment 'a joke', BBC Online 3rd December 2003

MCB was baffled with the decision, saying it made a nice change to see a Muslim in a positive light. In 2003, a prison officer in Suffolk was dismissed from his post after making a joke about Osama Bin Laden in the presence of Asian visitors, even though the tribunal could not establish whether they had even overheard the remark.[132]

No wonder people are left to conclude that Muslims are oversensitive. There might be some individual Muslims who overreact and complain, but this is probably the case with all religious and cultural groups. The decision to ban images or words is often done without any sense of perspective. Undeniably, anti-Muslim prejudice exists. But the cultivation of the victim mentality means that this is taken wildly out of proportion. At the same time, the perception that Muslims are "getting special treatment" fuels even more resentment – a kind of see-saw effect.

"Yes I think there is, there is no doubting it. There are two sides to it, there is an Islamophobic sentiment and victim hood, they play off each other." Male, Muslim, 22, London

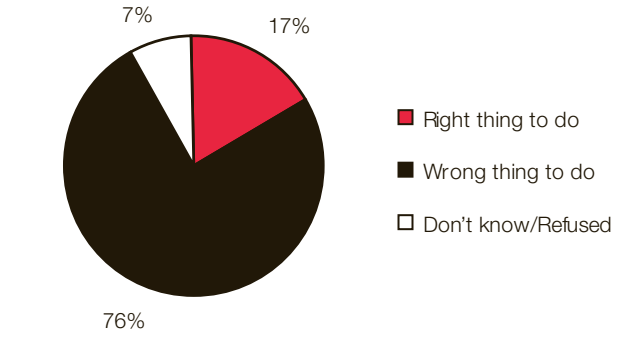
"I think that the government needs to leave the Muslim community alone… It's always Islam this or Islam that, a Muslim did this or a Muslim did that, or we are doing this for Muslims. That's just not right. It put across the wrong image. I wouldn't call it special treatment, I'd call it rubbish treatment, we get stopped and searched on the streets, people look at us like we are terrorists, and to top it off, they do things like cancel Christmas celebrations and they think they are doing us a favour." Male, Muslim, 22, Leeds

The attempt to be sensitive to Muslims' feelings can therefore backfire and make Muslims feel even more self-conscious. Our survey shows that many Muslims feel the response of the authorities often goes too far (Fig 19).

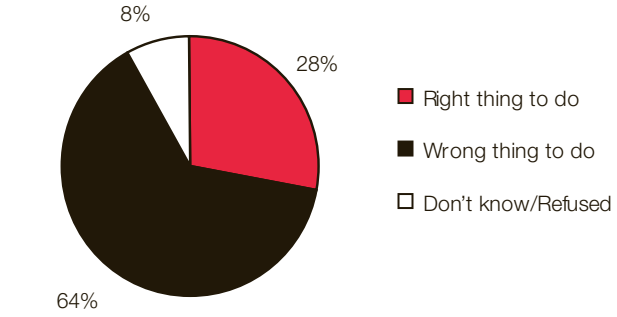
A slightly higher proportion of people believed that authorities go "over the top" (28%) than "do not make enough effort" (20%).

Figure 19: I am going to summarise actions taken by two local councils in Britain. Please say in each case if you think the council's decision was the right thing or the wrong thing to do.

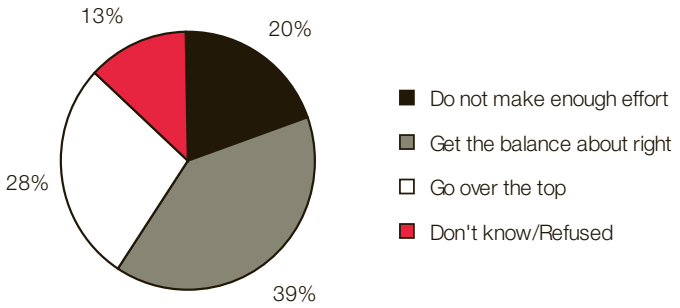
"In 2003, a local council banned an advertisement for a Christmas carol service for fear that it might cause tensions between religious groups".



In 2005, a local council banned all images of pigs from its offices (on calendars, toys, etc) telling workers they might offend Muslims' feelings



In general, do you think the authorities in Britain sometimes go over the top in trying not to offend Muslims, or do you think they tend not to make enough of an effort, or do you think they get the balance about right?



The perceived oversensitivity of Muslims – amplified through sensationalist media stories – does little to create a sense of harmony. Parts of the wider population believe that Muslims exaggerate their problems:

"I think there is a culture of victimhood, yeah. I think that Muslims are over sensitive and so every little thing is seen as an attack on them or their religion." Female, Hindu, 21, Birmingham

"Speaking to friends that I have who are young Muslims, that's not something that many would share and they may not like that culture, its more an impression that the community leadership is creating or selective people who are putting forward that point of view in the media." Male, non-religious, 24, Oxford

The apparent favourable treatment given to Muslims may mean that other groups can also become resentful.

"I don't think Christians are treated fairly, because there is a tendency to think that if someone insults Muslims or Sikhs or Hindus, that's bad, that's wrong, their opinions should be respected… Some groups are privileged, and I'm not one of those groups." Male, Christian, 24, London

"…[three or four years ago] in my college…there was a Muslim prayer room and in the halls there wasn't a Christian prayer room and the Christians were not allowed to use the Muslim prayer room for meetings…and I'm sorry but I don't see how that's OK and it actually really caused problems" Female, non-religious, 23, London

The rules of the "victim game" mean that is not only Muslim groups now who demand recognition and respect for their identity. In 2005, the campaigning group Christian Voice organized 1,500 protesters outside BBC venues over the decision to screen the controversial musical, "Jerry Springer: the Opera", which it described as blasphemous. The protest was inspired by an incident one week previously, when four hundred Sikh protesters successfully stormed a performance of the play 'Behzti' at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, closing it down. In May 2006, the group Hindu Human Rights campaigned against an exhibition by the Indian artist, M F Husain, at a London venue, Asia House, because it deemed the paintings to be "an abuse of Hindus and Hinduism". The exhibition closed after acts of vandalism and harassment by members of the public.

The politics of multiculturalism has created a curious dynamic; some groups demand special protections for their particular identity, which in turn encourages other groups to make their own demands. Muslim groups have operated along these lines for some time, but they did not start this framework. Rather, it was the broader politics of multiculturalism, which asserts that controversial opinions must be silenced in the name of protecting vulnerable minorities.

Feeling defensive

Understandably, Muslims have been feeling defensive about how wider society views them and their religion. One of the responses of the Government has been to try to present a more positive image of Islam. In 2006, the publicly-funded Festival of Muslim Cultures worked to promote Muslim achievements in science, technology, art and music. In the same year, the Mayor of London's Office supported IslamExpo, a major conference to showcase the diversity of Muslim life.

Initiatives like these may well help to promote a richer knowledge of Islam and greater awareness of Muslim issues, but they can also reinforce a feeling that Muslims need to be understood *because they are so different.* The impetus behind promoting a more positive image of Islam

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/suffolk/3288257.stm (last accessed, 12.12.06) and THE INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY (2005) *The British Muslim Community in 2005,* Wiltshire, The Institute for the Study of Islam and Christianity.

is the fear that Muslims are so unruly and angry that they need to be appeased and given special treatment. For all these efforts, the more attention we give to Muslims, the more they feel scrutinised, and in turn, the more defensive they will feel. By focusing on cultural identities, we reinforce the feeling that Muslims are alien and need to be treated differently.

"Emphasise individuality and stop boxing people." Female, Muslim, 22, Leeds

Numerous respondents complained about being labeled as 'terrorists'. In fact, it is very rare in the mainstream media to hear such blanket condemnations of Muslims or Islam. In light of warnings about Islamophobia after September 11th, the Government spin machine even encouraged *The Sun* to print a headline on its centre page on 13th September 2001 – 'Islam is not an evil religion'.[133] Exasperated policy-makers might well wonder what else they have to do to prove they are not demonising Muslims.

In reality, what many Muslims are reacting to is the feeling of being treated differently and placed under severe scrutiny. We are constantly told about how important it is to listen to Muslims' needs and understand "their culture", which only reinforces this idea that they are not like everyone else. Sadly it is true that many Muslims feel under the spotlight and very uncomfortable with the assumptions often made about their lives. Although claims about Islamophobia are certainly exaggerated, non-Muslims have inevitably begun to look at Muslims as different.

Policy-makers maybe fixated on identity, but many younger Muslims want to choose for themselves and not be categorized.

"I think it's good that they are teaching people about Islam, but I don't think they should keep emphasizing the difference between people. We need to somehow make communities work together." Female, Hindu, 21, Oxford

"I mean in a group of friends at school, with mixed backgrounds, there is no PC approach, you just gel together because …you know each other before identities are strongly formed … there needs to be emphasis on the unifying force and less on the divisions." Female, non-religious, 22, Birmingham

"I just want people to experience new things, people need to look outside the box they live in and not be so suffocated by what they know, and open the doors to what they don't know because there are some really amazing people out there". Female, Muslim, 22, London

"I was with a couple of friends of mine… we were talking about how we keep having to label ourselves, and I said something about sticking something up where the sun doesn't shine... and my friend said that was so British to say that. No one had to tell me you have to be British, it's a part of who I am, it's where I grew up. So this categorisation is very unfortunate. Even when they have this ethnicity form to fill in… I don't see the point of it, but apparently its important… I get confused; British Asian, British Indian, Indian, British… other…" Male, Muslim, 22, London

133. BIRT, J. (2005) Lobbying and Marching: British Muslims and the State. IN ABBAS, T. (Ed.) *Muslims in Britain. Communities Under Pressure.* London/New York, Zed Books/Room 400. p.94.

7

Who speaks for Muslims?

A strong Muslim identity has emerged in the UK over the past two decades, and younger Muslims are more likely to identify with their religious community than previous generations. The growth of Muslim organisations has meant more visibility of faith-based issues and a confidence to seek accommodations within British society. Since the late 1980s the Government has consulted with Muslim groups in order to gauge Muslim opinion on a range of issues. This has been encouraged by the broader political framework of multiculturalism, which categorizes citizens into religious, ethnic and cultural groups. The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) was set up in 1997 at the request of the then Conservative Home Secretary, Michael Howard, to act as the coherent and unified voice of Muslims to the Government.

However, in the past two years, there has been much debate about the value of 'community leaders' and their ability to truly represent the views of their communities. As discussed in previous sections, the Muslim population is often regarded as homogenous but contains considerable division and disagreement.

A number of newer organisations have spoken out against unaccountable community leaders whom they claim are driven by narrow political agendas. In November 2005, Progressive British Muslims was launched with the aim to give a platform to those Muslims who "feel under-represented by the existing faith based groups".[134] Muslims for Secular Democracy, launched in June 2006, has argued for the need to stop stereotyping Muslims as "dysfunctional people with burning resentments".[135] In July 2006, the Sufi Muslim Council was set up with the aim of representing the "silent majority" of Sufi Muslims who constitute 80% of the Muslim population. Its leader, Haris Rafiq, argued that existing organisations "lacked the courage to stand up and speak forthrightly about terrorism".[136] In November 2006, the newly formed, cross-ethnic group, New Generation Network, criticized existing policies towards ethnic groups. The founder, Sunny Hundal, argued that the Government is failing to engage with ethnic groups properly and "want so-called community leaders to do the job for them".[137]

What these new organisations share is a feeling that existing Muslim representative organisations fail to adequately represent the majority views of Muslims, or even worse, misrepresent their views.

A major contention has been the MCB's decision not to attend the annual Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) since its inauguration in 2001. Although the MCB strongly denounces the Holocaust, it maintains that it was not historically unique and that the scope of the day should be widened to include other genocides, citing Rwanda, Vietnam, Cambodia, Bosnia and Chechnya. Some critics have interpreted this decision as playing to anti-Semitic elements, and a competitive desire to promote the victimisation of Muslims around the world. The former leader of the MCB, Sir Iqbal Sacranie, also

134. See Progressive British Muslims web page: http://www.pbm.org.uk/ (last accessed, 09.01.07)

135. 'Muslims launch new organisation to challenge perceptions' *Asians in the Media*. 12th June 2006. http://www.asiansin-media.org/news/article.php/current_affairs/1354 (last accessed 09.01.07)

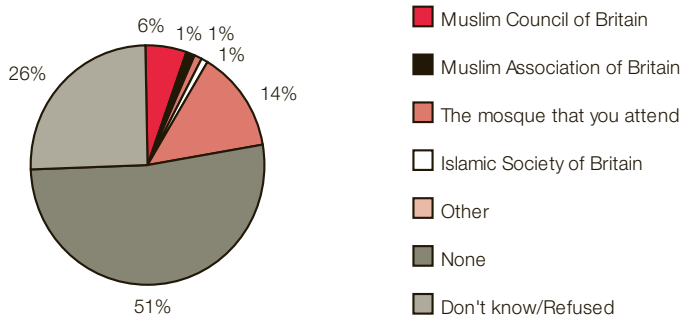
136. KING, O. (2006) Criticism for new Muslim organisation. *The Guardian*. July 19th 2006

137. HUNDAL, S. (2006) This system of self-appointed community leaders can hurt those it should be protecting. 20th November 2006

provoked ire by saying in a radio interview that homosexuality was 'unacceptable' and that same-sex civil partnerships were 'harmful'. The MCB was also the subject of a Panorama documentary in August 2005, which suggested that the organisation was dominated by ideologues with extremist views. The sometimes strident and contentious comments expressed by the MCB have caused concern that the diversity of Muslim opinion is not being heard. Although the MCB has stated that it only represents its affiliate organisations and denies ever having claimed to represent all Muslims, there is considerable annoyance amongst many that it is used as a proxy by the authorities for Muslim opinion.

More generally, there is a feeling that 'community leaders' are unable to relate to the feelings, aspirations and needs of younger Muslims living in Britain. The attempt to represent Muslim opinion as if it were all the same ignores the divisions and disagreements amongst Muslims, particularly between generations. As we have described in this report, the Muslim identity may be stronger, but it is also diverse. The tendency to consult with the 'Muslim community' ends up ignoring many differences of opinion on a range of political and religious issues.

Figure 20: Many organisations seek to represent a Muslim viewpoint on issues. Please name one or two organisations that you think of as best representing your views as a Muslim, or if there is no organisation that really reflects your views please say so.



Feeling under-represented

One of the most striking findings of the research was how respondents did not feel represented by current representative Muslim bodies.

Only 6% named the MCB as an organisation that represents their views (Fig 20). There is a feeling, particularly amongst younger people, that the MCB is dominated by older men, with insufficient representation of young people or women on their board. For many, this makes the MCB seem like an irrelevant institution and not suited to representing the views of the wider British Muslim population.

"…many of the leaders of such organisations are part of the first or second generation and probably represent those groups better, but the youth of today are third or fourth generation and there seems to be a large gap of thought in between the two." Female, Muslim, 24, Manchester

"Who elected them? Who put them there? I don't know, I don't even know who they are." Male, Muslim, 24, London

As we have described in the previous sections, there is a growing generational gap over how Muslims relate to their religion. Younger Muslims see the established mosque structures and institutions set up by their parents' generation as out of touch with their needs, either because they are too religiously oriented or because they are not religiously oriented enough. At one end of the spectrum, there is concern that the MCB is too close to the Government and lacks independence or a "radical edge" to criticise its policies. These Muslims prioritise religious concerns and want a group that will campaign more effectively for the *ummah*. At the other end, there is concern that the MCB is too extreme and religiously-oriented, meaning that it alienates ordinary Muslims who care less about faith-issues and more about issues like tax, employment and education. These

Muslims have secular concerns and therefore want their representative groups to focus on more "bread and butter" issues. Both camps express the contradictions of Muslim identity today. It would be impossible for the MCB or any other representative group to represent Muslim opinion as it if it was held together by a consensus.

New Muslim organisations seeking to represent the 'moderate majority' can therefore play an important role in highlighting the diverse opinions of Muslims and challenging lazy stereotypes. However, it is important not to make the same mistakes again, and to assume that because Muslims are not sufficiently represented by existing community leaders, what they need is simply more and better community leaders. The problem is the notion of the 'community leader' itself, and the idea that you can work out what Muslims think by consulting certain prominent individuals. With the exception of perhaps a few very narrow religious issues, Muslim opinions on politics, the economy, law, culture, the environment, and so on will be as diverse as those of the wider population.

"…it means that Muslims are all lumped together and treated as if they have one voice. That's simply not true." Female, Muslim, 22, Leeds

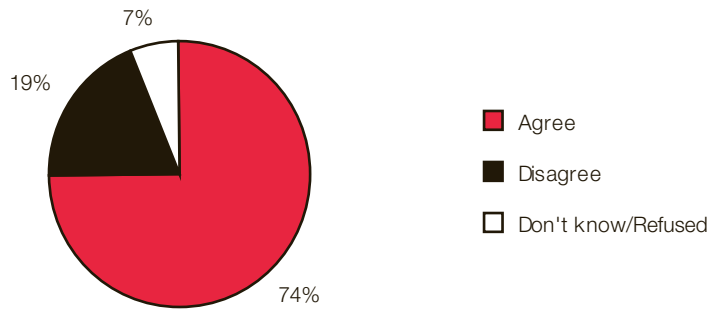
While there is a clear attachment to the *ummah*, most Muslims feel uncomfortable about generalizing about Muslims as a group in Britain (Fig 21).

Confusingly, although Muslims frequently say that they want more engagement and consultation with their community, at the same time, they are also wary of any attempt to represent "Muslim opinion".

In this sense, we need to draw a distinction between community engagement and political engagement. Community engagement starts from the premise that people who belong to a cultural or religious community share the same political opinions and interests, and are therefore best represented by people from that community. Political engagement starts from the premise that people's political opinions and interests are not tied to a cultural or religious identity (although there may well be some overlap), and that they should be represented by people who share the same views as them, regardless of their cultural or religious background. Therefore, there is no reason why an Asian woman MP cannot be just as good at representing her white constituents as any white MP. People vote for ideas and beliefs, not skin colour or ethnicity. Similarly, Muslim voters can be just as disillusioned with the policies and ideas of a Muslim politician, even if he shares their religion. The process of political engagement should allow people to transcend the cultural or ethnic background they inherit and think for themselves about which political ideas and policies are relevant to them. If Government engages with 'community leaders' because they have the right religious or cultural identity, it ends up denying this very real freedom that all citizens should have.

One of the dangers of community engagement is the way it breeds cynicism about the Government's failure to engage with Muslims directly. Many feel that the Government is using its financial and political clout to 'buy off' Muslim groups

Figure 21: "Many people think the Muslim community all believes the same thing. But there is more diversity and disagreement than they realise"



and quieten dissent. At the same time, there is a feeling that the attempt to engage with Muslims is a sign of weakness and a desire to appease critical voices rather than challenge them. On both counts, the strategy of engagement with Muslims is viewed as a cynical gesture.

"I think things like the 'roadshow' were gimmicks. When you have a government-sponsored roadshow it has probably been organised by some third rate civil servant from Manchester. Tony Blair set up these Muslim NGO's like the MCB just so he could have an official representative body. They are trying to bring Islam into the fold. But the fact that Tony Blair had to do that is pathetic". Male, Muslim, 24, London

Ironically, talking to Muslim groups is seen as a ploy by Government to avoid really dealing with Muslim concerns. This shows the irony of identity politics. Because community groups are ultimately unrepresentative, people are cynical about why the Government engages with them in the first place. More and better community groups will fall into the same trap, as long as they are used as a substitute for real political engagement with Muslims as citizens.

The paradox of 'listening'

"I have forsaken everything for what I believe in. Your democratically elected governments continue to perpetuate atrocities against my people all over the world."

So spoke Mohammad Sidique Khan, the thirty-year old ringleader of the London bombings, in a video message he recorded before his death. Responsible for the deaths of fifty-six people and the injury of hundreds more, the audacity of Khan's homemade video diary is breathtaking. What we see in his video is not a soldier at war, but a self-righteous young man who believed that his own moral certainty absolved him of the need to explain himself properly. Nobody elected Khan. As far as we know, he did not have relations with anyone in Palestine, Bosnia or Chechnya. Indeed, he did not even bother to ask his family, friends or neighbours what they thought. At the local mosque near where three of the bombers grew up, one of the committee members, Muhboob Hussein, reacted with anger to 7/7: "This is not Islam, this is not *jihad*, these people are not Muslim. This man [Khan] never came to our mosque....".[138] As one Muslim respondent told us:

"I thought that they were just selfish and just scum." Male, Muslim, 23, London

Khan's claim to represent all Muslims was a truly bizarre one. He had not shown much interest in trying to win people over to their worldview, he thought that "democratically elected governments" had less claim to act on behalf of people than he did. In a strange way, one could argue that Khan had taken the same liberties to speak on behalf of the Muslim community as other Muslim community leaders have done since the 1980s. With impeccable logic, Khan deduced that anyone who shouts loud enough and claims to speak on behalf of a community can win the ear of government.

Instead of challenging Khan's pomposity, many commentators have instead urged the Government to see Khan as a voice of the angry Muslim world, or to at least recognise the legitimacy of his demands. Of course, we would never apply this logic to right wing terrorists. Nobody listened to the revolting ideas of David Copeland, the neo-Nazi London "nail-bomber" who ran a violent campaign against black, Asian and gay communities in 1999. Nobody seriously believes that a far-right group like the Ku Klux Klan represents the views of the Christian majority in the USA. Even a respectable figure like the Archbishop of Canterbury, who has a legitimate claim to

138. AKBAR, A. (2005) Community haunted by a neighbour it tried hard to forget. *The Independent.* 3rd September 2005

speak on behalf of the Church of England congregation, is not expected to deliver the political views of the 37.3m people who stated their religion as "Christian" on the 2001 census. Yet, when it comes to Muslims, by listening to the extreme views of the minority, we have ignored the diverse views of the majority.

No wonder Muslims feel that nobody is listening to them. In fact, all along, we have been listening to them *in the wrong way*. The more we 'listen' to Muslims as a distinct community, the more we turn them into alien creatures whom we struggle to understand. Listening to terrorists' demands might appease a handful of individuals, but in the long-term, it will reinforce the alienation of Muslims who feel they have been exploited to fight somebody else's war.

"These bombers had as much in common with me as they did with other British people, or other religious people, i.e. not much. I hated them for claiming to represent Islam, you just can't do that. We didn't choose them and the responses to their actions will be mixed because Muslims are a mixed group. The sooner people start understanding that, the better!" Female, Muslim, 22, Leeds

"On TV generally… you see Al Mujahiroun. A couple of individuals from that have been invited onto the show, and nobody in the Muslim community gives them the time of day. We're looking at membership numbers of ten or twenty people. They're brought onto TV and broadcast as significant elements within the Muslim community…. it sends out completely the wrong message to non-Muslims who are watching it, who must think 'oh my gosh these people are recruiting a Muslim community, this is what a significant minority Muslim community thinks'." Male, Muslim, 22, London

Having been represented – and misrepresented – by community leaders, extremists and policy-makers, many Muslims have become cynical about whether anyone really cares about what they think. This problem cannot be resolved overnight by more consultation exercises and focus groups. Instead, there needs to be a serious effort to re-engage with Muslims through their identity as citizens. In the longer-term, this also means reviving the broader political culture to engage with other minority groups too. An important aspect of this will be the freedom to say uncomfortable things and express challenging views.

More generally, it is important to remind ourselves that it is not only Muslims who feel disengaged from politics. The constant focus on listening to young Muslims can make politicians forget that there is a wider population out there that is feeling disengaged too. Young people generally are less likely to vote, and many regard the political process as irrelevant to their lives.

"I know the name of my MP, but that's about the biggest impact he has on my life." Female, non-religious, 21, London

"I tend to agree with the view that very little can be done in regards to influencing long term policy and I think it works the other way round as well. I don't personally see the direct hand of the government in my everyday life." Male, Muslim, 22, London

When the Government consults with Muslims, the answers it hears are probably not so different to people their age. Engaging with them on the basis of their religious identity will not overcome this bigger problem.

Part 3

8

Reflections on policy

Changing attitudes to religion

Despite the claims of extremists, most Muslims do feel a sense of belonging to Britain and live comfortably with others in society. The majority want to send their children to mixed state schools, and feel as much, if not more, in common with non-Muslims in Britain as with Muslims abroad. They reject the implementation of *sharia* and agree that immigrants should learn English. There are also signs that many Muslims are becoming secularised and wish to modify their religious views to adapt to the mainstream culture.

However, our research also shows a definite shift amongst some younger Muslims, who are much more likely to identify with their religious community and be assertive about expressing their cultural difference in public. A growing number express support for faith schools and say they would prefer to live under *sharia* law. Some have become involved in Islamist politics and a tiny minority say they admire groups like Al-Qaeda. While many religious Muslims say they would like to see a reform of *sharia*, there is evidence to suggest that cultural attitudes more generally have become stricter in some regards, especially on the role of women, homosexuality and conversion to other religions.

Of course, young people have always rebelled against the norm. The turn towards religiosity for young Muslims today might be seen as a kick against the mainstream, almost in the way that iconoclastic punk culture appealed to bored suburban teenagers in the 1970s. Ironically, the retreat to a socially conservative lifestyle could be the height of adolescent revolt. But it must also be remembered that in the research we conducted, the degree of religiosity also remained relatively high for people aged between 24-34. Therefore, rising religiosity is not just a teenage phenomenon, and something people are just going to "grow out of". It represents a very definite shift in attitudes to identity and religion.

One thing is clear; Muslim parents are just as bewildered by this development as everyone else. Their children are pursuing religion with a fervour that is unrecognisable to them. Many of the older generation would have practised their religion as an aspect of belonging to their local community. Their religion was one factor in being part of a network of people with shared experiences and memories of "back home". Religion was a kind of social glue. For their children, however, religion takes on more individually oriented, spiritual and political dimension. It is not just something you do routinely, as part of an established communal tradition. It is the backbone of a strong personal identity. Many parents will no doubt be relieved that their sons and daughters want to be good Muslims but others may worry about how they will fit into the mainstream if they choose to wear strict religious clothing and spend all their time reading the Qu'ran. Like most parents, they have very little say over the kinds of religious or political views their children are drawn to.

The turn to religion needs to be understood in relation to a broader search for meaning and identity which exists

throughout British life. Young people are turning to religion by themselves as one way to make sense of the world and identify with a community of belonging. Many young Muslims have turned to religion in the hope that it will offer a narrative to their lives and a connection with something beyond themselves. They may return to the theological texts in order to work out how to live the good life. Others may see it as a badge of identity that marks them out to others. They might identify with other Muslims but not necessarily be much more religious. In this sense, Muslim identity is also politicised, and a statement of belonging. It can express a feeling of detachment from the mainstream, not just a positive identification with a set of religious values.

> “Cultural differences, left alone by the state, should be allowed to flourish and enrich our society”

The precise relation each person has to their religion is unique and it would be a mistake to over-generalise. In the large majority of cases, the turn to religion is a peaceful one that is managed while living in mainstream society; holding a job, raising a family, meeting non-Muslim friends and supporting the national football team. In some cases, the individuals we interviewed are wrestling with this division within themselves; between their religious identity and the seduction of mainstream culture. There is certainly recognition amongst Muslims that they are a more diverse population than others realise.

Equality and identity

Multiculturalists have long argued that liberal policies are ‘difference-blind’ and that this disadvantages minority groups because it forces them to hide a key aspect of their identity. If people are encouraged to assimilate into Britain, they are being ‘oppressed’ and made to feel culturally excluded.

In fact, it is the multicultural approach that pigeon-holes people and pressures them to keep separate from the mainstream. The balkanisation of communities through diversity funding and schemes has helped erode a sense of commonality. While today’s generation of young adults has grown up in British society and is fully immersed in its culture, it has also been taught that its identity is different to the mainstream. Some Muslims do not feel they have a stake in British society.

We advocate an egalitarian liberal approach in policy-making. People should be entitled to equal treatment as citizens in the public sphere, with the freedom to also enjoy and pursue their identities in the private sphere. This approach is not inimical to difference; rather it ensures the freedom of people to preserve and cherish the aspects of their culture as they choose, without coercion by the state.[139] Nobody, except perhaps the BNP, truly aspires to an unchanging British monoculture where we all look and sound the same. Cultural differences, left alone by the state, should be allowed to flourish and enrich our society. Immigrants, like everyone else, should be able to speak different languages in their home, practice their religion and eat whatever food they like.

At the same time, it is perfectly reasonable to expect people from immigrant communities to acculturate to certain basic cultural and legal norms, such as learning the English language, sending their children to school, and complying with the law. If an employer believes that the wearing of the *niqab* will hinder the proper teaching of children, then they should be allowed to enforce clothing restrictions, as long as they are applied equally to all. The good news is that immigrants to Britain have been more than willing to do accept these conditions, as long as multicultural

139. BARRY, B. (2001) *Culture and Equality,* Cambridge & Oxford, Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers Ltd

policies do not hinder that process. Many of them have adjusted their clothing, religious habits and traditions to fit in with the wider culture. Where possible, British society has been reasonably successful at accommodating pragmatically to different cultural needs and has accepted differences in a fairly relaxed way.

Is asking an immigrant to acculturate a form of oppression? Not at all. Identity is not a zero-sum game, where assimilating into one culture means abandoning every vestige of one's cultural or ethnic background. Rather, humans have a unique capacity to add to their stock of rich cultural experiences by learning new languages and changing their values. To suggest otherwise is to have a highly racialised view of people, as if they are entirely determined by their ethnic or cultural origin. Having the freedom to pursue one's culture also means the possibility of changing it, and developing without restraints posed by community or religious leaders. Muslims are a particularly good example of a group that is not homogenous and therefore, its members should be free to practice and believe as they choose without stereotyping by the authorities.

An integral aspect of this liberal model is the right to cause offence and criticise other people's cultures. Today, with increased sensitivities about Islamophobia, many Muslims feel entitled to have their religious views and identity protected. Their attitudes towards women, homosexuality, or politics are seen to be so inalienable that they are out of bounds for criticism. But treating people equally as citizens does not mean we should treat all cultures equally. It is precisely because we believe that all humans have the capacity for reason and to question their own cultures that we are able to criticise other value systems. People can change their culture consciously if they dislike aspects of it, and healthy disagreement is a necessary part of this. If we respect all cultures equally, we are in fact, closing down our engagement with minority groups. We end up treating them as a race apart, incapable of sharing similar views about issues of religion and politics, because "that's their culture".

Here is the double bind of identity politics. On the one hand, Muslims are encouraged to expect to be treated differently and have their culture respected. Yet, the more they are treated differently, the more they feel set apart from the mainstream. The increased attention to their difference makes Muslims more conscious of being 'outsiders' and makes them feel vulnerable. In order to feel even more included, they demand even more recognition and respect, which in turn increased their feeling of being different. It is a vicious circle. Their aspiration to be part of the mainstream is undermined when they demand the right to be different.

Just as we should not stereotype Muslims as vulnerable victims in need of special treatment, we should also challenge lazy stereotypes and sensationalist headlines which suggest that British Muslims *per se* are a threat to "our way of life". The intense media scrutiny inevitably makes some Muslims feel like outsiders, rather than as members of the same society as everyone else.

Some British multiculturalists have tried to affirm the validity of their approach by pointing to the failures of the French model and the riots in 2006 in the suburbs of Paris, in which large numbers of immigrant youths took violently to the streets. They argued that France's denial of difference in the public space had bred resentment. Certainly, the liberal model can only work if there is a genuine commitment to political and material equality – something that France has been widely criticised for lacking. Nevertheless, the ideal still offers some hope. The Pew Center study on Muslim and non-Muslim attitudes worldwide found that despite the disturbances:

"In France, the scene of recent riots in heavily Muslim areas, large percentages of both the gener-

al public and the Muslim minority population feel there is no conflict in being a devout Muslim and living in a modern society".

If we can learn a lesson from France, it is not that we should elevate differences but that we should prioritise the importance of political equality and ensure a commitment to improving living standards for all.

A sense of 'us'

Perhaps the most difficult fact to confront after the London bombings was that these British-born terrorists had been willing to inflict suffering on people of their own country. They sensed no connection to or felt no common cause with other British people. Instead, they considered themselves to be soldiers, fighting for a fantasy, global community of Muslims.

One of the drivers behind the growth of Islamism is a desire to find belonging in a wider community. Young people, charged with energy and idealism, will always seek out a connection to a cause worth fighting for. But as society has become more fragmented, and older collective identities have weakened, the positive impulse to belong has been forced into narrower and more atomised types of political struggle. In a different period, these individuals may have gone to war for their country, or marched on political demonstrations against their government, or even become politicians, but today – with no sense of connection to a real, living community – some of them are seeking out abstract communities to die for.

The inability to feel a connection with other people is a damning indictment of the multicultural approach in Britain. For over twenty years, successive governments have uncritically followed the intellectual fashion that emerged in the late 70s and early 80s. They have pushed an agenda which has effectively undermined the possibility of shared communal experience. Stressing difference has pushed some people apart to the degree that they feel no empathy for the suffering of others who are 'not their own'. In the name of multiculturalism, immigrants have been taught that belonging to Britain is something to be ashamed of, and that, as 'outsiders', they have a special, superior status as a result of being untainted. Instead of helping immigrants to learn English and acculturate to the mainstream, the multicultural approach has aimed to preserve distinct ethnic identities and groups. Of course, in many cases this was part of a genuine and admirable attempt to make migrants feel welcome. But the institutionalisation of difference over the common good has created tense lines of separation between groups. This was one of the main factors behind the inter-ethnic rioting in Lozells in Birmingham in 2005.

To address this sense of disconnection, numerous politicians have called for new policies to promote 'Britishness'. In recent years, the Government has initiated formal citizenship ceremonies and a citizenship test for new migrants. Think tanks have called for a 'rebranding' of British symbols, suggesting new faces on banknotes or a new design for the British flag. Gordon Brown has taken the lead in arguing for Britishness. Speaking to the left-wing Fabian Society in January 2006, he made the rather curious suggestion that Remembrance Sunday should be renamed 'British Day', in order to celebrate British history, achievements and culture.

The attempt to renew our sense of shared values may be well intentioned, but promoting Britishness like this ends up treating an organic identity as if it were simply a public relations invention or a marketing ploy. You cannot re-name significant days in the calendar according to the whims of the latest focus group. Symbols of national identity are meaningful precisely because they relate to very real, common experiences that have

brought people together historically. The feelings of national pride aroused by Remembrance Sunday or working class unity on May Day come from shared memories based on a sense of solidarity; not simply a photo opportunity for the Government.

The British nation state has a solid basis in reality, not just the imagination. Throughout its history, the nation cohered people together and was seen by many as the best way to improve their circumstances. Of course, there have always been limits to the way in which any state can realise the aspirations of its citizens, and political life has been divided. But historically speaking, the nation has been the polity through which people have fought to realise their ideals. People may have disagreed passionately on these ideals, but the arguments have been fierce precisely because they have been about shaping the direction of a common society. People seek to persuade others and win them over when they believe they belong to the same project. A sense of belonging to a country does not preclude a strong commitment to universal humanity, or solidarity with people abroad. Indeed, it has been the first step in transcending immediate local interests and participating in a polity which people feel they can influence and shape.

Very few people would argue today that Britishness is defined by ethnicity. The development of Britain out of the old kingdoms of the British Isles involved the gradual absorption of diverse peoples. Britain has been adept at absorbing and adding to its national identity through the arrival of ethnic, religious and cultural differences from within its different regions. Hugenots and Jews added to the mix and this is just as true of immigrants from the old colonies. In the 1960s new arrivals from the Indian sub-continent and the West Indies faced serious racism and far-right extremists tried to raise the Union Jack as a symbol of exclusion. But these immigrants also saw Britain as a place that could provide wealth, education and opportunity for their children. Many of them worked in the post-war welfare state and felt pride in the liberties and achievements of their new home. Some joined anti-racism groups that cut across ethnicity and fought to improve the way their local communities were treated by the authorities. Crucial to this sense of the common good was the institutions of civil society: trades unions, political movements, and voluntary organisations, which brought people together on a regular basis and bred feelings of mutual interdependence.

> “One of the saddest aspects of the war against British identity that has been waged in recent decades has been the bewilderment of many immigrants themselves”

It would be fair to say that post-war Britain, battered by the Second World War but proud of its role in defeating fascism, was a place with a very secure sense of national identity, with deep historical, institutional and cultural roots. Yet over time, and particularly since the 1990s, a process of weakening national and political identities – on both the political left and right – has led to a vacuum in which a narrower brand of identity politics has flourished.

Ironically, one of the saddest aspects of the war against British identity that has been waged in recent decades has been the bewilderment of many immigrants themselves. Far from viewing Britain as bad or fatally compromised, many of them were proud to have been accepted by a nation regarded as one of the most civilized in the world and grateful for the opportunities that living in the UK provided. What could be more dispiriting than to gain a prize only to be told it was worthless?

However unpopular individual governments or their policies may be the fact is that most Brits, native and immigrant alike, retain an uncomplicated and undemonstrative loyalty to Britain, despite the apparent efforts of many of those in charge to persuade them that it is entirely passé.

How can we begin to revive our sense of collectivity? First, rather than trying to promote Britishness in an artificial way, we would do better to relax a bit more and allow people to express their identities by themselves. People should feel able to express affection for their country, their region, or the town in which they live – flying their flag or supporting their football team – without accusations of racism. Just as importantly, they should also be free to march against governments and organise together in political protest. We should argue, debate and disagree over the ideals we should live by, and seek to persuade others to join us.

Another task is to challenge the long march of anti-Britishness through institutional and cultural life. Numerous critics have pointed out that history lessons, for instance, are taught in a one-sided, moralised way, focusing attention on the racism and violence of the Empire, and the oppression of ethnic minority groups and women, but with little sense of the positive contributions of the industrial revolution and the Empire, the emergence of parliamentary democracy, the literary and cultural heritage of the language.

The constant focus on the negative is not motivated by a genuine desire to show the complexity of the historical past, but rather to remind us of the inherent racism of British society and to supposedly make ethnic minorities feel welcome. Britishness has become a stick to beat people with, rather than something to be proud of. This is all the more ironic, when we consider how many Asians and Blacks were flying the England flag at the last World Cup. The sense of self-loathing is much stronger at the top than at the bottom. But anti-Britishness has not fostered a more hospitable atmosphere or tolerance towards different groups, it has simply demoralised our view of the past. A society that feels weighed down by shame cannot confidently face its future. The anti-Britishness agenda has also bolstered the confidence of aggressive Islamists who see a society that is ashamed to defend its ideals.

By bringing to an end the institutional attacks on Britain and its culture – the counterproductive cancellation of Christmas festivities, the neurotic bans on displays of national symbols, the facile rebranding of everything from London buses to BA tailfins, the relentless rewriting of British history in schools – we can begin to recover the habit of solidarity that currently only appears at moments of grave crisis. 7/7 was a black day but the silver lining was provided by the inspiring way that ordinary people from all kinds of backgrounds helped each other, calmly, bravely and without rancour. That sense of "us" is surely something worth fighting for.

Of course, the tide of anti-Britishness is just one symptom of wider self-loathing in western societies. The 'West' has become a dirty word, and it is fashionable to interpret all its achievements as nothing more than racist, imperialist oppression. But the 'West' is worthy of our support because it is more than a geographical space, it is a set of ideas associated with the Enlightenment – a period of intellectual inquiry that enriched our understanding of humanity and enshrined the principles of liberty, human reason and social progress.

As critics point out, human progress is not inevitable and the West has often failed to live up to these ideals, as evidenced by the modern history of warfare, genocide, and slavery. But overall, it has achieved much – improved living standards through scientific and technological advance, polit-

ical rights and freedoms, the enhancement and spread of knowledge. What is more, these ideas may have originated in Europe and America, but their universal appeal has meant they have spread further afield. Non-western countries and political movements have borrowed ideas which western intellectuals today deride. When some young Muslims bemoan the lack of values in the West, they express our own failure as a society to defend these ideals and assert their relevance for the current age.

The final step is to recognise that the 'common values' that might bring us together are still up for debate. We do have basic tenets of fairness, individual liberty, democracy, tolerance, justice and the rule of law, but beyond that, there is no ready-made political consensus. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism is a reflection of a broader crisis of political identity, not just cultural identity, and this affects all members of society, not just Muslims. We should be concerned about what sort of society we want people to belong to and what ideas we want to sign up to. Young people – not only Muslims – are asking questions that concern us all. What is the meaning of freedom today? What should be the role of the state? What is the purpose of education and how should we impart knowledge to the next generation? How should we approach scientific endeavour and consider new technologies? Unlike simple requirements like learning English, or acquiring a passport, the answers to these questions require publicly engaged debate and discussion.

A vital ingredient of this public discussion is the confidence to say the unthinkable and argue passionately over ideas, even if at times this causes offence. In recent years, authorities have used legislation to 'protect' the feelings of designated vulnerable groups. But this kind of sanitisation of debate prevents people from discussing things openly, for fear of saying the wrong thing. It can actually close down debate and foster a climate of indifference between different groups. In the case of Muslims, the support for diversity has closed down much needed discussion within communities about cultural values and practices.

Who is qualified to challenge the extremists?

When it comes to tackling radical Islam and winning the so-called 'battle for hearts and minds', it is agreed by many that religion must be part of the solution.[140] Encouraging Muslims to discuss their religion and challenge extremist interpretations is no doubt a worthwhile task. There are numerous scholars and organisations trying hard to fight extremist ideas and present a more sophisticated interpretation of their religion to the younger generation. Such individuals and organisations can also assist public authorities in thinking about who they give money to and the ideas they espouse.

> "The assumption is that only Muslims can fully relate to each other, and that those at risk need to be engaged with through 'their' culture"

But why leave the political task of challenging extremist ideas to Muslims? Surely combating the political challenge of Islamism is something non-Muslims can also contribute to? The assumption is that only Muslims can fully relate to each other, and that those at risk need to be engaged with through 'their' culture. This essentialist notion leaves Muslims isolated as a group and consigned to an intellectual and cultural ghetto. Even worse, it sends the signal that non-Muslim, 'Western' ideas are not really for them. Of course, one could probably find some useful rebuttals to Islamism within Muslim scholarship,

140. In 2006, a report from a conference organised in partnership between Wilton Park and Demos, stated, "Whilst there is no consensus about the nature of the links between religion and extremism there is agreement that religion is an important part of the solution". The report then goes on to say, "Youth workers, especially Muslim youth workers, can play a particularly important role, engaging with youngsters about their 'Muslimness', challenging them to think about Islam, and dealing with more practice economic and social issues…" WILTON PARK (2006) Report on Wilton Park Conference WPSO6/5 Towards a Community Based Approach to Counter-Terrorism. p.10

but there is no need to stop there. Instead of organising a Muslim scholars roadshow, we should widen our ambitions and recruit scholars from other political and intellectual traditions, to debate values, ethics and political ideas. Whether this might reduce the terrorist threat is almost a side issue, as such a project would have merit in itself.

The refusal to challenge Islamism with non-Islamic ideas betrays a lack of confidence about our ability to win the argument rationally. It is almost as if we have given up trying to tell young people what is wrong with Islamism, and we are instead trying to convince them that such ideas are simply 'un-Islamic'.

> "There is no quick-fix policy that one can implement tomorrow that will deal with the broader cultural factors that this report has tried to explore"

But it is crucial that all younger people – Muslim and non-Muslim – are taught that ideas do not belong to any single cultural or ethnic group, and therefore can be shared and argued about by others. This is what universalism means – that human knowledge is not confined to cultural or ethnic groups and we can share and learn more widely from others. Through our reason, we are able to understand different languages and ideas and consider them on their own merit, rather than by how culturally *authentic* they are. We should have greater confidence in teaching younger Muslims about a range of unfamiliar values, political traditions and ideas – J S Mill, as well as the Qu'ran.

Some have argued that teaching a 'truer' version of Islam (whatever that might mean) to younger people will give them a sense of belonging and turn them away from radicalisation. This might well be true, but what might be the other consequences of this approach? If we constantly stress religion in our engagement with young people and constantly talk to them through the prism of 'their values' or 'their traditions', we only reinforce their sense of difference even more. They are likely to think of themselves as part of a group that has special needs and concerns apart from wider society. True, they may not become terrorists, but they may not feel particularly British either.

Conclusion

This report has tried to offer some explanations for the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, but it has not presented a straightforward solution to 'the problem of terrorism'. This is not because there are not specific things the Government can do to reduce the potential terrorist threat – there are very many measures that will improve the security services, such as enhanced intelligence gathering and limiting the room for extremists to manoeuvre in the UK. However, there is no quick-fix policy that one can implement tomorrow that will deal with the broader cultural factors that this report has tried to explore. We may be able to dismantle some existing policies and soften the edges of failing strategies, but many of the cultural trends we have identified need to be challenged through intellectual debate and persuasion. In short, one cannot throw money or 'taskforces' at what is, in part, a political and cultural problem. The findings of the opinion survey in this report confirm that a growing number of young Muslims are becoming radicalised and are growing apart from the mainstream. Reversing this process will take time to overcome.

Islamist terrorism is a threat to national security, but it also represents a set of ideas and attitudes that we need to confront. As we have tried to argue, these ideas are not entirely alien to us but in some respects have grown up in our very own culture. When Islamists express

ambivalence to modernity, hostility to freedom of speech, a heightened sense of victimisation, and a demand for cultural recognition, they are speaking in a language that has already been established in advanced, Western multicultural societies and, in fact, present serious problems of their own. It is not Islamism that poses the greatest threat to Western values or British identity but the mixture of self-loathing and confusion that reigns in our society more generally.

More importantly, we should guard against the logic that any policy is good as long as it will reduce the terrorist threat. There are valid arguments for improving the living standards of disadvantaged groups in the UK, or to change foreign policy in the Middle East, or to teach better values in school, but these should be argued for in their own terms, not because they will stop young Muslims from getting angry. There are over 60 million people in Britain, and politics should be about them, not just a group of young men who want to join the *jihad*. Some have described the war in Iraq as "the elephant in the room" and argued that we should change foreign policy if we want to end terrorism. Not only is this a simplistic analysis of why terrorism has emerged, but it is a pathetic approach to politics. A society that prioritises its safety above all else will soon have no values left to lose.

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Britain's Muslims are a community under scrutiny. Islam as a religion is practiced peacefully by the UK's 1.6m Muslims, but there is widespread concern about the growing popularity of Islamism; a political ideology that aims to create a state and society in strict conformity with religious doctrine. This has coincided with a rise in religiosity amongst some younger Muslims, who are more likely than their parents to hold strict religious views, express anti-Western attitudes, and identify not with Britain but with the global Muslim community – the *ummah*.

This report draws on extensive new opinion research conducted among Britain's Muslim population. It argues that instead of looking abroad to the Muslim world for explanations of these phenomena, we should examine the influence of political and cultural trends *within* British society over the past two decades. In particular, the doctrine of multiculturalism, with its stress on 'difference' and victimisation, has encouraged the growth of a strident Muslim identity in the public realm. This approach has also masked the true diversity of attitudes and experiences within the British Muslim population. In order to address the rise of Islamism, the authors argue, we need to abandon the corrosive policies of multiculturalism and develop a sense of national identity and shared values capable of inspiring a younger generation.

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