

Preface

The objective of this document is to provide the background and context required to engage in a meaningful dialogue on the challenges facing the multicultural British society. It is prepared for the meeting of the European Council of Religious Leaders (ECRL) in Birmingham 12-14 February 2007. The theme will be Muslims in Britain.

The ECRL is one of four regional InterReligious Councils (IRCs) within the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) network. The ECRL brings together senior religious leaders from Europe's historical religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam, with Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs and Zoroastrians as active participants.

The Council, which has 30 members, is based in the shared commitment of the faith traditions to human dignity and the right to live in peace. On this basis religious leaders have committed themselves to work together to prevent conflict, to promote peaceful coexistence and to encourage their communities to do the same.

This document was prepared by the secretariat of the ECRL, and is written by the senior information and research officer of ECRL Shoaib Mohammad Sultan. It is written with input and ideas from a number of sources, listed in the end of the paper. The Senior Advisor of ECRL, Imam Dr. Abduljalil Sajid, has provided essential input to the content of the document.

1. Introduction

While still constituting a small percentage of the total population of Britain, Islam and Muslims are becoming a visible part of its cultural, social and political landscape. This document addresses some of the complicated and complex issues surrounding Islam in Britain which are essential to understand in the discussion regarding the integration of Muslims into British society.

While violent radical groups are exploiting and misusing the religion of Islam as a framework for recruiting terrorists, the overwhelming majority of Britain's Muslims are law-abiding citizens who despise these attacks. They understand and practise their faith for what it is – a religion of peace. Using Islam as a way of justifying terrorism is an abuse of that faith. The attempt to analyse the phenomenon of radicalisation should therefore in no way be understood as equating an entire community with a small militant minority.

The Muslim community has grown rapidly in recent decades, and Islam is today the second largest religion in Britain. The role of Islam is therefore no longer only a foreign policy matter as it used to be, but has also become a domestic issue.

A certain degree of re-Islamisation of young second- and third-generation British citizens with a Muslim background has been noted in recent years. However, one needs to be careful not to confuse this development with an increase in radicalisation, since the latter is not necessarily a consequence of the former.

The document starts with a historical background to contact between British and Muslim communities, followed by an overview of the situation today. Then we take a look at some of the British Muslim organizations, and then a look at some defining events in British Muslim relations. In the last part we look at radicalization of British Muslim youth and Islamophobic trends in society.

2. Historical Sketch of Muslims in Britain

The Initial contact

Islam is generally thought of as being a recent arrival in Britain, but there has been contact for many centuries. Britain has always had a “special relationship” with the Muslim world. Initially, Muslims landed on these isles as explorers and traders.

Trade was so important to King Offa of Mercia, a powerful Anglo-Saxon king of the 8th century famous for building Offa's dyke, that his coins have the inscription of the declaration of faith of Islam (There is no god but Allah) in Arabic. These were copies of coins of the near-contemporary Muslim ruler Al-Mansur, and it is thought that they were minted to facilitate trade with the expanding Islamic empire in Spain.

Mohammad bin Musa al-Khwarizmi (780-850 CE), a famous Muslim scientist, wrote a book titled *Kitab Surat al-Ard* (Face of the Earth) which included a map of the world, the first of its kind. The British Isles are detailed on the map, mentioning some important landmarks. This is another indication that Muslims had encounters with the British Isles as early as the eighth century.

Since then there are many examples of British men traveling to Islamic countries, learning Arabic, and translating literature into Latin. One of the most well known is Adelard of Bath, known as the 'First English Scientist'. Among the works he translated was al-Khwarizmi's work on mathematics and astronomical tables. It was through these translations that the numerical value of 'zero', and the Hindi-Arabic numerals were introduced into the West as a whole. If not for the work of al-Khwarizmi, and the translation made by Adelard, it is likely that the West would have been using Latin numerals for a much longer period.

The Crusades – war, trade and intellectual interchange

Later the relationship was dominated by the Crusades and the British played their part. For instance, the sacking of the Muslim city of Lisbon in 1147 during which perhaps 150,000 Muslims were massacred, was largely the work of soldiers from Norfolk and Suffolk. However, at the same time one needs to acknowledge that Britain was the first country in Europe where medieval images of Islam were later to be challenged.

In search of 'enlightenment' and seeking knowledge, Daniel of Morley, like Adelard, set off to the Muslim world. He traveled through the South of Spain, Cordoba, Toledo, and Seville and by 1180 he was lecturing in Mathematics and Astronomy at Oxford. His translation of the work of Ibn Rushd (Averroes) on Aristotle contributed to the 'Renaissance' in the West.

During this time, Muslim scholarship was well-known, and there was a clear exchange between the Muslim world and the West in all fields of knowledge from agriculture to geography, music, science, mathematics and social science.

By the 14th century following the crusades and the introduction of several Muslim cultural traditions into British life, from the paisley to the arch to spices and the concept of chivalry, the Muslim world was admired and respected for its scholarship and advances in all fields of knowledge. Muslim scholarship such as that of Razi, Avicenna (Ibn Sina) and Averroes (Ibn Rushd) formed the backbone of intellectual and scholarly life in Britain.

Relationships were not confined to the intellectual, but also included political connections. For example, King John was excommunicated by Pope Innocent III in the twelfth century for offering his help to the North African King Abu Abdullah Mohammad an-Nasir, in his campaign against the Spanish Catholic King of Aragon. Much later, Elizabeth I offered in 1588 to enter into an alliance with Murad III (1546-95) to overthrow the then King of Spain, as she viewed the Muslims as 'fellow monotheists' and the Spanish King as 'idolatrous' (M. Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam*, 1991).

Although antagonistic, the political relationship between Britain and the Muslim world was perhaps most clear during the Crusades. Interaction continued throughout the centuries, with political and cultural interplay existing despite great differences.

The trade empire

As the Ottoman Empire expanded westwards through central Europe and the Mediterranean Britain's trade network expanded eastwards to meet it. Throughout this period Britain was closely engaged with the Islamic world. By the 1620s, the Turkish naval presence had extended its reach into the waters of the British Isles and there occurred various naval skirmishes and raids inland. What was really worrying the Stuart authorities was that some of these raids were being led by Englishmen who had converted to Islam and "turned Turk".

The universities of Oxford and Cambridge established Chairs of Arabic in the 1630s, and scholars in Britain relied heavily on translations from Arabic in the fields of mathematics, astronomy and

medicine throughout the mediaeval period and the Renaissance. A rendering of the Qur'an in English was produced by Alexander Ross in 1649. Although much had been said against Islam, the Prophet Muhammed and Muslims in general, in England appeared the first indications of a more balanced view.

During the reign of Elizabeth I there were considerably more of her subjects living in North Africa than in all the nascent North American colonies. British travelers in the East regularly brought back tales of their compatriots who had "crossed over" and were now prospering in Ottoman service. In a great many cases, the converts were not slaves but free merchants or Servants of the Crown who were attracted by what they saw. Soon after, trade with the Ottoman Empire began to flourish, and by the end of the 17th century trade with the Ottoman Empire accounted for one quarter of all England's overseas commercial activity.

Regardless of political interplays, till then the relationship between Britain and the Islamic world remained largely external. With the decline of Muslim power, specifically the Ottoman Empire, and the growth of British colonialism, this relationship changed. The migration of peoples of Muslim background, together with migration of other peoples as a result of Britain's colonial activities, has given Britain the shape it has today.

The British East India Company

The British East India Company, which was formed in 1600, wanted to cash in on the profitable spice trade of the East. But competition from the Dutch drove the company to India, which was ruled by a powerful Muslim dynasty, the Mughals. As a rich and sophisticated civilization, India was at the centre of a vast network of trade.

From a few trading centers, called factories, the East India Company built up a profitable pattern of trade. This had a revolutionary effect on British economy and society. In the 18th century it became more powerful and had its own army, which it used to conquer territories. As the Mughal empire declined, the company gradually extended British rule over a large part of India. British control of India, through trade, conquest and colonization, resulted in a gradual migration of many classes of Indians to Britain, including servants, sailors and students. The intermingling of Indian and British ideas, religions and ways of life led to a vibrant multiculturalism of the East India Company.

The first large group of Muslims in Britain arrived about 300 years ago. They were sailors recruited in India to work for the East India Company, and so it is not surprising that the first Muslim communities were found in port towns. Most of these immigrants came from the Yemen, probably because Aden was the main stop for ships between Britain and the Far East, and many of the seamen later settled in the port cities of Cardiff, Liverpool, South Shields, Hull, and London. There are now an estimated 70-80,000 Yemenis living in Britain, who form the longest-established Muslim group in Britain.

Immigration

The larger scale arrival of Muslims in Britain began in the early part of the nineteenth century. The migrants came from a broad range of ethnic, social, and economic backgrounds. They consisted of people from different areas connected to the British Empire: Malaya, Yemen, India, and British Somaliland. The first communities were formed Liverpool, Manchester, London and Cardiff.

The earliest political refugees came to Britain around 1867 from Turkey and Cyprus. By this time, Britain had developed into a 'liberal democracy', and the freedom associated with this attracted immigrants into the country. This trend continues today. The first mosque in Britain was established in Cardiff as early as 1860.

Ships' cooks came too, many of them from Sylhet in what is now Bangladesh. There are records of Sylhetis working in London restaurants as early as 1873. Some Muslim sailors decided to stay in Britain and simply left their ships without going through any formal immigration procedure. The next wave of Muslim immigration to Britain followed the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. The increase in trade caused a demand for men to work in ports and on ships.

Muslims also came to Britain with economic aspirations. For example, Monshee Mahomet Saeed came to Britain as early as 1777 and set up an 'Indian Vapour Bath and Shampooing Establishment' in Brighton. His success is shown by the fact he was appointed 'Shampooing Surgeon' to His Majesty George IV. His book 'The Travels of Dean Mohamet' was the first known book published by a Muslim in Britain.

Many Muslims came at this time in search of education, and many of the students were from India. As the British hold in India was strong at the time, many of those in the upper class in India, many of whom were Muslims, felt the best education would be 'western' education. Therefore, from four students recorded in 1845, there were 207 Indian students by the 1890s and a further 700 by 1910.

In the 18th and 19th Centuries there were also a number of converts to Islam amongst the English upper classes, including Edward Montagu, son of the ambassador to Turkey. Despite these influxes, Britain's current Muslim population are almost all people who immigrated to Britain in the 1950s, and later, and their descendants. Many of the immigrants in the 1950s and 60s came from India and Pakistan in search of a better material life.

While many of these planned to bring their families to Britain once they had achieved financial security, others hoped to save money to buy land «back home» and then return to the families they had left behind.

A less-known reason why many people left Pakistan was the construction of the Mangla Dam in the early 1960s. This submerged some 250 villages in the Mirpur District, and displaced 100,000 people; more than half the residents of some villages moved to Britain through a deal between the Pakistani and the British government. Most immigrants came from farming areas such as Azad Kashmir and the Northwest Frontier, which had close connections with Britain as established recruiting grounds for the British army and the merchant navy. Almost all Bangladeshis came from Sylhet, which also had a long tradition of providing immigrants to Britain.

The first immigrants were men. Once in Britain they tended to live in groups in communal houses until they had saved enough money to bring their wives and children to join them, or chosen to return to their country of birth. The communal houses often contained men from the same village in Pakistan. Living like this made life easier for the new arrivals because it gave them a base, a community and friendship, and financial support while they found their feet.

Because they had no family or home comforts in Britain the new immigrants began a tradition of working very long hours that the present generation rejects. Even when their wives joined them the early Muslim immigrants were still isolated from the host culture by language and prejudice. The generation of Muslims that have been educated in Britain has much stronger relationships with non-Muslims than their ancestors.

Immigration was boosted briefly by The Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962, which removed the right of automatic entry for Commonwealth Citizens, restricting it to those who had a work voucher. People hurried to get into Britain before this new law made it too difficult. The later Immigration Act of 1971 blocked immigration for single men.

The next wave of immigrants came from Africa, mostly from Kenya and then Uganda.

As certain African regimes encouraged a policy of Africanisation, life became more difficult for those Asians already living there. Many of these Asians started moving to Britain until the Commonwealth Immigrants Act made it more difficult for them to do so. In 1972 60,000 Asians were expelled by President Amin from Uganda, many of whom were allowed to settle in Britain.

Although the immigrants from Africa were often traumatized and had lost most of their material possessions, they still had many advantages. They were better educated than the earlier immigrants, many of them were professionals or from skilled trades, and they already had experience of thriving in a minority community.

By the 1990s Islam was Britain's second most popular religion. Most British Muslims, as most Muslims in the world, belong to the Sunni tradition of Islam. There were over 600 mosques in the UK and around 60 Muslim schools.

A recent surge in immigration in the wake of changes to the immigration laws in the late 1990s has had controversial results, with allegations that there has been an increase in enforced arranged marriages.

Home Office figures show that the number of Pakistani men using their wife's status to gain entry to Britain increased from 1,740 in 1995 to 3,510 in 1997. Islamic scholars say that freely given consent is as necessary for a valid Muslim marriage as for a Christian one, and the Muslim community believes that there are few compulsory marriages.

Muslims are not one monolithic group or class; consequently, their background and origin shape their identities in Britain. There is a wealth of history exemplifying the contribution Islam and Muslims have made to the world.

3. Current Overview

A census of the population in Britain has been taken every 10 years since 1801 (with the exception of 1941, when Britain was at war). The 2001 survey was the first time the national survey included a question about the religious beliefs of the respondents. Looking at the data about Muslims we see a very complex picture of a very diverse community.

Muslims score low on a number of socioeconomic factors, but at the same time we see a promising and positive development amongst the British Muslim youth with regards to education.

British Muslims, who are they

The British Muslim community constituted of 1.6 million people, making the Muslim faith the largest non-Christian religion in the UK, consisting of 2.8 per cent of the total population, and above half of the non-Christian population.

Nearly half of the Muslims were born in Britain, and 70 percent of all Muslims claimed a British identity. National identity is strongly related to country of birth, and 91 per cent of the Muslims born in UK gave a British national identity. Religion is an important factor in many Muslims lives, and over half of the respondents said that their religion was important to their self-understanding.

Roughly one third said they were active in their faith. The numbers were similar for Jewish, Sikh and Hindu respondents. Among Christians, only a fifth mentioned religion as important, although this was much higher among Black Christians.

The majority of the British Muslims are from the Indian Sub-continent. The Pakistani community is the largest, with 43 per cent, the Bangladeshi community is 17 per cent, and the Indian Muslim community is 9 per cent of the total British Muslim community. The ethnic British converts make up 4 per cent of the total British Muslim population, and 6 per cent were of Black African origin, mainly from North and West Africa, particularly Somalia and Nigeria.

Family

Young Muslim adults were more likely to be married than were young people from any other religious background. Muslims tend to prefer marriage rather than cohabitation. Muslims also have a much lower divorce rate than the majority, though somewhat higher than Sikhs and Hindus.

Muslim households are the most likely to experience overcrowding. And one third of Muslim households lived in overcrowded accommodation in 2001, compared to just 6 per cent of the Christian households. While not as high as for the Muslims, the Hindu and the Sikh community also has a large number of households that experience overcrowding. The high proportions for Muslim, Sikh and Hindu households are, to some extent, a reflection of their large size. Their average sizes were 3.8, 3.6 and 3.2 people respectively, compared with 2.3 people among Christian and Jewish households.

Muslims have the youngest age profile of all the religious groups in Great Britain. About a third of Muslims were under 16 years of age in 2001, as were a quarter of Sikhs and a fifth of Hindus. There are very few older people in these groups – less than one in ten were aged 65 years or over. The Jewish and Christian groups have the oldest age profiles with one in five aged 65 years or over.

Unemployment and Education

Unemployment rates for Muslims are higher than those for people from any other religion, for both men and women. In 2004, Muslims had the highest male unemployment rate in Great Britain, at 13 per cent. This was about three times the rate for Christian men (4 per cent). Unemployment rates for men in the other religious groups were between 3 and 8 per cent. The unemployment rate for Muslim women at 18 per cent was about four times the rate for Christian and Jewish women (4 per cent in each case). Unemployment rates for women in the other religious groups were between 6 per cent and 9 per cent.

In all religious groups unemployment rates were highest among those aged under 25 years. Muslims aged 16 to 24 years had the highest unemployment rates. They were over twice as likely as Christians of the same age to be unemployed – 28 per cent compared with 11 per cent.

Although unemployment rates for older Muslims were lower, there was a greater difference between their unemployment rates and those for people from other religious backgrounds. Muslims aged 25 and over were more than three times as likely as Christians of the same age to be unemployed.

In 2004 a third of Muslims of working age in Great Britain had no qualifications – the highest proportion for any religious group. They were also the least likely to have degrees or equivalent qualifications.

Muslims who were born in the UK are more likely than those born elsewhere to have a degree or

equivalent qualification, irrespective of age. Among those under the age of 30, UK born Muslims were almost twice as likely to have degrees in 2004 as those born elsewhere.

Economy

Among working age men, Muslims had the highest overall levels of economic inactivity in 2004 – 31 per cent compared with 16 per cent of Christians. This is partly explained by the young age profile of Muslims and the correspondingly high proportion of students. However, among older men of working age, Muslims also tended to have the highest levels of economic inactivity, largely due to ill health.

Within each religious group women were more likely than men to be economically inactive. The main reason was that they were looking after the family and home. Muslim women were more likely than other women to be economically inactive. About seven in ten Muslim women of working age were economically inactive, compared with no more than four in ten women of working age in each of the other groups. Christian women were least likely to be economically inactive.

Health

Muslims in Great Britain had the highest rates of reported ill health in 2001.

Age-standardized rates of 'not good' health were 13 per cent for Muslim males and 16 per cent for Muslim females. Rates were also high for Sikhs: 10 per cent of males and 14 per cent of females rated their health as 'not good'. These rates, which take account of the difference in age structures between the religious groups, were higher than those of Jews and Christians, who were the least likely to rate their health as 'not good'.

After taking account of the different age structures of the groups, Muslims had the highest rates of disability. Almost a quarter of Muslim females (24 per cent) had a disability, as did one in five (21 per cent) Muslim males.

A matter of class

These numbers, along with other key demographical information from the survey, point towards this as a matter of class rather than something explainable from religion. It has been suggested that many of the problems, specially connected with economical inactivity and bad health, are also common problems amongst non Muslims with the same demographical profile.

4. Muslim Organizations

In an organized society the different organizations play an important role. The Muslims of Britain have formed a number of organizations. We will take a closer look at some of the important ones. These are not only community organizations, but also think tanks and lobby organizations with a Muslim agenda.

The Muslim Council of Britain

The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) is an umbrella organization dedicated to the common good, to the betterment of the community and country. It was inaugurated - after several years of wide-ranging consultation and careful planning - on November 23 1997 at the Brent Town Hall in

Wembley by representatives of more than 250 Muslim organisations from all parts of the United Kingdom.

The MCB gives practical shape and expression to the ties of faith and community that naturally bring Muslims of all social and cultural backgrounds together. It also brings people from various schools of thought and political outlooks together.

Its administrative expenses are covered from affiliation fees and donations from Muslim individuals and institutional well-wishers.

The MCB today has about 450 affiliated institutions including mosques, education and charitable institutions, women and youth organizations and professional bodies. Most of the main national and regional Muslim bodies are now members. Today MCB is the most representative body of British Muslims.

British Muslim Forum (BMF)

The British Muslim Forum was formed on 11 March 2005 as a co-ordinating platform that aspires to provide a focus reflecting the hopes, fears and aspirations of the grassroots. The BMF has been set up to complement and enhance the work already undertaken by hundreds of institutions and individuals who serve the communities in all areas of life.

The BMF aims to promote values that are common to all humanity through teachings of fearing God and serving humanity. The BMF also intend to strengthen the existing multi-faith links that promote understanding and tolerance amongst faith communities.

The Muslim Association of Britain

The Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) was established in 1997. MAB states its aim as to "promote and propagate the principles of positive Muslim interaction with all elements of society to reflect, project and convey the message of Islam in its pure and unblemished form".

Along with Stop the War Coalition (StWC) and Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, it has co-sponsored various demonstrations against the 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq. MAB first started working with the StWC in 2002. They agreed to join together MABs demonstration to mark the anniversary of the Second Palestinian Intifada with a demonstration StWC had planned against the looming Iraq war.

MAB encourages its members to vote certain ways in elections - it supported Labour's Ken Livingstone for Mayor of London, and later in the parliamentary elections of 2005 it supported Respect in London and the Green Party in South East England.

The Muslim Public Affairs Committee UK

The Muslim Public Affairs Committee UK (MPACUK) was created in 2002, and the organization was set up to address what it sees as the under-representation of Muslims in British politics. The group, which maintains a website and bulletin board, is run by four activists.

The MPACUK encourages Muslim participation in the mainstream British political process and has no political affiliation. In particular it encourages Muslims to vote for or against MPs based on their views on a number of issues of Muslim concern. It has attacked Muslim Groups which reject Muslim participation in Western politics.

Islamic Human Rights Commission

The Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) was set up in 1997. It is an independent campaign,

research and advocacy organization based in London. It fosters links and works in partnership with different organizations from Muslim and non-Muslim backgrounds, to campaign for justice for all peoples regardless of their racial, confessional or political background.

Its aims are manifold, and its claims to draw inspiration from the Qur'anic injunctions that command believers to rise up in defense of the oppressed. IHRC works through submitting reports to governments and international organizations, writing articles, monitoring the media, cataloguing war crimes, producing research papers, organizing vigils, taking on discrimination cases and so on.

5. Defining events

Some events play a major role in defining a community's image in the mind of themselves or others. Here are a few such key defining moments for British Muslims.

The Satanic Verses Affair – 1988-91

The Satanic Verses Affair was prompted by a feeling of revulsion amongst Muslims towards Salman Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses*, first available for sale in September 1988. The affair was seen very differently from various perspectives. While many in the western world saw it as a matter of freedom of speech, most Muslims perceived it as an insult and smear campaign against their holy prophet.

The British Muslim community was able to respond rapidly because of a pre-existing institutional infrastructure and collaboration in place for over a decade, notably the Islamic Foundation in Leicester and the 'Impact International' Muslim news magazine in London.

On 27 February 1989 a delegation of British Muslims met Mr. John Patten, a Minister at the Home Office to press for legal redress for abuse and sacrilege of Muslims' religious sanctities. In addition, after the statement from the Attorney General that British law precluded any action against the publishers, some Muslims chose a more confrontational approach. The book was burned during a number of demonstrations, which got media attention.

The news headlines tended to portray Muslims as emotional hot-heads, both confirming and perpetuating a convenient stereotype. Muslims on the other hand complained that the media chose not to report the strenuous efforts that Muslims had made to resolve the matter with civility and dignity, particularly the dismissive way the publishers had responded to the large-scale petition. This also encouraged a number of Muslim individuals and organizations to join the British political scene.

World events, such as the deaths in Islamabad on 12 February 1989 during an anti-Rushdie demonstration, and the subsequent Imam Khomeini Fatwa declared in February 1989, intensified the spotlight on British Muslims. On 27 May 1989, several thousand Muslims from all over Britain converged on Hyde Park for a march to Downing Street organized by an ad-hoc 'British Muslim Action Front'.

British Muslims also Participated in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) Summit in Dakar, Senegal, in December 1991, and worked to brief Muslim heads of states of the event. The Satanic Verses Affair thus not only launched British Muslims on a new trajectory but also put them in the orbit of Muslim world affairs.

The Bosnian War – 1992 – 96

For evening after evening, month after month, TV screens brought scenes of shelling of Sarajevo and Bosnian women and children fleeing towns and villages. Here was a tragedy unfolding in Europe, traumatizing a Muslim people for no reason but their religious identity. Like the Satanic Verses Affair, it was a compelling wake-up call for British Muslims.

There was disgust with the Government policy of denying the supply of heavy artillery to the Bosnians while at the same time turning a blind eye to the involvement of the army of the Republic of Serbia in aiding the Serb rebels in the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The British Foreign Office line was that all the warring factions, Bosnian, Serb and Croat were equally culpable. To the Muslims it seemed like an indirect support to the stronger side.

The British Muslims felt that their government showed a disregard for the plight of the Bosnians, which was in marked contrast to a number of initiatives from individuals and charity bodies, both Muslim and non-Muslim.

The war also prompted many British Muslims into charity work. One such example was Asad Khan, an electronics engineer from Finchley, North London, who with the support of his wife and friends, founded a UK-registered charity, Convoy of Mercy (CoM) in 1992.

CoM was responsible for over 80 land convoys to the Balkans transporting medicines, medical equipment clothes, books and aid workers. On most occasions Asad was a driver in these 32-hour journeys from London. CoM maintained a presence on the ground throughout the Bosnian war, one of the few British Muslim aid organizations to do so.

After the end of the Bosnian War, CoM went on to provide aid in Kosovo and other crisis spots. A number of political and organizational activities in the Muslim community in the UK can be traced back to the Bosnian war.

The elections in 1997 where the conservative government lost to the Labour Party also marked the first time Muslim politicians made it to the British parliament. The new home minister also requested the Muslim organizations to form a common front, and thus helped lay the ground for the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB).

September 11 & its Aftermath

Within hours of the Twin Towers attack, Muslim organizations in Britain were receiving hate mail. British Muslims found themselves catapulted to a front line not of their making:

Muslims experienced abuse and threats, and mosques were desecrated as people responded in a knee-jerk manner. In Exeter, two days after the attacks, eight pig heads were thrown into the car park of the local mosque and a banner was erected saying “The blood of the American people is on the hands of every Muslim. Nuke ‘em, George.” In Swindon, a nineteen year-old Muslim woman wearing a headscarf was hospitalized after being chased and hit hard on the head with a baseball bat.

This was to be the most delicate moment thus far in the history of the Muslim community in Britain – The country could have easily slipped into a climate of intolerance towards Muslims. However one factor proved tremendously important – Muslims in Britain possessed a national body through the Muslim Council of Britain, which possessed a connection with the grass-roots, and at the same time had contacts with the British authorities.

The MCB was thus able to issue a press statement within three hours of the atrocity stating unequivocally that 'whoever is responsible for these dreadful, wanton attacks, we condemn them utterly'.

The government played its part by acknowledging this, and the very day after the attacks the Prime Minister himself made reference to the MCB's unequivocal position of outright condemnation in his press conference outside No 10 Downing Street.

Muslim leaders from around the country, through a press conference arranged by the MCB, signed a statement stating that the attacks were morally indefensible and called on those who had planned them to be brought to justice.

The anti-War movement 2001-03

British Muslims were able to form important alliances with several mainstream organizations who opposed the US-led wars against Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003). For the first time, Muslims felt that they were not espousing some fringe issue as far as mainstream society was concerned, but their concerns were at the very heart of a wide social movement that deplored US policies and distanced itself from the actions of the Blair government. The rallies gradually increased in size: 20,000 took to the streets in October 2001; 100,000 in November 2001; 400,000 in September 2002; the record 2 million in March 2003, the largest political demonstration in the nation's history.

The challenges of organizing these events brought to the fore fresh talent, including Salma Yaqoob, who later became a city councilor in Birmingham, and who successfully engineered an alliance between Muslim organizations and the Socialist Workers Party/Socialist Alliance in Birmingham.

National elections in 2005 saw Labour emerging with a majority in the Commons reduced from 161 to 60. Amongst the most significant results for Muslims was the Bethnal Green and Bow constituency in East London, where George Galloway, founder of the Respect Party, with widespread support of Muslims, beat incumbent Labour MP Oona King, a staunch supporter of the Iraq-war.

Also, the number of Muslim MPs in the Commons increased from 2 to 4, all from the Labour party. For the first time in a British General Election, there was considerable interest in the voting intentions of the Muslim community. Traditionally regarded as a captive Labour vote bank, it was a constituency that no longer could be taken for granted.

Racial and Religious Hatred Bill

When the Racial and Religious Hatred Bill entered Committee Stage on 21st June 2005, its rationale was to extend the current offenses on incitement to racial hatred under the 1986 Public Order Act to cover the stirring up of hatred (i.e. violence and intimidation) against people of any religious faith. The offense was to carry a maximum seven-year jail sentence.

The original proposals would have given the same protections that applied to race to religion e.g. criminalizing reckless, abusive and insulting behavior directed at individuals because of faith. In its modified form, a new schedule has been added to the Public Order Act 1986 that outlaws "threatening" behavior and that too only if it can be proven to be "intentional". Thus it will be more difficult to convict someone of hatred towards Muslims, then say hatred to an ethnic group, which under the terms of the Race Relations Act, includes Jews and Sikhs (but not Muslims).

Bombs in London

Like all British people, the Muslim community reacted with shock and outrage at the Underground explosions and the bomb aboard a London bus 7th July 2005, that left 52 people dead, including 6

Muslims.

The different Muslim organizations reacted within hours of the incidents and condemned the actions. Several also pointed out that several of the victims were Muslims, and that British Muslims were victims just like other British citizens. They offered help and support for the government where they could, and urged Muslims who might have information about the incident and those behind it to inform the police and cooperate with the establishment in order to uproot terrorism.

The organizations also called on Muslim clerics in Britain to speak out about their opposition to terrorism and preach for unity.

The Cartoon crisis and the response of Muslims in Britain

On 30th September 2005, the Danish daily Jyllands-Posten printed 12 cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad.

For older Muslims in Britain the Danish cartoons affair was seen as a re-run of Rushdie's 'Satanic Verses' fifteen years earlier. They felt that then as now incidents were used to focus on lack of a sense of humor, lack of tolerance and predisposition to violence amongst Muslims. The difference now was that the controversy took place in the backdrop of the attacks on New York. Muslims felt besieged and an easy target for anti-Muslim groups, more so than in the late 80s.

The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), recognized the grave consequences if matters went out of hand, and issued statements calling on Muslims to keep their protest within the law and eschew completely any incitement to hatred: "Inevitably some elements may seek to exploit this current crisis to provoke negative or extreme reactions among Muslims. The MCB urges fellow British Muslims to exercise the utmost restraint in the face of these provocations. There may be elements that would want to exploit the genuine sense of anguish and hurt among British Muslims about the manner in which the Prophet has been vilified to pursue their own mischievous agenda. We would caution all British Muslims to not allow themselves to be provoked. They should respond peacefully and with dignity at all times" (Press release, 3rd Feb 2006).

The MCB's fears were prompted by some demonstrators outside the Danish embassy in London carrying placards with very offensive slogans like: "butcher those who mock Islam", " Britain, you will pay, 7/7 on its way".

For some Muslims such behavior was playing into the hands of those who wished for Islam to be portrayed in the worst possible light. Several Muslim representatives attending a meeting of the MCB in Birmingham on 4th February 2006 urged that the best approach for Muslims in the face of provocations and insults was to behave like the Prophet would have - with dignity, magnanimity and compassion. Reference was made to the Prophet's experience at Taif and his response. Salma Yaqub, a respected voice within the community, urged the imams present to think carefully of the impact of their words on congregations - "we don't need to prove who loves the Prophet most".

Both Muslim extremist groups and Islamophobic elements have tried to use the cartoon controversy to boost their own agenda, unfortunately with some success. British media did not print the cartoons in question.

Religious symbols

A number of incidents in the last few months of 2006 gave rise to a very vocal debate about the use of religious symbols in public, and the relationship between tolerance, religious rights and duties.

On 5th October 2006, the Leader of the House Jack Straw MP, a former Home Secretary and

Foreign Secretary published an article in the Lancashire Telegraph which created a shock in the Muslim community. The shock came because Straw was a leading Labour politician, with a track record of dialogue with the Muslims, and with long-standing friendships in the community, and he was understood as declaring that he demanded Muslim women visiting his MP surgery to remove their *Niqab* or face veil. The question asked was why Jack Straw felt it necessary to raise the issue at the present time - only a few days earlier Home Secretary John Reid had made a similar address to Muslim parents. The cumulative effect left many Muslims feeling stigmatized.

The following week a support teacher in Dewsbury, Aisha Azmi, was suspended for wearing the veil during class lessons. Pushing aside criticisms, on 3rd November, Jack Straw defended his original remarks and stated that it was "absurd" and "ridiculous" to suggest that his comments on the veil made him directly responsible for a rise in Islamophobic attacks (The Guardian, 3rd November 2006)

On 6th November, a legal advisor Shabnam Mughal twice refused to remove her 'niqab' during an immigration tribunal in Stoke-on-ent. The presiding judge, Judge George Glossop, said he could not hear Mughal properly and adjourned the hearing to seek guidance from the President of the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal Judge Hodge.

On 5th December, 2006 Channel 4 announced that it had invited a *Niqab* wearing lady to deliver its alternative Christmas speech. The 10-minute broadcast on Christmas Day would be delivered by Khadija, a lecturer in Islamic studies from the Midlands.

On 20th December, 2006 the media headlines were about the escape of Mustafa Jama, wanted for the murder of WPC Beshenivsky in Bradford in November 2005. For example the Sun's front page carried the caption "Veil ... is this a Muslim woman or a ruthless gunman?" with a full page picture of a woman bearing the *Niqab*. The newspaper also added "A MEMBER of the gang that killed WPC Sharon Beshenivsky fled Britain disguised as a woman in a Muslim-style veil... His face was covered by a *Niqab*, with only a slit for his eyes, and he is believed to have been clad in a jilbab that covers the entire body."

This type of media reporting based on an unnamed police source further stigmatized Muslim women wearing niqab. Subsequent TV coverage which included interviews with airport security staff indicated that there were several possibilities for Jama's escape route. It is understood West Yorkshire Police - who actually never commented on reports about the veil theory - regarded it only as one of a number of possibilities. However the Islamophobic damage had been done.

At the same time, and maybe prompted by this, a row started between a Christian employee of British Airways and her employer about her right to wear a cross. In the end British Airways had to back down.

6. Media

Mainstream media

Relations between news journalists and those they write or broadcast about can often be complicated. The journalist needs to maintain a distance to be able to report objectively, but at the same time there should be some trust between a given community and the media covering events in that community. This is often lacking between the mainstream media and British Muslims.

Many journalists still see Islam as something ‘different’, in the broadest sense of that word, a foreign faith that sits uncomfortably in Western countries. Muslims, on their side, believe that the media overly demonizes the Muslim community by focusing disproportionately on bad news and on conflicts.

At the same time, there are more Muslim individuals prominent in the British Media than ever before, and much is being done to improve relations between Britain’s Muslim organizations and the media, and many media organizations are taking concrete and often innovative steps to address issues of common concern.

The Guardian convenes an annual forum in which it invites younger British Muslims to debate and discuss issues of mutual interest, and Channel 4 has also broadcast an innovative weekly show called Shariah TV in which an invited audience of younger Muslims puts questions about the practice of Islam to an invited panel of scholarly experts. This program was aimed exclusively at a Muslim audience.

If ordinary Muslims and small organizations are wary of engaging with the media, larger and more politically active Muslim institutions are showing signs of having become accomplished practitioners at influencing media coverage by using the craft of public relations. They are adept at lobbying journalists, writing letters to newspapers, issuing press releases and staging press conferences.

Muslim media

The English language and relatively lenient attitudes to censorship and press registration are two reasons why Britain has always been attractive for anyone wanting to establish English language media. Minority communities, non-Western organizations and non-Christian faith groups that want a global audience for their message tend to choose London as their center of operations.

The earliest Muslim periodicals in English date from the beginning of the 20th century. But mass-media institutions emerged in Britain at the same time as the beginning of migration of Muslims from South Asia in the late 1950s. An important aim was to provide English speakers with an interpretation of world events (particularly developments in predominantly Muslim countries) through what was – and is – considered an authentically Muslim view. This is in part because many Muslims believe that the mainstream English language media does not portray world events in a way that is sympathetic to their concerns.

The Muslim News International was one of the first Muslim publications and was established in London in 1963, Impact International was another important monthly magazine which started in 1971. The Muslim News, a free newspaper paid for by advertising, was set up in 1989. Newer magazines include the Muslim Weekly, Q News and Islamica.

The internet has given Muslims something that they have always felt was denied to them: the ability to set the media agenda and influence audiences without having to go through other media

channels.

One of the most popular websites for British Muslims is *www.islamonline.net*. It is published by journalists sympathetic to the modernizing wing of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood. Based in Cairo but with a network of global correspondents, the site contains a mix of daily world news, features, chat, audio and a chance to pose questions on the practice of Islam live to a panel of theologians from different countries.

7. Islamophobia and radicalization

The radicalization of young Muslims and increasing Islamophobia are trends which we see on the rise in most western European societies, so also in Britain.

Islamophobia is the fear and/or hatred of Islam, Muslims or Islamic culture. Islamophobia is characterized by the belief that all or most Muslims are religious fanatics, have violent tendencies towards non-Muslims, and reject as directly opposed to Islam such concepts as equality, tolerance, and democracy. It is viewed as a new form of racism whereby Muslims, an ethno-religious group, not a race, are nevertheless constructed as a race.ⁱ

A report from the think-tank Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia has found that there have been more attacks on individuals and mosques in the UK following the al-Qa'eda attacks in America. Exclusion from public life has fostered a feeling of not belonging in Britain among some Muslims, particularly the young. This could lead to a time bomb of ill-feeling, according to the report.ⁱⁱ

The report, researched and written in the most part by Hugh Muir, a journalist on *The Guardian*, and Laura Smith, until recently a journalist on the *Evening Standard* now studying for a masters degree at the London School of Economics, states: "Time bombs are being primed that are likely to explode in the future. Both Muslim and non-Muslim commentators have pointed out that a young generation of Muslims is developing that feels increasingly disaffected, alien and bitter.

Launching the new report, Dr Richard Stone, chair of the commission, warned key recommendations had been ignored.

"On 15 February 2003 there took place the biggest public demonstration ever in British history the march against the war in Iraq," said Dr Stone. "But within weeks, the wonderful solidarity seen on 15 February seemed to be unraveling." There is now renewed talk of a clash of civilizations and mounting concern that the already fragile foothold gained by Muslim communities in Britain is threatened by ignorance and intolerance. "It's in the interests of non-Muslims as well as Muslims, therefore, that Islamophobia should be rigorously challenged, reduced and dispelled. The time to act is now."

The cartoon crisis mentioned earlier and then the row about Muslim dress code have also led to increased tension in the relation between Muslims and non-Muslims in Britain.

In Britain, an Afghan taxi driver was paralysed from the neck down after being attacked with a bottle in a dispute over the attacks on New York. The European Union's race watchdog has also accused a wide range of British commentators, politicians and media of helping to foster an upsurge

in anti-Islamic feeling after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. These anti-Islamic trends also fuel Islamic radicalization.

Islamic radicalization is fostered in a small part of the Muslim population, and it focuses on viewing non-Muslims as the enemies of Islam. Even amongst the radicals, it is important to note, there are few that advocate violence. But their views on the relationship between Muslims and others still make most mainstream Muslims shy away from them.

The worrisome trend though is that while the radicals are few, and the ones that advocate violence are even fewer, there are many Muslims that do not see the radicals as a threat, and thus through negligence give the radicals an opportunity to get foothold in communities. The bombs in London provided a frightening idea of how these organizations were able to radicalize youth born and bred in Britain, and if one takes into account the large number of plots the MI5 says it has foiled since then it is really a growing problem.

MI5 has also reported that it keeps a large number of Muslim individuals and organizations under close watch. The last issue in this regard was the report that the intelligence agencies have been monitoring every Muslim who traveled from Britain to Mecca on pilgrimage.

A senior Whitehall official disclosed that the operation targeting trips to the holy city in Saudi is part of a trawl by MI5 and MI6 for information about movements of suspected terrorists. These moves have been criticized by Muslim community leaders.

However, while one should appreciate that the violent radicals are a small group it would be unforgivable to ignore the fact that there indeed are Islamic terrorist networks operating in Britain which must be dismantled by appropriate means. Still it is important that one does not further alienate the larger Muslim community in the act. Much as social marginalisation and alienation, coupled with targeted indoctrination, may have led some individuals to radicalize, there is no reason to suspect or, worse, to criminalise entire communities.

On the contrary, it is all the more necessary to address the needs and problems of those young British Muslims, in particular, who risk getting caught between failing integration and mounting radicalisation. The root causes of Muslim radicalism are complex, and cannot be reduced to a single issue the disappearance or resolution of which would magically do away with it. The issue needs to be properly understood before we can make proper countermeasures.

When Samuel Huntington first wrote, in 1993, about a possible “clash of civilisations” between broadly Christian and Muslim states, societies and values as the new defining factor of world politics in the 21st century, criticism was swift and sharp from fellow academics as well as commentators and opinion leaders.

Some objected primarily to his analysis, which offered very little circumstantial evidence and appeared to overstate the case, but most complained that his diagnosis risked becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. With the ongoing developments one is entitled to wonder whether the gloomy prophecy has somehow vindicated the patchy analysis. Radical individuals, groups and organizations on both sides of the divide have unfortunately been able to use analysis and theories such as these to increase media attention. It is interesting and ironic to observe how concurrent the worldviews of radical Muslims and Islamophobes are. These worldviews are marked by the belief that there is a constant war between the Muslims and non-Muslims, and every event is understood as a part of that war.

The UK's highest-ranking Asian police officer Tarique Ghaffur said during a meeting in Manchester

that Islamophobia made some Muslims vulnerable to extremism. Mr Ghaffur said a "critical crossroad" had been reached in relations with the Islamic community. "Young people have developed a strong sense of connection with Islam. The cumulative effect of Islamophobia, both internationally and nationally, linked to social exclusion, has created a generation of angry young people who are vulnerable to exploitation."

He said the "simplistic" anti-western messages of extremist organizations, advocating closed and hostile views of other religions, could be attractive to vulnerable young people. We must think long and hard about the causal factors of anger and resentment. In particular, we need to adopt an evidence-based approach to building solutions. He also called for leadership from the Muslim community, elements of which "remain inward looking"ⁱⁱⁱ. These views are echoed by Paul Beaver, an independent consultant on terrorism and security. He says the vast majority of the Muslim community is law-abiding and against terrorism. But, he adds, they are in denial about the radicalization of their youth.^{iv}

The challenge for both the British government and the Muslims in Britain is to combat both these two trends. Neither can do it alone, the question is, will they be able to cooperate? A number of very good initiatives have been taken, and the relationship between Muslims and the authorities are growing and a number of common initiatives have been taken to combat both radical Muslim groups and Islamophobia in society.

i <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamophobia>

ii <http://www.insted.co.uk/islam.html>

iii http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/5251346.stm

iv <http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2006-08/2006-08-11-voa33.cfm>

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