

**Muslim identity politics in the UK, 1960-2010**

**Development, challenges, and the future as illustrated by ‘the  
fate’ of freedom of expression**

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London, for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.**

**Declaration of Authorship**

I, Khadijah Elshayyal, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Abstract

The past four decades have witnessed a tremendous amount of change and development in the area of British Muslim identity politics. From the establishment and growth of local and regional community groups, to international Islamic movements taking root in the UK and making an impact on the attitudes and aspirations Muslim communities. From the Rushdie affair and its legacy, through to the impact of international terrorism (9/11), and terrorism on home soil (7/7), all of these events have left their unmistakeable mark on Britain's Muslim communities. While there has been much recent academic study on British Muslims, there has been a lack of in-depth focus given to critically charting the development of a formal identity politics through official representative organisations, in the context of the rationale for claims that have been put forward towards government, their evolution and refinement over time and the impact of factors such as multiculturalism, Islamophobia and securitisation.

With this thesis, I aim to contribute towards filling this gap in the literature. I first examine how formal Muslim identity politics 'scene' developed into the current familiar form. I look at some of the theory that has been used both to explain and to justify it. This includes examining aspects of British culture, and that of immigrant Muslim communities, which have informed and complicated approaches to engagement and dialogue at one and the same time. It also involves looking at notions of equality as recognition, and the idea of misrecognition. I propose that ever since the Rushdie affair of 1989, political claims put forward by Muslim organisations have been driven by the existence of an 'equality gap', and a keen desire to close this gap has informed and motivated their identity politics.

Freedom of expression is a theme of particular interest. In the form of the Rushdie affair, it was a major trigger for the coming together of disparate Muslim groups to collectively engage with the government. Since then it has consistently been a site of much sensitivity, contention and debate. Deploying examples relating to freedom of expression, I illustrate how Muslim identity politics has evolved over the years and how priorities as well as tactics for Muslim groups and successive governments with whom they have engaged have both shifted and changed.

Comparing and contrasting Muslim identity politics with the experiences of Britain's Jewish communities, I draw out salient points of commonality and difference in their respective communal organisations. By pointing out how similar Muslim claims towards government have been to those made by Jews in the past, I show not only how Muslim identity politics has consciously benefited from the prior experiences of British Jewry, but, importantly, that Muslim political claims are not as exceptional or unreasonable as critics might suggest.

Finally, I take stock of how British Muslim identity politics has progressed over this period, assessing the extent to which the 'equality gap' has been closed. I argue that while it has been considerably narrow, the events of recent decades have led to a change in its focus. I present projections and recommendations on the future of Muslim identity politics in the UK. I argue that whereas in the past period, Muslim organisations were overwhelmingly preoccupied with lobbying of the state, the future of identity politics lies in harnessing the potential of civic partnerships based on shared interests between diverse communities. This approach, when supplemented with the traditional lobbying role played by representative groups, can more effectively address the 'equality gap'.

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I held formal interviews and informal conversations with a large number of individuals from British Muslim communities and organisations, as well as some from the Jewish communities. I was touched by the generosity – with both time and information, and occasionally hospitality – that I was shown by all my interviewees. Many have requested to remain anonymous, so I will respect their wishes by simply acknowledging them collectively, heartfelt thanks to you all!

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## Acronyms

BCM	Bradford Council of Mosques
BMF	British Muslim Forum
BMI	British Muslim Initiative
BMPA	Bradford Muslim Parents' Association
BMSD	British Muslims for Secular Democracy
BNP	British National Party
BOD	Board of Deputies of British Jews
CENTRI	Counter Extremism Consultancy, Training, Research and Interventions
CRC	Community Relations Council
CRE	Commission for Racial Equality
CST	Community Security Trust
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
DI	Dawatul Islam
EDL	English Defence League
EHRC	Equality and Human Rights Commission
EIWG	Engaging with the Islamic World Group
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FOSIS	Federation of Students' Islamic Societies
HT	Hizb ut Tahrir
ICIT	Institute of Contemporary Islamic Thought
IFE	Islamic Forum Europe
IJV	Independent Jewish Voices
IPB	Islamic Party of Britain
ISA	Information Sharing Agreement
ISB	Islamic Society of Britain
JFS	Jews Free School
JI	Jamaat-e-Islami
JIMAS	Jam'iyat Ithya Minhaj AhlusSunnah wal jama'a

JLC	Jewish Leadership Council
LMI	Liverpool Muslim Institute
MAB	Muslim Association of Britain
MB	Muslim Brotherhood
MCB	Muslim Council of Britain
MET	Muslim Educational Trust
MINAB	Mosques and Imams Advisory Board
MP	Muslim Parliament
MSS	Muslim Students' Society
NICMU	National Interim Council for Muslim Unity
NMWAG	National Muslim Women's Advisory Group
OASIS	Organisation of AhlusSunnah Islamic Societies
PBM	Progressive British Muslims
PET	Preventing Extremism Together
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
RMW	Radical Middle Way
SMC	Sufi Muslim Council
TJ	Tablighi Jamaat
Tell MAMA	(Tell) Monitoring Anti Muslims Attacks
UKACIA	United Kingdom Action Committee on Islamic Affairs
UKIM	United Kingdom Islamic Mission
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party
UMO	Union of Muslim Organisations
YMAG	Young Muslim Advisory Group
YMO	Young Muslim Organisation
YMUK	Young Muslims United Kingdom

### Glossary of non-English terms:

Al salaf al salih	the pious predecessors.
Al wala' wal bara'	loyalty (to Islam/Muslims) and disassociation (from disbelief/disbelievers).
Ashkenazi	Jews who trace their origins to the indigenous Israelite tribes of the Middle East, generally used to describe present-day descendants of Rhineland Jews.
Baitul mal	treasury
Bani Ibrahim	children of Abraham
Banlieues	suburbs, with connotations of low income populations and social housing.
Da'wa	call or 'invitation' to Islam.
Dar ul Islam	realm of Islam.
Dar ul kufr	realm of disbelief.
Darul Uloom	house of sciences (in the UK used for Islamic seminaries in the <i>Deobandi</i> tradition).
Du'a	'callers' to Islam/proselytisers (singular: <i>da'iya</i> ).
Eid	bi-annual Muslim festival.
Ghira	jealous guarding or protection of honour.
Hadarim	traditional Jewish religious schools (singular: <i>heder</i> ).
Haham	<i>Rabbi</i> of <i>Sephardi</i> congregations.
Halal	permitted under Islam, e.g. <i>halal</i> meat.
Illa rasulallah	(anyone/thing) except the messenger of God.
Isa'ah	insult, offence.
'ird	honour, dignity.
Janaza	Muslim prayer for the deceased.
Jihad	struggle, greater <i>jihad</i> being the individual's everyday struggle with her desires, lesser <i>jihad</i> is the armed struggle.
Jihadi	of <i>jihad</i> .
Khilafa, khulafaa	succession, successors (of the Prophet Muhammad). Singular: <i>khalifa</i> . Refers to Islamic state and its ruler/s.
Kuffar	disbelievers.

Kunya	nickname or epithet.
Madhab	school of thought in Islamic jurisprudence.
Madrassa	school providing supplementary Islamic education.
Milad ul nabi	birthday of the Prophet Muhammad.
Mujahideen	those engaged in <i>jihad</i> .
Nasheed	songs, used to refer to Muslim religious/devotional singing.
Sabb an nabi	insulting the Prophet.
Sephardi	descendants of Jewish settlers originally from the Near East, who settled in the Iberian Peninsula.
Shahada	Islamic declaration of faith.
Shalwar Kameez	traditional South Asian dress consisting of a tunic over loose fitting trousers
Shari'a	the path to water (old Arabic), the (legal) path of Islam.
Shaykh ul Islam	title denoting religious leadership of a Muslim community.
Shechita	method of ritual slaughter according to Judaism.
Shi'a	group/party (of Ali, the fourth <i>khalifa</i> ), the minority denomination within Islam.
Sunnah	the recorded tradition of the Prophet Muhammad, and along with the Qur'an, a primary source of Islamic teaching.
Sunni	of the <i>sunnah</i> , the majority denomination within Islam.
Tajdif	blasphemy.
Tawheed	the oneness/unity of God.
Ummah	nation – used to refer to the worldwide Muslim community (nation).

**Chronology of recent British Muslim identity politics, incorporating relevant domestic and international historical events:**

**18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries** various waves of Muslim (mainly male) immigrants arrive in the UK to work as labourers, forming communities in UK port towns including Cardiff, Liverpool, London and South Shields.

**1887** Liverpool Muslim Institute (LMI) established by Abdullah Quilliam.

**1889** Quilliam's LMI set up a prayer hall at Brougham Terrace in Liverpool; Woking mosque (later the Shah Jahan Mosque), is constructed, the first purpose built mosque in Britain.

**1910** London Mosque Fund opens with the aim of obtaining donations towards the establishment of a mosque in London.

**1913** Woking Muslim Mission established by Khwaja Kamaluddin, reviving the Woking (now Shah Jahan) Mosque, which had fallen into a period of disuse after the death of its founder Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner in 1899.

**1914** British Muslim Society founded by Lord Headley.

**1940** East London Mosque opens on its first premises on Commercial Street.

**1944** King George VI donates 2.3 acres of land in Regents Park for use as the London Central Mosque. This is in return for the similar donation of land in Cairo for use as an Anglican cathedral.

**1962** UKIM formed.

Circa. **1962** MSS formed.

**1963** FOSIS established.

**1964** The Labour Party comes to power under Harold Wilson, beginning an 11 year stretch of Labour governments, ending in 1979 [with the interruption of Edward Heath's Conservative administration between the years 1970-74].

**1965** First Race Relations Act introduced, along with the Community Relations Commission, the precursor to the CRE.

**1966** MET established.

**1968** YMO formed as the youth wing of UKIM.

**1970** UMO formed; Muslim Welfare House established in London.

**1971** *Impact International*, Muslim news and current affairs magazine launched.

**1973** Islamic Foundation established in Leicester.

**1975** The East London Mosque opens in its current location at Whitechapel Road.

**1976** Race Relations Act; CRE established.

**1977** The London Central Mosque and Islamic Cultural Centre at Regents Park is opened.

**1978** Dawatul Islam formed.

**1979** Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher is elected.

**1980s** HT arrives in Britain; IFE formed.

**1984** Honeyford Affair; YMUK established as UKIM's youth wing; JIMAS formed.

**Late 1980s** YMUK breaks away from UKIM.

**1987** First Palestinian Intifada.

**1988** *The Satanic Verses* published by Viking Press; UKACIA formed.

**1989** *The Muslim News* first published.

**1990** Fatwa issued by Ayatollah Khomeini calling for the death of Salman Rushdie; ISB established; the Muslim Institute established; First Gulf War commences with the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq and the allied intervention which ensued.

**1992** John Major is elected leader of the Conservative Party after Margaret Thatcher's resignation, and thus replaces her as prime minister; Muslim Parliament of Great Britain launched; Bosnian War breaks out and continues through to 1995.

**1994** NICMU initiative commences; YMUK merges with ISB to become its official youth wing.

**1996** Al Muhajiroun formed by breakaway members of HT.

**1997** MCB established; MAB formed; Labour Party comes to power under Tony Blair; Runnymede Trust report on Islamophobia is published.

**1998** First two Muslim schools granted voluntary aided status (and state funding) by the Education Secretary.

**1999** Macpherson Report is published.

**2000** Terrorism Act 2000; Second Palestinian Intifada; Race Relations Amendment Act 2000.

**2001** 9/11 attacks; revised anti-terror legislation; an optional religion question included in the national census for the first time; British forces sent to Afghanistan as part of the US-led coalition; Stop the War Coalition formed to oppose Britain's involvement in the 'War on Terror', MAB is a key partner in the coalition.

**2003** Allied invasion of Iraq (Second Gulf War), as part of the War on Terror.

**2004** RESPECT Party formed, it fields a number of high profile Muslim candidates in the European Parliament and local council elections that summer.

**2005** 7/7 attacks; Preventing Violent Extremism working groups convened, producing extensive recommendations to the government; BMF and SMC launched; RESPECT Party leader George Galloway wins Bethnal Green and Bow seat (a constituency with a Muslim majority population) in the General Election, on an anti-war platform, and with endorsement and support of many Muslim groups and figures.

**2006** Terrorism Act 2006 passed; RRA Act passed; Prevent strategy initiated; Danish Cartoon Crisis (the cartoons were actually first published in *Jyllands Posten* in September 2005, but international awareness picked up by the end of the year, reaching their peak by Jan/Feb 2006).

**2007** MINAB launched; NMWAG launched; Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) comes into being, replacing the CRE and other statutory bodies to form a single equalities body dealing with discrimination against age, disability, gender, race, religion and sexual orientation.

**2008** Blasphemy laws abolished; YMAG launched; Quilliam Foundation formed; start of protracted public stand-off between MCB and government ostensibly over Daud Abdullah's position re: Gaza.

**2009** Resumption of formal MCB-government relations, but this time as part of open engagement with much wider spectrum of Muslim groups, which included those emerging post-2005; EDL formed.

**2010** Labour defeated in the General Election and a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition forms government with David Cameron as Prime Minister, review of the Prevent strategy commences. The Conservative Party demonstrates its antipathy towards 'Islamism' by instructing its politicians, including (then party co-chairman) Baroness Warsi, to boycott the Islam Channel's annual Global Peace and Unity event; Home Secretary Theresa May uses 'exclusion powers' for the first time to refuse Indian TV preacher Dr. Zakir Naik entry into the UK after a right-wing campaign, on grounds of his 'unacceptable behaviour'; meanwhile, Geert Wilders, a far-right Dutch politician known for his inflammatory anti-Muslim views visits UK after successfully overturning a ban imposed during the previous year.

**2011** Review of Prevent strategy published; Sayeeda Warsi's speech on Islamophobia.

**2012** MCB constitutional reforms passed, including a female quota in its National Council and a directly elected Secretary General; internet film, *Innocence of Muslims* reignites debates on free speech and Islam and provokes heated protest across Muslim world; Muslim Leadership Panel formed; TELL MAMA UK launched.

**2013** Murder in Woolwich of an off-duty member of the armed forces, Fusilier Lee Rigby, by two Muslim men claiming to act in retaliation for 'anti-Muslim' British foreign policy. This was followed by a spate of arson attacks and vandalism on mosques and Muslim schools, apparently carried out by the EDL or their sympathisers in retaliation to the murder.

## Chapter One:

### Introduction

#### Preamble:

Muslim presence in the UK can be traced back many centuries, with the earliest record of Muslim influence appearing to be the inscription of the *shabada*, the Muslim declaration of faith, on a coin issued by the Eighth Century Anglo-Saxon king, Offa of Mercia.<sup>1</sup> There are extensive records of interactions between the British Isles and the Muslim world, through politics and warfare of course, as well as through culture and trade.<sup>2</sup> In modern times, there have been various waves of immigration from Muslim countries which have resulted in settlement, and the development of communities in various, mostly urban, areas of the UK. To a large extent, immigrants from the Muslim world during modern times arrived for economic reasons. The 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century settlement of Somali and Yemeni Sailors in Wales and South Shields respectively, and the later arrival of South Asian immigrants in the post-war period and beyond were all cases of economic migration. Young men usually travelled first to seek employment, only later to be joined by their families, or (notably in the earlier periods) to marry locally and settle with their families.

A growing number of studies have been produced charting various aspects of this history, including the settlement of these immigrants, the development of communities and institutions, as well as efforts at claims-making and political engagement. Historic surveys have had a broader remit than political engagement, including it amongst cultural dynamics and developments, institution building, social aspects, including education and family life, as well as covering much longer time-spans.<sup>3</sup> Some of these works have encompassed studies of some of the very earliest examples of Muslim identity politics in Britain, including the political activity of individuals such as Syed Ameer Ali,<sup>4</sup> Khwaja Kamaluddin<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sophie Gilliat-Ray, *Muslims in Britain: an introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp.6-7.

<sup>2</sup> Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Humayun Ansari, *The Infidel Within: Muslims in Britain since 1800* (London: C. Hurst, 2004); Gilliat-Ray, *Muslims in Britain* (2010).

<sup>4</sup> Rozina Visram, *Ayabs, Lascars and Princes: Indians in Britain 1700-1947* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), pp.97-102; Humayun Ansari, 'Introduction' in *The Making of the East London Mosque: 1910-1951* ed. by Humayun Ansari (Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp.6-9. Ali was a British-educated Indian lawyer who became the first Indian to be appointed to the Privy Council. His earliest political activity was focused on the Muslims of India, co-founding the All-India Muslim League to promote educational and economic 'advancement' among Muslims. But by 1904 he had retired and settled in Britain and in due course became chairman of the Committee of the Woking Mosque, as well as the London Mosque Fund, campaigning enthusiastically for a mosque in central London (what became the East London Mosque).

<sup>5</sup> Khwaja Kamaluddin is credited with having revived the Woking Mosque after a period of dormancy, and establishing the Woking Muslim Mission, cf. Ansari, *The Infidel Within* (2004), p.88 and 126.

and William Abdullah Quilliam,<sup>6</sup> all of whom engaged with the state on behalf of Muslim ‘community interests’.

There have been numerous studies of contemporary British Muslim political engagement as part of European surveys,<sup>7</sup> or as single chapters within wider collections.<sup>8</sup> There have also been studies that have looked at political engagement and community organising on a smaller, regional scale, such as Philip Lewis’ *Islamic Britain* which specifically focuses on the Muslim communities of Bradford during the 1990s,<sup>9</sup> identity and political awareness among young Muslims,<sup>10</sup> and studies that centre around single events, and their impacts and reverberations.<sup>11</sup>

The development of a formal Muslim identity politics during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century up until present times has not received comparable extensive and in-depth scholarly attention from an historical perspective, and thus, it will be the focus of my thesis. The work of Tariq Modood has been seminal in discussing structural disadvantages that Muslims have faced in the political landscape, as well as understanding the experience of anti-Muslim racism and discrimination, and how British Muslims have responded with a politics of identity.<sup>12</sup> However, his approach has been from within the disciplines of political philosophy and sociology, thus highlighting the opportunity, and need for an historical analysis of the subject.

While there have been innumerable instances of political engagement and community organising amongst Muslims in Britain during preceding periods, these were largely concerned with setting up basic community institutions such as mosques, and other

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<sup>6</sup> Ron Geaves, *Islam in Victorian Britain: the life and times of Abdullah Quilliam* (Leicester: Kube, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Jytte Klausen, *The Islamic Challenge: Politics and Religion in Western Europe* (Oxford: OUP, 2006); Jonathan Laurence, *The Emancipation of Europe’s Muslims: the state’s role in minority integration* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), as well as edited volumes including Jocelyne Cesari and Sean McLoughlin eds., *European Muslims and the Secular State* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) and Tariq Modood, Anna Triandafyllidou, and Ricard Zapata-Barrero, *Multiculturalism, Muslims and Citizenship: A European Approach* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Steven Vertovec, ‘Islamophobia and Muslim Recognition in Britain’ in *Muslims in the West: from Sojourners to Citizens* ed. by Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad (New York: OUP, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Philip Lewis, *Islamic Britain: religion, politics and identity among British Muslims* (London: IB Tauris, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> Philip Lewis, *Young, British and Muslim* (London: Continuum, 2007), Nahid Afrose Kabir, *Young British Muslims: Identity, Culture, Politics and the Media* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Mark J Halstead, *Education, Justice and Cultural Diversity: An Examination of the Honeyford Affair, 1984-85* (London: Falmer, 1988), Paul Weller, *A Mirror for our Times: the Rushdie affair and the future of Multiculturalism* (London: Continuum, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Examples include: Tariq Modood, *Multiculturalism: a civic idea* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), Tariq Modood, *Multicultural Politics: racism, ethnicity and Muslims in Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), Tariq Modood, ‘Muslims and the Politics of Difference’ *Political Quarterly* Vol. 74:S1, (August 2003), pp.100-115.

community support services for recently arrived immigrants. My focus will be on a phase that was distinguished by its concern with coordination and representation on a national level. There were emergent elements of this concern from the early 1960s, however, I will argue that it was the Rushdie affair during the late 1980s that really set into motion a drive for a formally instituted and widely recognised national body for the communal leadership and representation of Britain's Muslim communities.

I begin by tracing the journey of British Muslim identity politics on numerous and sometimes rather disparate fronts, from the 1960s through to the 1980s, a period of over two decades which was marked by a preoccupation with identity preservation among immigrant communities that were coming to terms with their now permanent settlement in the UK. I then look at the period from the later 1980s to 1997, a highlight of which was the Rushdie affair of 1988/9, and the subsequent formalisation of Muslim identity politics. From this, I develop a solid background from which to proceed with a study of formalised Muslim identity politics from 1997 (marked by the launch of the Muslim Council of Britain and the publication of the Runnymede Trust's report on Islamophobia), through to 2010. With these two decades being a period of remarkable flux on so many levels, I have chosen to narrow my focus to the theme of freedom of expression.

This theme is of distinct interest for a number of reasons. Firstly, as I will go on to argue, freedom of expression was a central theme to the events of the late 1980s (namely the Rushdie affair), which propelled British Muslim communities to forge a path towards formal identity politics on a coordinated, national scale. Secondly, it is a theme which brings out very interesting points of historical, cultural and geopolitical contrast and comparison between the immigrant Muslim communities to Great Britain, and the public / political culture of Great Britain itself. On a global level, there has been a continuing trend of instances where Muslims have claimed that deep provocation and gratuitous offence had been caused by instances where aspects of their faith had been mocked and ridiculed by others. Such moments have invariably drawn heated and heartfelt protest from among Muslims worldwide (British Muslims among them), as well as regularly prompting calls for censorship, censoring and occasionally violent and even fatal incidents. Many on the right wing of politics have argued condescendingly that the Muslim reaction to such moments has consistently been an expression of exceptionally irrational and unfathomable, 'Muslim

rage'.<sup>13</sup> Examples such as the extensive and often hysterical global reaction in 2006 to the Muhammad cartoons published by the Danish newspaper *Jyllands Posten*,<sup>14</sup> through to the violent protests that took place against the 2012 amateur internet video, 'The Innocence of Muslims', have all been cited in this context.<sup>15</sup>

However, I will show that although there has been some consistency in Muslim intolerance of, and deep-seated offence towards mockery or ridicule of their faith, this trend cannot be understood *simply* by making reference to their faith, without taking into account a host of other explanatory factors. Additionally, it must be acknowledged that while this reaction of anger towards religious offence, and calls for censorship has continued to manifest itself at various moments over recent decades, it nonetheless is an approach which is experiencing significant adjustment and revision among many Muslims. This, I will argue, is telling of wider change and development that is taking place within Muslim communities – *especially* in Western countries and, as I will demonstrate, Britain is an apt example of this.

Finally, the theme of freedom of expression is one that has attracted a great deal of resurgent interest in the post-9/11 age of terrorism and securitisation. New-wave counter-terrorism laws have delved ever deeper into the area of expression, to the extent that they have been charged by their opponents with creating 'thought crimes'.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, 'soft' initiatives run and/or funded by the government to combat radicalisation and violent extremism by 'winning over hearts and minds', have been associated with the targeted surveillance, harassment and excessive monitoring of Muslims, and as such have been accused of having a chilling effect on free expression within these communities.

I will argue that contemporary British Muslim identity politics has grown and developed around the broad notion of an 'equality gap'<sup>17</sup> – which I define as the idea (both real and perceived) that Muslims did not have recourse to the same level of equality under the law

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<sup>13</sup> A term used by *Newsweek* in the cover of its 24<sup>th</sup> September 2012 edition, which was swiftly reclaimed as a focus of satirical parodies by users of Twitter and other social media sites across the world. See Alexander Hotz, 'Newsweek 'Muslim rage' cover invokes a rage of its own' US News Media Blog, *The Guardian* (17<sup>th</sup> September 2012). The term 'Muslim rage' was also used as early as 1990 by Bernard Lewis in his *From Babel to Dragomans: Interpreting the Middle East* (New York: OUP, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2004), where he describes it as the 'irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present, and the worldwide expansion of both', p.330.

<sup>14</sup> They were originally published in late 2005, although worldwide protests only really gained momentum by January 2006.

<sup>15</sup> David Aaronovitch, 'Is this the reaction of a grown-up religion?' *The Times* 20<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. the Samina Malik and Ahmed Faraz cases, discussed in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

<sup>17</sup> This shall hereinafter be referred to as the Equality Gap.

as other non-Muslim citizens. This was often expressed with reference to discrepancies in specific anti-discrimination provisions, but also extended wider than this.<sup>18</sup> Using free speech-related examples, I will examine contemporary British Muslim identity politics from the point of genesis up until 2010. I will, at various junctures, assess the successes and failures of the path that organised Muslim identity politics has followed, and I will conclude by giving recommendations for the future and offering a vision for how the Equality Gap can be effectively narrowed, if not, closed.

There exists a large and growing body of academic literature that covers the British Muslim experience from various angles, however, there is an absence of an in-depth, analytical narrative that charts the development of modern Muslim identity politics in the UK,<sup>19</sup> in particular, the development of this identity politics has not been explored from the lens of freedom of expression issues, in the type of depth that I hope to offer in this thesis. Additionally, since the time period under discussion is a very recent one, I will be using a range of current and recently released evidence and source material.

I will conduct this study as an historical analysis, using a range of primary and secondary sources. These include a number of in-depth interviews and informal conversations that I have conducted with key figures within Muslim community organisations, as well as other relevant figures. Additionally, I have had access to documentary material from the various organisations and structures both within British Muslim communities as well as the relevant material from government departments and structures – these include promotional documents, as well as internal membership communications, meeting minutes and correspondences. Newspapers, magazines and other forms of media including television and radio – both mainstream and community-based – have all provided useful primary and secondary sources for events and perspectives.

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<sup>18</sup> See Chapter 3 of this thesis.

<sup>19</sup> Two recently published contributions in this field are: Nasar Meer, *Citizenship, Identity and the Politics of Multiculturalism: The Rise of Muslim Consciousness* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) and Tahir Abbas, *Islamic Radicalism and multicultural politics* (London: Routledge, 2011).

### Setting the Scene: historical and theoretical contexts

This first chapter outlines the context in which the thesis will be set, and the key questions that it will tackle. Taking the notion of social equality and justice as my starting point, I will hone in on three important themes which have particular bearing on the integration and claims-making of Muslims as a newly-settled minority in Britain.

The first theme is that of **freedom of expression**, and more generally, of civil liberties – the lens through which the thesis as a whole will be analysing the development and evolution of British Muslim identity politics. I will begin with a survey of the Enlightenment roots of the historical development of these concepts in British political thought and their impact on constitutional and legal evolution. I will then also look at the historical pathway that similar ideas have travelled in Islamic theological and political past, and how they have fared in recent history, in Muslim majority countries, many of which are – in their present forms – relatively recent creations. This examination is important insofar as it sheds light upon the theme of freedom of expression and the understanding and approach to civil liberties as it unfolded in recent British Muslim history. It facilitates in the comprehension of the ensuing historical analysis – where causal factors behind moments of conflict and intractability can only be fully understood with an appreciation of these different historical pathways, and their role and place in shaping the mindset and perspectives of the political establishment, the media and the wider public on the one hand, and those of Muslim community groups and interlocutors/representatives on the other.

Before I do this, mention must be made of the extent to which there was an awareness of Islam, its scriptures and traditions among enlightenment thinkers.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, occasional sympathy towards Islam demonstrated by many key figures of the enlightenment may be taken to contradict the popular impression that ‘Islam’ and ‘the west’ have long been the sites of rival or opposing value-systems. This leads me to point out that although it may be tempting to portray Muslim and British (western) perspectives on free speech as two separate monoliths, this would be inaccurate, since the works of several Enlightenment writers express admiration towards and fascination with aspects of Islam, including the

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<sup>20</sup> Ziad Elmarsafy, *The Enlightenment Qur'an: the politics of translation and the construction of Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009) draws our attention to a number of (often sympathetic) European translations of the Qur'an that were written during the early modern period. Accompanying commentary and critiques also expressed high regard for the ‘achievements’ and leadership of the Prophet Muhammad.

person of the Prophet Muhammad, of Muslim societies, values and government.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Muslim thinkers have differed in their understandings of free speech, not least due to their own cross-cultural interactions. As I will show, these interactions and exchanges between cultures and contexts continue to the present day and are visible in the developing perspectives of Western Muslims on notions of free speech and blasphemy, and their responses to instances of offence.

The second part of this chapter will look more closely at the idea of **equality**, in the understanding with which it has been used for motivating and justifying British public policy over the past four or five decades, specifically with reference to British Muslims as a religious minority. It will look at the themes of equality and justice, and discuss contemporary debates within political theory around how they can best be secured for minority communities. I will argue that Muslim identity politics in contemporary British history has invariably been underpinned by a call to some understanding of ‘equality as recognition’. I will propose that this, coupled with an understanding of ‘equality as redistribution’, provide a theoretical basis from which attempts to redress imbalances in the type of access British Muslims have had to equality and justice can be understood. This theoretical survey, together with the preceding survey of historical and cultural background in Chapter 1, will constitute a comprehensive background to the remainder of the thesis, which will trace and examine the development of British Muslim identity politics from the 1970s through to 2010.

The third part of this chapter will consider the idea of **identity politics**, and specifically in relation to Britain’s Muslim communities. Here I will look at definitions of the term – both in academic literature as well as popular usage. I will examine the merits of academic arguments in support of a politics of recognition and difference, for minority and historically disadvantaged groups. I will also consider how the idea of misrecognition can be used to explain and justify the need for a politics of identity. Further, I will note that Muslim identity politics has evolved alongside the evolution of British Islam(s) itself. I will point out the impact of internal debates, disagreements and rivalries within Muslim communities, the influence of representative communication and negotiation – whether with the government or with other public bodies, and the role of wider contemporary socio-political debates in shaping the priorities, style and nature of British Muslim identity

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<sup>21</sup> See also Humberto Garcia, *Islam and the English Enlightenment, 1670-1840* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2012).

politics. This will be a recurring theme throughout my thesis as I trace and critique the simultaneous development of British Muslim identity politics on each of these three fronts. Finally, I will close this chapter by providing a detailed outline of my thesis, including its aims and objectives, structure, chapter summaries and end with anticipated conclusions and recommendations.

### **1.1 Free speech in British and Muslim traditions**

As with any immigrant or ‘new’ community, there was a certain inevitability that areas of misunderstanding and even conflict between Muslims and wider society would arise, as efforts were made to settle, to come to terms with the new home and to build relations of trust and friendship while looking to the future. Appearance, culture, tradition and language were obvious markers of difference for recent immigrants. This was true on a day-to-day level of course, but was sometimes particularly significant at moments of negotiation. Prejudice and xenophobia were also present in their various forms and did not fail to make their impact on the level and quality of relationships (or lack of it). This is not to mention the colouring of perspectives from both sides by the legacy of colonialism and the relationships of power that existed between the UK and countries of origin.<sup>22</sup>

But apart from the serious complications and difficulties in communication that these factors would cause, there were also obstacles in communication of a more nuanced nature which affected the level and effectiveness of conversation. The Rushdie affair shed light on one important source of dissonance in perspectives when it came to understandings and expectations around the freedoms and limits of expression. Even a cursory survey of the language and logic behind arguments used by Muslim activists and commentators, and responses that they received from the government and the ‘liberal establishment’, gives sufficient indication as to serious differences in the origin and nature of the cultural and political development that this value had undergone in British political/constitutional history on one hand, and in the political experience of the South Asian countries from whence a majority of Britain’s Muslims traced their origins, on the other. The latter is arguably more complex since it encompasses influences from Islamic theological tradition as well as political history and of course colonial influences which in many cases played no small part in shaping and formalising the constitutions and legal frameworks of many (then still relatively young) Muslim nations. In the following section, I will look briefly at each of

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<sup>22</sup> On this cf. Talal Asad, ‘Multiculturalism and British identity in the wake of the Rushdie affair’ in *Politics and Society* Vol. 18:4 (1990), pp.455-480.

these trajectories and refer where relevant to illustrative aspects of *The Satanic Verses* experience to demonstrate how a failure to grasp these different formative pathways can (and quite spectacularly in this instance, did) lead to a sharp intransigence and unhelpful polarisation of positions.

### **1.1.1 The social contract, natural rights and freedom of expression:**

The development of the British constitutional political system and the highly valued place of freedom of expression as a fundamental liberty in British politics and thereby in the public mindset have important origins in the thinking of Enlightenment philosophers – notably Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. As contemporaries of the English Civil War, the short-lived Cromwellian republic and the fraught restoration of the Stuart monarchy, they witnessed a time when security and liberty as values were uppermost in people’s minds, as they had recently experienced a great deal of instability in respect of both.

Hobbes and Locke had strong, if divergent, views about the place and proper extent of political authority. Hobbes argued in favour of the necessity of arbitrary rule, as a way of keeping in place a system that would control the innate tendency in individual human beings to pursue the satisfaction of their desires, and thus to, if left unchecked, fall into a ‘natural state’ of conflict and competitive destruction. Such was the nature of humanity that it could only be tamed by the force of a powerful civil-state entity. Hobbes recognised that religious and clerical authority had also sought to keep arbitrary control over mankind, but rather than the separation of powers, favoured the civil-secular model which, on the basis of a social contract, would provide citizens with order and protection and the scope for self-preservation, while they in return would accept its control and authority. Rights and freedoms were therefore enjoyed by individuals at the discretion of the ruler. While obviously this position does not sit at all well with the present-day understanding of freedom of expression, and indeed more generally, of freedom and the relationship of the individual with government, Hobbes has been credited for setting a foundational precedent for modern thinking on the nation-state and its functions. In addition, the staunch defence by Hobbes of centralised arbitrary rule can be understood to have set some momentum for the oppositional idea of natural rights and freedoms in the context of a more representative and more accountable style of government as elucidated by John Locke.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Of course it was as a reply to Sir Robert Filmer’s *Patriarcha* that Locke wrote his *First Treatise of Government*. However, Locke was obviously aware of the work of Hobbes and his work since the two were contemporaries.

From Locke's Protestant perspective, the Stuarts' unpromising interest in Catholicism – in particular the prospect of a Catholic James II succeeding Charles II to the throne – presented to him the unattractive image of a return of the sort of arbitrary monarchical power for which Charles I had been executed and the monarchy abolished. Thus it was something to be deeply wary of, since both Catholicism and arbitrary rule shared worrying propensities to impose undue restrictions upon the individual's liberty and to curtail the power of parliament which, to Locke, represented the people's will.<sup>24</sup> Locke's view of the social contract which bound political communities together had as central to it the idea of individual natural rights. It was the sovereign's duty to safeguard these rights, and whilst there is some disagreement around where Locke placed the limit of the individuals' obedience to the sovereign should be drawn,<sup>25</sup> Locke nonetheless advocated the necessity of protecting the individual's natural rights, and the importance of accountability of the sovereign to the people (e.g. through parliament) when decisions about such rights needed to be made.<sup>26</sup> Such a position relies importantly on there being access to free expression and this principle ties in with Locke's writings on the subject of toleration – which includes the toleration of religious and political dissent. Criticism has been levelled at Locke for his failure to go far enough in matters of toleration, for instance his view that government may not afford toleration to Catholics and atheists for reasons of the potential political damage that they might cause.<sup>27</sup> However what is of more importance to the discussion at hand is the spirit of Locke's perspective on toleration and its longer-term impact on the evolution of British political norms and values. Locke's support for the notion of toleration and the right of resistance against tyranny gave reasons for the perspective that dissent and difference had a value and that the undue stifling of them may provoke legitimate responses of protest or rebellion. This notion of inviolable individual rights was later developed by thinkers such as John Stuart Mill and can be seen to have historically developed and according to some accounts to have influenced the modern understanding of 'human rights' – which, as enshrined in present-day international and European Union human rights agreements and instruments, includes the right to free expression.

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<sup>24</sup> Iain Hampsher-Monk, *A History of Modern Political Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp.69-72.

<sup>25</sup> J W Gough, *John Locke's Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp.27-28.

<sup>26</sup> Alex Tuckness, 'Rethinking the Intolerant Locke' in *American Journal of Political Science* Vol. 46:2 (2002), pp.288-298.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

Mill's writings on freedom of expression have proved both seminal and influential in the evolution of the English legal system. Mill defended the idea that expressive acts should be immune from restrictions on the basis of two main points. The first was the danger of 'assuming infallibility' – that as compelling and persuasive an opinion (or the falsity of an opposing opinion) might be, the curtailing of an opponent's free expression would amount to an assumption of infallibility.<sup>28</sup> Secondly, that the free expression of all opinions, whether true or false, was vital to the formation of an 'intellectually active people'.<sup>29</sup> However, he also articulated the exceptional grounds upon which he felt that restrictions to expression could be justifiably placed – and at the foundation of these grounds was his 'harm principle', which remains a legislative cornerstone as well as a widely accepted and hotly defended concept in British public political culture. To quote Mill: 'that the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exerted over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others'<sup>30</sup>

This principle has continued to have a profound impact on the modern British political psyche and informs the spirited defence of free expression that has regularly been invoked to rebut calls from minorities for censoring or indeed censoring of material that has caused deep offence. However, what has often not been fully appreciated is the way in which the impact of offence caused by such material *can* have the potential to cause harm, and particularly because it is directed at aspects of identity that have *already* been subjected to some form of public disadvantage or misrecognition. Brown argues that there is some room for an effective response to racial and religious hatred that draws upon Mill's work. A political, even a 'sparingly used' legislative response that 'balances freedom of speech against future possible harms' can go some way towards redressing discrimination and the potential resultant inequalities, with minimal impact on freedom of expression.<sup>31</sup>

Of course there are and always have been legal restrictions to freedom of expression in the UK – well known examples include libel, privacy and blasphemy laws.<sup>32</sup> However, these have not existed without contention and dispute over their validity or over the appropriateness of where exactly to place boundaries. More recently, anti-terrorism

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<sup>28</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism, Liberty, Representative Government* (London: Dent, 1972), p.92.

<sup>29</sup> Alex Brown, 'The Racial and Religious Hatred Act: A Millian response' *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy (CRISPP)* Vol. 11:1 (March 2008), p.7.

<sup>30</sup> Op. cit., p.78.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> More will be said about blasphemy laws, the historical background to them and their relation to this debate in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

legislation has included controversial restrictions on speech that ‘encourages’ or ‘glorifies terrorism’, or expresses support for proscribed terrorist groups. However, this last example is a case in point, as the unease with which it has been received by so many, from experts in law and civil liberties to ordinary members of the public, is demonstrative of just how cherished and sacrosanct freedom of expression is regarded.

### **1.1.2 Freedom of expression in Islam and Muslim tradition:**

Many Muslim immigrant communities, whether arriving from the Indian subcontinent, other commonwealth countries or from areas in the Arab world and the Middle East had experiences and expectations on the issue of freedom of expression that carried remarkably different historical and cultural meanings and often owed their provenance to a wholly different set of values.

In terms of faith and theology, there have been some characterisations of Islam which argue that the concept of freedom of expression is alien to Muslim tradition, and that instead, a focus on the community as the source of individual identity and fulfilment is given far greater importance by Muslims. The notion of Islam as a ‘communitarian’ faith suggests that greater value is placed on the protection of the faith community’s honour, as well as that of its revered figures, than on the concept of individual freedom. Indeed, this has been argued by several authors, including some Muslims.<sup>33</sup> I contend that such a portrait is rather too simplistic to do justice to the reality of how choices are made and priorities are ordered by ‘the average’ Muslim citizen (if indeed, such a person can be said to exist). Even *if* all Muslims regarded their affinity to their faith to carry such weight that it overrode their understanding of individual freedoms, this argument also assumes that for all Muslims, their faith somehow automatically trumps other aspects of their identity, such as liberalism or even secularism, for example – values which hold freedom of expression in unquestionably high regard.

Yet while I accept that there might be *some* Muslims whose worldview might closely match the ‘communitarian’ characterisation mentioned above, it is important to also point out that, even so, the idea of free speech is itself not wholly absent from Islamic sources and tradition. Muhammad Hashim Kamali argues that freedom of expression is absolutely

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<sup>33</sup> M M Slaughter, ‘The Salman Rushdie Affair: Apostasy, Honor and Freedom of Speech’ *Virginia Law Review* Vol. 79:1 (February 1993), pp. 153-204. Also Shabbir Akhtar, *Be Careful with Muhammad! : The Salman Rushdie Affair* (London: Bellew Publishers, 1989).

intrinsic to the Islamic faith, as a right, and that on occasion, its exercise also becomes analogous to a duty. Kamali cites two objectives that are directly served by the value of free speech – the discovery of truth and the upholding of human dignity.<sup>34</sup> These objectives mark out important distinctions in the conception of free expression from an Islamic theological perspective, and from the present day ‘western’<sup>35</sup> conceptions of free expression as a basic individual right and guarantor against tyranny – be it from a regime or from a religion, or for that matter, from a theocratic regime. This last possibility carries acute resonance with Ayatollah Khomeini’s fatwa sentencing Rushdie to death, which seemed to symbolise everything that was to be abhorred and feared about the arbitrary theocracy that the Islamic Republic of Iran was popularly perceived to be - the prioritising of religious dogma and obedience to a religious authority over freedom of expression and the life of an individual.

Kamali’s two free speech objectives fit well with the overall project of the *shari’a*<sup>36</sup> of which the ultimate objectives are the protection of belief, life, intellect, honour and property. From an individual perspective, these objectives can be approximated into the language of rights without much difficulty, in the sense that the individual has a right that the state provides adequate protection of these aspects of their self. And while speech and/or expression are not individually mentioned, there is clearly scope for their inclusion in at least two of the above categories – namely belief and intellect. In fact, it could be said that any understanding of these two categories would be crucially deficient without provision for free expression.

More recently, a number of Western Muslim thinkers have taken these ideas further, and promulgated Islamically inspired cases in favour of free expression and critical thinking, defending the *rights* of others to criticise and even insult Islam, while at the same time insisting that such a right should be exercised in a multicultural, multi-religious society with caution and respect – indeed that it should not be wrongly construed as a *duty*. For example, Usama Hasan has presented a theologically grounded argument against blasphemy legislation, which insists that Islam does not prescribe any earthly punishment

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<sup>34</sup> Muhammad Hashim Kamali, *Freedom of Expression in Islam* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1997), p.8.

<sup>35</sup> I am aware that ‘the west’ is a hugely generalised term, and my use of inverted commas here and later on is to indicate appreciation that just as Islam and Muslims are not monolithic entities, neither is ‘the west’.

<sup>36</sup> In this instance I am referring to *shari’a* as a legal framework, as potentially, the basis for authority in a political community, and not to its meaning on the more day-to-day level, as a personal path informing an individual’s citizenship as inspired by her faith.

for blasphemy. Violations of respect for sacred symbols are to be punished in the spiritual and other-worldly realms, not through any worldly legislation or penalties. Hasan observes that in the contemporary context, it is extremely difficult to define blasphemy, especially on the type of global level that recent controversies have played out. Moreover, he notes that in the Qur'an and Sunnah, there is an absence of 'explicit sanction... for the criminalisation and punishment of blasphemy',<sup>37</sup> and that those sources which are used to support such measures are often 'misquoted', since they all refer to wartime situations.<sup>38</sup> In an appreciation of cultural nuance, Hasan acknowledges that instances in Islamic tradition of wartime retaliation against poets who had mocked the Prophet Muhammad had occurred, but that 'in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century Arabian culture (was) dominated by an oral tradition, (and) poetry was used for propaganda and psychological warfare'.<sup>39</sup> As a general rule, however, particularly in this globalised age, he maintains that blasphemy legislation is not called for, nor does it fulfil any specific role that is called for by Islamic sources and scriptures.

Interestingly, it is the potent impact of offensive speech freely expressed that has been the source of representations from Muslims for protection. The extensive reach of powerful media outlets and influential artists can encourage or give added legitimacy to anti-Muslim sentiment, and as a minority group, with a comparatively far more limited voice, there is less opportunity to counter such offensive speech on a similarly large scale. So while defending the right of free expression, some thinkers have called for caution, understanding and empathy in good measure, because of the potentially substantial harms that unfettered free expression in this area can cause.

Tariq Ramadan is one example – at a recent PEN International gathering in New York, he argued that freedom of expression should not be restricted by law to protect minorities from offence. However, he also acknowledged that this offence was often deeply and genuinely felt, and often had complex and far-reaching consequences. Instead he called for sensitivity, and 'intellectual empathy' with those in the Muslim world who had been so deeply offended by recent controversies. Additionally he argued that a commitment to

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<sup>37</sup> Usama Hasan, 'No compulsion in religion: an Islamic case against blasphemy laws' *Quilliam Foundation* (London, 2012).

<sup>38</sup> It is worth pointing out here Talal Asad's observation that Muslims objecting to the Danish 'Muhammad cartoons' published in 2005 did not use the Arabic equivalent of 'blasphemy' (*tajdif*), rather they preferred the term *isa'ah*, meaning insult, harm or offence. Cf. Talal Asad, 'Free Speech, Blasphemy and Secular Criticism' in Talal Asad *et al*, *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury and Free Speech* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), p.38.

<sup>39</sup> Op. Cit.

consistency and even-handedness was needed when it came to free speech. It was inconsistent, he maintained, for certain European countries to continue to criminalise Holocaust denial, whilst simultaneously displaying incredulity at Muslim calls for censorship and complaints of offence at mockery of their faith.<sup>40</sup>

A similar position was taken by Tariq Modood in the wake of the Danish ‘Muhammad cartoons crisis’ of 2006. He argued that the cartoons occupied ‘an entirely different league of offence’, since they constituted a comment on Muslims as a whole rather than only the Prophet Muhammad as an individual. As such, the portrayal in one cartoon of the prophet as a terrorist was effectively a racist stereotype of Muslims collectively. But rather than banning or censorship, society should respond to such racist and/or Islamophobic expression with protest or censure, in a similar fashion to what has become the norm with most racist expression.<sup>41</sup>

Talal Asad invites a critical consideration of liberal/secular responses to Muslim offence, by asking whether ‘modern secular aversion to the category of blasphemy derive(s) from a suspicion of political religion.’<sup>42</sup> This aversion, he argues, is specifically focused on Islam, and is combined with latent paranoia, ‘loathing and fear’ of Muslim immigrants to manifest an intolerant hostility towards any (violent) protests against religious offence. Thus, ‘aggression in the name of God shocks secular liberal sensibilities, whereas the art of killing in the name of the secular nation, of democracy, does not.’<sup>43</sup> Without absolving the violence perpetrated by Muslim protesters, Asad argues that the shrill defence of the value of free speech at all costs by vehement secularists against ‘Muslim rage’ might actually have more to do with their own prejudices than they might like to admit.

A substantial difficulty when it comes to reconciling the ‘eastern’ and western’ traditions, is the location of acceptable boundaries in free expression. I have already illustrated examples of where limits of expression in British legal and public norms lie. In the case of Muslim tradition, legal restraints have been placed primarily where the objectives of the discovery

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<sup>40</sup> Tariq Ramadan, speech delivered at PEN America Conference – *Faith and Free Speech: defamation of religions and freedom of expression*, UN Headquarters, New York, 16<sup>th</sup> September 2010.

<sup>41</sup> Tariq Modood, ‘The liberal dilemma: integration or vilification?’ *Open Democracy* 8<sup>th</sup> February 2006. Available at: [http://www.opendemocracy.net/faith-terrorism/liberal\\_dilemma\\_3249.jsp](http://www.opendemocracy.net/faith-terrorism/liberal_dilemma_3249.jsp) [accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2013].

<sup>42</sup> Talal Asad, ‘Freedom of Speech and Religious Limitations’ in *Rethinking Secularism* ed. by Craig Calhoun, Mark Jurgensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerpen (New York: OUP, 2011), pp.282-297.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

of truth and upholding of human dignity are deemed to be at threat of being seriously undermined. In particular, restrictions placed on expression that is considered to equate to apostasy or blasphemy have been notoriously troubling to the ‘western’ mind, conjuring unpalatable images of violence and capital punishment. Notwithstanding the fact that there is a range of scholarly opinion regarding the applicability of any official punishments for either,<sup>44</sup> (let alone any applicability of capital punishment), there has historically been a widespread sense of reverence and sensitivity around the character and person of the Prophet Muhammad among Muslims, a sentiment which to a large extent remains to this day.<sup>45</sup> It was this sensitivity that was aroused by the publication in 1988 of Salman Rushdie’s novel, *The Satanic Verses*, and the nature of the reaction to it was to a substantial extent an expression of this reverence. The inviolability of honour (*‘ird*) in *shari’a* is a concept which Shabbir Akhtar utilises to supplement the greater (blasphemous) charge of *sabb al-nabi* (insulting the prophet) in his spirited case for the proscription of *The Satanic Verses*.<sup>46</sup> Interpretatively, this is something of an attempt to bridge the two pathways, by approximating the harm caused by blasphemy against the prophet (which the ‘western’ mind might struggle to understand the gravity of), with the more familiar charge of personal attack – libel or defamation.<sup>47</sup>

Apart from this cultural and religious reverence for the Prophet, there were of course other factors which caused reaction to intensify and escalate. Two of the most important include an international dimension, and the response and attitude of ‘the other side’ to initial objections. With respect to the international factor, this is best detected in the stance of the Muslim Institute and its leader Kalim Siddiqui, who positively celebrated the Iranian Revolution and argued that Muslims in the UK could draw strength and support from the

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<sup>44</sup> Kamali, *Freedom of Expression in Islam* (1997), p.213.

<sup>45</sup> Akhtar, *Be Careful with Muhammad!* (1989), Ch.1.

More recently the international furore in the wake of Danish newspaper *Jyllands Posten*’s publication of satirical cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad in 2005, is demonstrative of how the Prophet remains highly revered and respected by Muslims worldwide. Granted, the escalation of both this and the Rushdie affair were given substantial impetus by political forces, but nonetheless, they both drew highly-charged and indignant protest from Muslims from all backgrounds across the world who expressed a sense of deeply felt offence and grievance.

<sup>46</sup> Shabbir Akhtar quoted in *Sacrilege Versus Civility: Muslim Perspectives on the Satanic Verses Affair* ed. by M. Manazir Ahsan and Abdur Raheem Kidwai (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1991), pp.52-3. Akhtar links every Muslim’s personal *‘ird* with the reputation of the Prophet Muhammad and thus argues that insulting the prophet is enough of a deep and hurtful affront to each and every Muslim who aspires to his example and leadership, for it to be banned.

<sup>47</sup> Tariq Modood and Bhikhu Parekh each make some case for understanding a notion of ‘group libel’ with respect to this issue. Modood in ‘Muslims, incitement to hatred and the law’ in *Liberalism, Multiculturalism and Toleration* ed. by John Horton (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993) and Parekh in his *Rethinking Multiculturalism: cultural diversity and political theory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

new Islamic republic, as well as assurance from the defence that the fatwa provided in the face of Rushdie's 'attack'.<sup>48</sup> As for the second factor – the manner and tactics that were chosen by government representatives appear to have only fuelled resentment and frustration among Muslim protesters. Talal Asad remarks that they were both 'lecturing' and 'colonial' in tone and in content.<sup>49</sup> Judging by the correspondences and commentaries that were written during this period, this was certainly a widespread feeling.<sup>50</sup> And while the above at least explains the frustration of Muslim groups at the apparent futility of their efforts at explaining their position and defending their 'rights', it was perhaps this very insistence by Muslims to overwhelmingly use blasphemy as the main reason for their campaign for the book's recall which so riled the 'liberal establishment' and caused them to dig their feet in hostility further still. How could the precious and hard-won value of free expression, particularly of artistic expression, be permitted to be threatened with such tremendous force merely on the grounds that it offended the religious sensitivities of members of a minority faith?

In a sense these different pathways so coloured attitudes and expectations on both sides, that the dialogue which took place during and in the aftermath of the Rushdie affair can very well be characterised as both sides talking *at* one another rather than *with* each other.

### **1.1.3 Cultural disorientations and the need to adjust: Why have Muslims taken such deep offence to attacks on their faith?**

Differing understandings of rights, freedoms and different ways of relating to government are of course not the only areas where culture and mindset between east and west have their divergences. For many of those communities who arrived as part of the chain migrations of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century onwards, they experienced major lifestyle changes on a number of levels. Apart from linguistic differences, there was the contrast between the close-knit rural life, to which many (especially South Asian immigrants) were accustomed to – and the more individualistic and obviously unfamiliar lifestyle of the city. More specifically, the role of religion and religious/cultural influences in each of these lifestyles differed greatly. Many of these immigrants were coming from environments where religion formed much more of an integrated, very spiritual backdrop to everyday life – a norm

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<sup>48</sup> Kalim Siddiqui, 'Generating "power" without politics', speech delivered at Muslim Parliament's London conference - *The Future of Islam in Britain* on 14<sup>th</sup> July 1990 (London: Muslim Institute, 1992).

<sup>49</sup> Asad, 'Multiculturalism and British identity in the wake of the Rushdie affair' (1990), pp. 456-457.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *Sacrilege Versus Civility* ed. by Ahsan and Kidwai (1991) and UKACIA, *Muslims and the Law in Multi-faith Britain* (London: UKACIA, 1993).

which contrasted with the evermore detached understanding of religion in relation to daily life that was more prevalent in the urban contexts that they were joining. So while it may have been very natural in rural Kashmir, for example, to understand religion through its manifestation in day-to-day rites of passage, through family and tribal relations and folklore; in the new context of Britain, religion necessarily had to fit into not only a new template of meaning and even practice, but also had to deal with the fact that it (Islam) was a minority and perceptibly ‘foreign’ religion. As a consequence, the experience of adjusting and finding a place in their new home was made additionally unsettling when access to and relationships with religion were abruptly altered.<sup>51</sup>

Even the very actions used to express feelings of dissent and protest were infused with cultural baggage. To return to the Rushdie affair, the decision of a Bradford protester from the Bradford Council of Mosques to set fire to a copy of *The Satanic Verses* was intended to be a dramatic publicity stunt which would force the media and establishment to step away from their apparent lack of empathy and their disdain towards the deep offence and hurt of which Muslims were complaining. The idea was that by burning the book, the complaints and representations that had been made by Muslim representatives would finally be afforded the seriousness and attention that they deserved. Yet, as Zaiba Malik, a British-Pakistani journalist who grew up in Bradford, describes in her memoirs, while the book-burning certainly bagged countless newspaper headlines for the Bradford Council of Mosques, they weren’t so successful at garnering compassion for the cause:

Journalists, writers, commentators and thinkers were appalled and shocked at what had happened at the Tyrls [the location in central Bradford where the first book-burning took place]. Don’t these Muslims understand that we believe in freedom of expression in this country, that free speech is a cornerstone of our democracy, that it is a right we have had to fight long and hard for and is one we will absolutely defend – even if it causes offence?<sup>52</sup>

She further quotes Eric Pickles, the then (Conservative) leader of Bradford Council who later argued that ‘Of all the symbolic actions, setting fire to a book was probably the worst thing to do. It looked like something out of Nuremburg’.<sup>53</sup> Such was the centrality of the impact of culture on creating and sustaining a harsh dissonance between two parties that so

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<sup>51</sup> A good overview of the features and challenges of this adjustment experience is found in ‘Mind the gap’ Ch.2 in Lewis, *Young, British and Muslim* (2007).

<sup>52</sup> Zaiba Malik, *We are a Muslim, please* (London: William Heinemann, 2010), pp.197-199.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* p.198.

desperately needed to be understood by one another. For the Muslim community, the book-burning was more than a plea to be heard by those in positions of power; it was a symbol of just how much the crime of *sabb an-nabi* was considered to be a red line that must not be crossed at any cost. Yet for the politicians and the media, who the Muslim community were so desperate to convince, the act of book burning represented the epitome of backwardness and intolerance.

I would take this notion of cultural dissonance even further and argue that understandings of honour in many parts of the Muslim world are coloured more by traditional and cultural norms than by religion per se. Cultural practices and customs in many Muslim majority countries, and specifically the Indian sub-continent, are often infused with a strong understanding of familial or tribal honour and loyalty. These are historically enshrined values, which often enjoy a somewhat fabled status in public consciousness. Perhaps these have come to be most infamously (mis)understood in the west through the unfortunately titled crimes of ‘honour killing’, which have been rationalised and/or justified by perpetrators using the notion that the victims’ ‘sinful’ or ‘shameful’ actions are directly linked to the honour and reputation of her family, clan or community.

But the ‘eastern’ conception of honour that I refer to has wider and deeper significance than this. The dense literature and poetry of pre-Islamic Arabia is rife with references to tribal and familial honour, revenge on behalf of scorned or slighted fellow-tribesmen and family feuds that continued for generations. The Arabic word *ghira*, - which connotes an ardent or jealous guarding/protection of honour – is a central notion to be understood, and one which has a place not only in the Arabic speaking countries but in the Muslim communities of South Asia as well. It is most often expressed in connection with religion and familial honour especially relating to females. While clearly not something exclusive to the east, an appreciation of this aspect of cultural background and heritage can contribute to a more informed understanding of seemingly (to Western eyes) exaggerated Muslim responses to offensive criticism of their faith.

To illustrate, let us look at more recent controversies such as the 2006 Danish cartoon crisis and the 2012 ‘Innocence of Muslims’ film – both have drawn ire and criticism from western Muslims, but protests have not reached anywhere near the scale of those that took place in the Muslim world. Notably, any protests that *did* take place in Britain were peaceful

and far removed from the violent mobs that took to the streets of various Muslim-majority countries. A common refrain of protesters in Muslim countries was the phrase ‘*illa rasulallah*’ – ‘(anyone/thing) but the messenger of God’, emphasising how the person of the Prophet Muhammad was directly and inextricably tied with their personal honour and reputation – they could bear any insult *but* criticism or ridicule of this most revered figure.

And finally, it would be short-sighted for us to fail to recognise the role that geopolitical factors have also played in exacerbating sensitivities and pushing many in the Muslim world to protest with such heated fervour at what are considered to be deeply offensive and sacrilegious depictions of their faith in the public sphere. To return to the ‘Innocence of Muslims’ film, angry, riotous protest in the Muslim world can only be comprehensively understood in its proper and complete context. For many protesters in the Muslim world, the film was indeed considered to be highly insulting, but as many have noted, it was often more of a final straw that set off riots that were waiting to happen anyway.<sup>54</sup> US military presence, political intervention and deadly drone attacks are just some of the reasons why ordinary people in countries such as Libya, Pakistan and Afghanistan have, in recent times, had plenty of reasons to harbour hostility and resentment towards Western countries, and the USA in particular (where the film originated). To quote the words of one commentator on the affair: ‘Broken by poverty, threatened by drones, caught in the war between al Qaida and the US, to many Arab Muslims, the film represents an attack on the last shelter of dignity - sacred beliefs - when all else has been desecrated.’<sup>55</sup>

Additionally, the impacts of highly restrictive political regimes in many of these countries meant that mass dissent and protest directed at domestic issues, such as political corruption and economic deprivation was often not a safe option, as opposition activists could suffer heavy penalties for their views. Instead, pent-up public anger was more readily vented against less locally contentious foreign ‘enemies’ who had slighted religious sensitivities.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Myriam Francois-Cerrah, ‘Demonstrating for Dignity: why are Muslims so enraged?’ *Huffington Post* 18<sup>th</sup> September 2012 available at: [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/myriam-francois/demonstrating-for-dignity\\_b\\_1885020.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/myriam-francois/demonstrating-for-dignity_b_1885020.html) [accessed on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2012].

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Although a wave of protest and revolution had brought about the fall of dictatorships in the Muslim world in 2010/11 in countries such as Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, the political landscape in these countries is still very unstable. While their populations are gradually experiencing greater political freedoms, the effects of decades-long authoritarian regimes are still present.

There were elements of all of these factors present in 1988 when the Rushdie affair first broke out. Thus it was that while both the Muslim communities of Britain, and the British political and media establishments of the time, were not seeking to conflict or to clash with one another – a clash nonetheless occurred. I shall return to look at the Rushdie affair in greater depth in Chapter 3, from the perspective of its role in igniting Muslim identity politics in earnest. For now, suffice to say that the affair offers a clear illumination of how significantly the different cultural and political experiences of British Muslim communities and British public and political institutions affected each of their respective approaches to communication, as well as their senses of priorities when it came to negotiation, with one another.

Moving on from the contextual background to Muslim claims-making and the development of their political agency, I will now look at the theoretical background to equalities policy, exploring the justifications from a theoretical perspective for Muslim identity politics, with a view to understanding the way in which it was articulated by Muslim advocacy groups, as well as the government's approach to Muslim claims-making.

## **1.2 Equality in the theoretical terrain**

A common motivating factor behind active political engagement for any individual or group is a sense that some form of injustice or inequality has been felt and is in need of being rectified. The case with minority communities is often that politicisation and political organising is related to experiences of poor treatment or marginalisation in different spheres of life – be they the economic, for instance through poor working conditions or aspects of social and political life, where legal arrangements might affect minorities unfairly or disproportionately – either by deliberate design or through inadvertent omission of factors relating to difference. In what follows, I will look at how this pursuit of equality on a policy level is justified through a theoretical framework, looking specifically at arguments for equality as recognition which have been the key theoretical underpinning for multiculturalism and race relations policy in the UK, and more recently, for policy efforts to tackle Islamophobia.

### **1.2.1 Equality as recognition:**

The question of how to deliver equality through the law to all citizens is one that is of primary concern to any liberal society. Debate around the nature of equality and the

priorities that political communities must deal with in order to achieve it is wide-ranging and intense. The term 'equality' is both broad and contestable; and continues to be the focus of both agreement (in terms of its importance) and debate (in its definition). A major feature in this debate has centred on where to measure equality. Should we be satisfied as long as equality of opportunity is available to all or is it also important to look at how 'equal' the outcomes of any institution or process are? The relevant distinction here lies in the first of these, equality of opportunity, being concerned with *redistribution* - how well the opportunity for equality is distributed among individuals; and the other, with *recognition* - an attitude that is concerned with aspects of social and political relations that cannot be 'quantified' in the same way that distributive and economic inequalities can, and which seeks to seriously incorporate into the political community a fair and sustainable manner, groups that visibly or perceptively differ from the mainstream.

In what follows, I will concentrate on how the idea of *recognition* has come to be understood as a method through which aspects of equality can be secured, in particular for members of minorities within society, for whom there might be the experience of unjustifiable, added disadvantage. This could be either as a result of social norms and preferences being predominantly aligned in favour of (or shaped by) the majority; and/or as a result of historical injustices (or, on some accounts, continued injustices) that they may have suffered. Additionally, these injustices could take the form of oppression or suppression on account of their difference and/or on account of their minority status. The concern of the state with these kinds of challenges can be informed by a broader range of matters, but the importance of seeking to eliminate inequality remains a valid and central justification that is used for public policy efforts to pursue measures that will target the particular disadvantages that are considered to disproportionately or specifically affect minority groups.

Before moving to examine the trajectory of relevant policy that has evolved in the UK over the course of recent decades, I will first devote some attention to illustrating some key theoretical arguments. Prominent among writers concerned with the notion of equality as recognition of difference are theorists such as Charles Taylor, Axel Honneth and more recently, Anna Elisabetta Galeotti. While there exist numerous disagreements and debates between recognition theorists as to the role and scope of recognition, all are identifiable by their advocacy of this idea that recognition is a crucial aspect of equality in a pluralist

political community. A central feature of any politics of recognition is the idea that individuals are in need of a certain level of recognition from those around them in their communities and groups, and in wider society and the political domain, in order to fulfil their true potential and to be able to function on a satisfactory level – one which all individuals should be in a position to expect for themselves.

Speaking in positive terms, a politics of recognition espouses that individuals are in *need* of recognition from those around them in order to fully function and truly realise themselves and their aspirations. Members of minority or disadvantaged groups who are denied such recognition are therefore seen to be lacking in necessary tools for attaining genuine equality with the mainstream, and are denied an important aspect of their personal well-being. Without adequate recognition, individuals are potentially deprived of the basic resources and opportunity with which to define and project themselves to those around them in a way that is aligned with their personal volition and self-understanding. Thus recognition is a fundamental and powerful aspect of an individual's relationship with themselves, and with society around them.

### **1.2.2 From recognition to parity – Three approaches:**

The works of Charles Taylor and Axel Honneth have served as focal points for what is now a wide-ranging and extensive literature on recognition. Both are critical of what they see as the 'conventional' liberal framework's rigidity toward individuals and in particular those who are stigmatised or form part of a minority, and both take inspiration from the Hegelian tradition.<sup>57</sup> Taylor articulates a 'deeply-rooted' desire, which all human beings possess, for recognition by others of their unique and distinctive identity. Difference-blind liberalism, in its insistence to overlook diversity as either irrelevant or peripheral to the concern of the political community, does not deliver this. Instead, it invariably succumbs to the very state of bias or partiality which it claims to avowedly shun. This is because true (complete) neutrality does not exist in any political community since the political structures, institutions and the norms of public life of each are inevitably shaped by its historical experience as well as the culture, tradition and even preferences of the majority. In restricting itself to 'recognising' only those qualities that are universally shared among individuals, Taylor argues that there is a failing which renders 'difference-blind liberalism' incapable of genuinely accommodating the notion of authenticity. An individual cannot be

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<sup>57</sup> Axel Honneth, 'Recognition and Moral Obligation' in *Social Research* Vol. 64:1 (1997), pp.16-35; Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition* (Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1994).

true to herself if those around her in society do not give due recognition to aspects of herself that do not happen to conform to the predominant/preferred norms, practices and values in society.

Honneth, as a critical theorist, places emphasis on recognition less as an aspect of identity politics than as a tool with which to critique injustice that exists in the realm of communication, as observed in intersubjective relationships (as distinct from injustice in the realm of production – which redistribution seeks to put right). In focusing on intersubjectivity, he identifies three strands through which social attitudes and interactions can disrupt a subject's relationship to herself. These are love (where physical integrity is violated through 'practical maltreatment' – such as physical abuse which can destroy a person's self-confidence and underlying trust in herself), rights (where basic respect and/or legal protection for it, on a level with that enjoyed by other members of society are denied – thus damaging a subject's moral self-respect by signalling that her status is somehow below that of others around her) and solidarity or esteem (denigration of certain individual or collective ways of life as inferior or deficient – depriving a subject from social support and thus impacting eventually on the opportunities that she has for self-realisation).<sup>58</sup> These strands constitute a 'denial of recognition' and as such the injustice they cause is significantly weighty in gravity 'not simply because it harms subjects or restricts their freedom to act, but because it injures them with regard to the positive understanding of themselves that they have acquired intersubjectively'.<sup>59</sup>

Another theorist – one whose work tackles 'hard case' problems that bear similarities to ones that I will be examining – is Anna Elisabetta Galeotti. Her 'toleration as recognition' thesis defends the view that, especially for minorities, recognition in the public sphere is the most effective and fairest way with which toleration (the widely cherished principle of 'live and let live') can be practised. That toleration itself is an essential value to be pursued, especially within a pluralist context, is a matter of broad general agreement<sup>60</sup>. The object of toleration as recognition is to achieve equal and fair treatment in the public realm for minorities that are (or have been) 'occupying unequal positions in relation to social standing, public respect, social and political power', due to the dominance and power of

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<sup>58</sup> Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: the moral grammar of social conflicts* (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), p.134.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., pp.131-135.

<sup>60</sup> See Catriona McKinnon, *Toleration: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2006), Ch.1. Also Monique Deveaux, *Cultural Pluralism and Dilemmas of Justice* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 67-72 discusses the origins of and connections between the liberal principles of neutrality and toleration.

force and quantity that majority preferences can deliberately or inadvertently give rise to. What recognition achieves, either through gesture and symbolism or through ‘literal’ (actual) policy changes, is a readjustment of existing political arrangements in such a way that redresses the social and political marginality that some minorities would find themselves experiencing.<sup>61</sup>

At this point it is also important to note objections that have been made to the sometimes popular idea that recognition is profoundly in competition with or irreconcilably distinct from a politics of redistribution. In this respect, the later work of Nancy Fraser goes some way to showing how the idea of recognition is more closely connected with redistribution than is often assumed to be the case. In criticising Axel Honneth’s account, for example, she highlights how a politics of recognition implies and relies upon a certain understanding of redistribution as a partner in the same ‘two-dimensional’ conception of justice.<sup>62</sup>

Similar points are made by Bhikhu Parekh, albeit from a different perspective, when he asserts that ‘the politics of recognition remains impotent unless it is embedded in the politics of redistribution’.<sup>63</sup> An important concern of his is to defend the idea that cultural injustice among and between citizens and groups (as distinct from the state-centred locus of justice and injustice that redistributive politics might tend to focus on) is of great significance. Parekh is of the opinion that the traditional preoccupation with a ‘statist view’ of justice has limited its own vision and scope in its disregard for the vital experiences of injustice that are suffered in the realm of intersubjective relations. And so while the emphases and preoccupations of their positions differ, Parekh, like Fraser, argues that both recognition and redistribution must be understood and deployed in tandem.

### **1.2.3 Misrecognition as a motivator for political agency:**

Another important factor to consider when discussing the theoretical foundations for Muslim political agency as a community is the notion of misrecognition, sometimes

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<sup>61</sup> Anna E Galeotti, *Toleration as Recognition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.10-12.

<sup>62</sup> Nancy Fraser with Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A political-philosophical exchange* trans. by Joel Golb, James Ingram and Christine Wilke (London: Verso, 2003), p.34. Although this argument itself has also been criticised for being unduly rigid and failing to appreciate other dimensions to justice such as questions of political inclusion and exclusion, cf. Anne Phillips, *The Politics of Presence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

<sup>63</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, ‘Redistribution or Recognition? A misguided debate’ in *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Minority Rights* ed. by Tariq Modood, Stephen May and Judith Squires (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.208.

described as the ‘sister concept’ of recognition.<sup>64</sup> The experience of misrecognition for Muslims in the UK has been portrayed by Wendy Martineau as

(having) to do not with overt forms of discrimination or prejudice that lead to explicit claims-making but involves a more subtle form by which the dominant social imaginary constructs some citizens’ degree of ‘belonging’ in society as more complete than others, and that places subtle restrictions on some people’s ability to participate equally in society.<sup>65</sup>

So by this line of argument, the Equality Gap would not only be based on claims-making and actual changes to the law, but also a more subtle complaint of misrecognition. Martineau follows Taylor, Honneth and other recognition theorists in arguing that misrecognition occurs as a failure in the ‘communication of meanings’ between ‘ordinary agents’. This ‘partial non-communication’ is what causes a polarisation between cultural identities and can give way to a sense of conflict, as well as breeding feelings of defensiveness by those groups who feel that they are under attack. The impact of these processes leads to the oppression of the less-powerful cultural group by the one wielding more power, as exemplified by the feelings of acute powerlessness which, as I describe above, drove Muslim protesters to burn *The Satanic Verses* during the height of their frustration at the impasse they were experiencing with the British government and the disdain with which the media were treating their anguish.

Proponents of a Muslim identity politics, especially of the sort that emerged in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, would most likely have differed with Martineau on the appropriate solution to the problems caused by misrecognition. Martineau is wary of settling for a recognition of cultural identities as a solution to the harms caused by misrecognition, since ‘conceiving multicultural recognition in terms of the affirmative recognition of identities both detracts attention away from the processes that produce misrecognition and may in fact be unhelpful in rectifying this’.<sup>66</sup> Instead she favours a ‘hermeneutic approach’ – one where calls for recognition are viewed within the context of the very struggles for recognition that are taking place. This, she contends, will allow for greater dialogue to take place, both between different groups (the majority and the minority/ies), as well as

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<sup>64</sup> Nasar Meer *et al*, ‘Misrecognition and ethno-religious diversity’ *Ethnicities* Vol.12:2 (January 2012), pp.131-141.

<sup>65</sup> Wendy Martineau, ‘Misrecognition and cross-cultural understanding: Shaping the space for a ‘fusion of horizons’ *Ethnicities* Vol.12:2 (January 2012,) p.166.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* p.162.

‘minority voices *within* minorities’,<sup>67</sup> voices which can easily be drowned out or sidelined under the type of system that typically relies on ‘community leaders’ to represent the interests of minority groups.<sup>68</sup>

In contrast, the early pioneers of contemporary Muslim identity politics were very keen on securing group rights and exemptions, in addition, of course, to securing even-handed legal treatment when it came to recourse to certain legislation – specifically blasphemy and anti-discrimination legislation. This approach was primarily about group recognition. As I shall show in the course of this thesis, Muslim identity politics in Britain grew and evolved around a yearning to make Muslims ‘count’, calling for ‘affirmative recognition’ rather than a desire to ‘fuse cultural horizons’.<sup>69</sup> Of course such an approach was in no small part influenced by the precedents that had been set by pre-existing models for identity politics – notably the arena of race-relations and the representation of the British Jewish community. This is not to mention that successive governments have themselves actively encouraged the ‘affirmative recognition’ model for their official dealings with minority groups.<sup>70</sup>

There are merits to Martineau’s critique. Detractors of multiculturalism policy often draw attention to the ‘competition’ for recognition and resources that it allegedly breeds.<sup>71</sup> By focussing on what she sees as the root causes of misrecognition – divergence and poor communication between different ‘cultural horizons’ – it would seem that, while Martineau does not rule out a place for recognition, that her approach would at least lead towards a viable solution. In doing so, she theoretically avoids a descent into Nancy Fraser’s ‘practical recognition-effect’,<sup>72</sup> where an official encouragement of individuals to self-identify with a group leads to a continual clamouring of groups, and groups within groups, for some elusive ideal of equal recognition, thus creating something of a self-perpetuating cycle that is never truly satisfied.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid. p.173. Author’s own emphasis.

<sup>68</sup> As I shall go on to show in this thesis, this type of system, one which largely lives on until today, has been regularly criticised for being prone to domination by cliques of self-appointed, older, male ‘community leaders’.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., pp.167-171.

<sup>70</sup> In Chapter 3 of this thesis, I discuss how consecutive Conservative and Labour governments supported the establishment of a Muslim umbrella group, and effectively made it something of a prerequisite for engagement. Representative organisations for other minority religions such as the Hindu and Sikh faiths have since also been established.

<sup>71</sup> Brian Barry, *Culture and Equality: an egalitarian critique of multiculturalism* (London: Polity, 2001).

<sup>72</sup> Nancy Fraser, ‘From redistribution to recognition? Dilemmas of justice in a ‘post-socialist’ age’ *New Left Review* I/212 (July-August 1995).

With respect to the specific case of Muslim identity politics in Britain, I will argue that after examining its birth and development over the past three to four decades, that affirmative recognition on its own will not provide an adequately robust solution to the issues at the heart of Muslim political engagement. Martineau's idea of 'fusing horizons' offers a helpful and more nuanced way forward, and I submit that a combination of both can provide a chance for genuine progress. Having said this, I will also point to other compelling reasons as to why there remains room for the continuation of a Muslim politics of identity, albeit in a revised form to the one that we have come to know over recent decades.

### **1.3 Identity Politics – definition, theory and practice**

The term 'identity politics' has come to signify any political participation that is based around the self-interest, or the specific perspective, of a particular group within society. Usually, this group will be a minority, or one that has suffered (or continues to suffer) particular injustice or inequality. Examples include disability, ethnicity, gender, race, religion and sexual orientation. Historically, the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century has witnessed successive waves of political movements seeking to rectify injustices that had been suffered by disadvantaged or minority groups.<sup>73</sup> These have given rise to the practice of identity politics in various wide-ranging formats across liberal democracies, where it is sought to remedy perceived injustices or disadvantages, often through challenging the dominant culture's account about the inferiority of the identity in question, and redefining it on its own terms, often through raising consciousness within the various communities associated with the identity. Political claims are put forward to the state, proposing remedial measures to secure equality and tackle disadvantage. Alternative methods of campaigning and political action have also been pursued. The development of liberal democracies in modern times has been credited with enabling the rise of identity politics, in the sense that it provides individuals with the opportunity to freely group with those who share their identities and collectively put forward their claims.<sup>74</sup> However, proponents of identity politics have also criticised liberal democracy as being incapable of catering sufficiently to identity politics. This is because they have tended to be organised around a system of political parties, interest groups and lobbies that individuals can join or leave at will, rather than identity groups. Moreover, the conventional style adopted by liberal democracies in respect of interest groups, lobbies and political parties can easily overlook and thus exclude

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<sup>73</sup> Cressida Heyes, 'Identity Politics' in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* ed. by Edward N. Zalta, (Spring 2012 Edition).

<sup>74</sup> Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

marginalised or minority (identity) groups, thus perpetuating their marginalisation and not allowing their minority views or preferences to be heard.<sup>75</sup>

In the course of this thesis, I will look at some of the arguments around the validity of politics based around religious identity, as well as the practical meaning that Muslim identity politics held for those who were engaged with it – including their key concerns and aspirations. However, at this introductory stage, I will briefly address some of the main charges that have been made against the impacts of identity politics on communities, society and the general political climate.

As a form of political engagement and lobbying, identity politics is nothing new, and it is certainly something which citizens of a liberal democracy have every right to engage in. However, it has been the subject of much contention over recent years, particularly in respect of Muslim communities and the debate on multiculturalism. Detractors argue that New Labour excessively fostered identity politics, and in doing so, cultivated an unhealthy, divisive political landscape whereby minority groups competed with one another for the largest portion of official attention, funding, and privileges. According to Amartya Sen, this climate should more accurately be described as ‘plural monoculturalism’,<sup>76</sup> since actual meaningful interactions between different communities are few. Rather, identity politics promotes the side-by-side existence of a diversity of discrete communities, to the extent that they ‘might pass one another like ships in the night’.<sup>77</sup>

An additional charge that has been made against identity politics is that rather than providing an authentic space for minority or disadvantaged groups to be heard in the public sphere, the types of community groups and forums that governments are likely to engage with have had a tendency to be hijacked by individuals resembling the archetypal ‘community leader’.<sup>78</sup> In such a scenario, there is a danger that minority voices within minority communities are overlooked and organisations become preoccupied with furthering the political agendas or pet projects of those at their helm.

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<sup>75</sup> Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp.54-5.

<sup>76</sup> Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: the illusion of destiny* (London: Allen Lane, 2006).

<sup>77</sup> Amartya Sen, ‘The uses and abuses of Multiculturalism’ *The New Republic* 27<sup>th</sup> February 2006.

<sup>78</sup> By this I mean the dominant stereotype of minority community leaders – male, middle aged, self-appointed, self-inflated, out of touch and unrepresentative of his community. This image has been recently caricatured in popular culture by the BBC TV sitcom *Citizen Khan*, which features a Mr Khan who self-identifies as a ‘community leader – they all know me!’ but is barely recognised in public and is out of touch with even his own immediate family’s concerns.

Moreover, the continued exercise of identity politics is blamed for encouraging governments to address communities, and communities to view themselves, in a compartmentalised fashion, through the lens of their identity, as opposed to simply as citizens. So rather than appreciating the diversity of perspectives and aspirations within communities, identity politics can generate and entrench reification. This, in turn, promotes an inaccurate and unfair picture of the lived realities of citizens, as well as acting as a general barrier to integration and social cohesion.<sup>79</sup> There is some element of truth in this argument – no representative body can ever hope to accurately speak for its community. Indeed, the proportions of individuals who will identify with, let alone engage with such organisations are a minority within their communities.<sup>80</sup> However, in the case of British Muslims, as with other minority groups, the growth and development of identity politics cannot be attributed to a desire to self-segregate, as much as it can be to a deeply felt need to make their voices heard, against a background culture which had not taken into account cultural and religious differences and thus not delivered equal treatment to these communities.

Finally, as this thesis shall go on to show, British Muslim identity politics and community representation developed in recent times in conscious emulation of previous paths that had been trodden by both race relations campaigns, and the experience of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. By this token, regardless of the flaws or merits of identity politics, in the interests of even-handedness, it is hardly fair to deny such an opportunity to Muslims. For better or for worse, it is indisputable that identity politics has been an absolutely crucial issue for British Muslims in particular over recent decades. Whether this has been as a platform from which community concerns and demands for equal treatment have been articulated, or whether it has been as a site for intra-community interactions and the evolution of identity and political engagement through debate and disagreement, or, indeed, whether it has been as a government-driven strategy through which to more coherently and effectively engage in dialogue with Muslim communities. On each of these

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<sup>79</sup> Anne Phillips, *Multiculturalism Without Culture* (Princeton, NJ.; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007) presents one such argument where she makes the case for a multiculturalism that is focused on individuals and individual rights, rather than one with groups and cultures as its primary concern.

<sup>80</sup> For instance, a 2006 poll found that less than 4% of British Muslims felt that the MCB represented them, and 12% felt that it represented their political views. NOP/Channel 4, 'Dispatches Muslim Survey' results were broadcast on 'What Muslims Want' *Dispatches*, Channel 4, 7<sup>th</sup> August 2006.

levels, Muslim identity politics has been a topic worthy of close examination and critical analysis.

I aim to look chronologically at developments and thus will introduce and discuss the myriad of groups that have played a role in British Muslim political engagement and representation, as they appear and feature. Britain's Muslim communities are exceptionally diverse in terms of culture and ethnicity, as well as religious practice and political perspectives. This diversity has been reflected in the myriad of organisations and platforms that, together, have made up Muslim identity politics over recent times. Each has engaged with the issues of the day in its own way, and approaches have ranged from political isolationism to active lobbying of the state, to involvement in party politics and standing for political office. They have included participation in state-sponsored schemes, the development of cross-community civic partnerships, but also a preoccupation with international affairs and a subsequent disengagement from an 'un-Islamic' British civic life. All of these facets of Muslim identity politics will be surveyed, and aspects of their interplay with each other examined. I will however devote some specific focus to the Muslim Council of Britain since, as I demonstrate, they have proven to be more consistent, more long-lived and more representative than other Muslim advocacy or representative groups. Moreover, they enjoyed a short period of exceptional primacy in the field of Muslim representation between the late 1990s until 2005.

With this historical and theoretical background in mind, I will proceed in the following chapter (Chapter 2) to chart how and why the preservation of religious identity became a central preoccupation for budding Muslim community organisations in the UK from the 1960s onwards. The chapter after that, (Chapter 3), will discuss how an idea of recognition as parity has developed in practical terms in the context of British race relations and integration policy – in the specific case of British Muslims and the arguments presented for parity of recognition. It will also look at the budding organisational structures and lobbying techniques that were emerging within British Muslim identity politics, and discuss how they were influenced by the antecedent experiences and established institutions of British Jewish identity politics.

In doing this, I aim to have made a foundation for the remainder of my thesis, which will look at how the Muslim identity politics that grew out of this call for parity of treatment

and recognition has developed over the past few decades, which key moments have influenced and shaped it, its challenges, successes and failures and finally, its prospects for the future.

#### **1.4 Methodology:**

Before proceeding to the thesis outline, I will first elaborate upon the methodology that was used for my research, in particular for the fieldwork that I conducted. The thesis is first and foremost a work of historical analysis, relying on a wide range of primary and secondary source material as the basis of its research. With project's the time-frame (1960-2010) being so recent, I found that there was great benefit in utilising oral history as an important source of information, analysis and perspective. To this end, I conducted interviews with a number of individuals who have been involved with the events and developments that I have considered in my thesis. Some of these came from the various community organisations that feature in my research, while others were selected on the basis of long-standing involvement in Muslim community representative and advocacy initiatives. I also spoke with people who have been part of government-sponsored Muslim community initiatives, as well as individuals with a background in the Muslim media sector. Additionally, I spoke with a couple of individuals from British Jewish community groups, as part of my comparative research into communal organising among British Jews in Chapter 3.

The style and format of my interviews varied – from extended face-to-face interviews, to extended telephone conversations, email conversations and more informal discussions. The type of approach I used depended on a number of factors, including the availability and preference of the interviewee, the level of involvement that the individual had in events that I was covering, and therefore the amount and nature of subject matter that I wished to discuss with them in an interview. I prepared for interviews beforehand by considering the topics that I wished to cover and preparing some central questions. However, I maintained a flexible approach to interviews, allowing space for my interviewees to speak openly and at length. Most of my interviewees were specifically selected on the basis of my background research and knowledge. Nonetheless, I occasionally used a ‘snowball’ sampling method, whereby my interviewees recommended to me further people that I should approach for interview. When it was used, I found this method to be appropriate as it allowed me to

hear alternative perspectives on issues or events, and to corroborate or verify information that I had obtained from other sources.

I must also mention here that I benefited significantly from my own personal position with respect to the British Muslim community landscape. Being a British Muslim myself, and one who has experienced close interaction and engagement with a number of the groups and individuals that I study, I had the important advantage of ‘trusted insider’ status, in the sense that I possess extensive familiarity with the context and development of British Muslim community organisations. I was also previously acquainted with some of my interviewees. In some cases, I did find this background to be of additional advantage, since a certain level of trust was already in place, interviewees did not find it difficult to ‘open up’. However, once or twice I felt that my background may have contributed towards an atmosphere of guardedness, whereby interviewees were perhaps suspicious of my motives in conducting what may have been perceived as overly critical research about certain Muslim groups and organisations.

Reflexivity was important to me in the course of my fieldwork, as my familiarity with the contexts and subjects that I was studying meant that I had to continually reassess my position in the course of my interviews. I took extra care as I framed my interviews and questions to search for accuracy and detail, and was acutely aware that my findings might be politically skewed if I allowed my own views to permeate into my interview style. I therefore made a conscious effort to remain unbiased and objective in my approach to interviews, allowing space for my interviewees’ views and perspectives to authentically come through.

I took matters of research ethics very seriously and ensured that my fieldwork complied with the university’s guidance notes for research ethics. In particular, this involved that my interviewees were not made vulnerable in any way as a result in their participation in my research. It included outlining clearly to them the nature and scope of my research, the details of what their participation would involve and making clear that they were free to withdraw their participation at any point if they so wished. Additionally I explained to my interviewees that their conversations with me were being recorded and that they would be treated with confidentiality. Those interviewees who did not wish to be identified in the thesis were given the option of anonymity.

Finally, I should make mention of the specific parameters within which this study is located. In looking at the development of British Muslim identity politics, a central contribution of my thesis will be an articulation of what I have termed the Equality Gap, and its role in Muslim claims-making. To be clear, this Gap has been defined specifically with reference to political engagement and political claims-making. That is to say that it refers to a gap in equality as perceived and articulated by Muslim communities and representatives, in terms of their public and political engagement. Needless to say that there are cases to be made for the existence of other equality gaps between Muslims in Britain and other sections of society – for example gaps in social and economic equality. There are also arguments to be made that there exist equality gaps *within* some of Britain’s Muslim communities, most obviously perhaps relating to inequalities that are faced by some Muslim women. However, while each of these highly viable and extremely interesting lines of research, this thesis will not delve into them so that focus can be maintained and space constraints can be observed.

### **1.5 Thesis Outline:**

The thesis will be divided into four sections – consisting of an introduction, a conclusion and two main parts. Each of the two main parts will be framed by a broad area of research, and will contain two smaller chapters which will hone in on specific aspects. They are outlined with brief summaries below:

#### **Chapter One - Introduction:**

This chapter will present the context of the overall study, its aims and objectives and the theoretical framework within which the key concepts that I shall be working with are situated. It will look at a number of themes, including free speech, equality, and identity politics; and consider their varying definitions and meanings both in Muslim religious and political history and in the tradition of western political thought. A consideration of the different expectations and approaches to these themes that different historical experiences have helped to engender in both ‘Muslim’ and ‘western’ traditions will be coupled with a look at the nature of contemporary legal and political debates on the limits and safeguards on freedom of expression and other civil liberties. These have often constituted the key triggers to formative debates and initiatives in Muslim community organising and conversation with government and the wider establishment.

## **Historical background**

### **Chapter Two – Identity preservation and the birth of modern ‘Muslim consciousness’: 1960s – 1980s**

This chapter will chart a narrative of modern British Muslim political history by looking at a selection of moments where significant strides in political interaction and engagement took place. Particular cases will include some political and social initiatives of Muslim convert communities and immigrants during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. These will provide a window into the nature of issues and concerns as well as into the discussions and platforms for conversation and claims-making with government and authorities that were utilised – including institutions, personal relationships, media and other ventures.

After looking at key episodes during the period prior to mass-immigration (pre-1960s), it will, by drawing several comparisons, demonstrate how the emergence of a palpable shift in outlook, aspiration and prioritisation of issues of importance coincided with the commencement of mass-immigration, the arrival of families and the increasingly permanent settlement of Muslim communities in various parts of the country. This shift, in addition to the influence of push factors, such as the role and impact of concurrent political trends, in particular the debate and development of a race relations policy and campaigning agenda will be assessed, arguing that it was to leave an unmistakable effect on the future shape and trajectory of British Muslim identity politics.

In order to do this, I look at the growth of national and regional organising in Britain around the idea of a shared Muslim identity, which was gaining increasing credence among British Muslims as foreign Islamist movements were gaining a stronger foothold in Britain through the establishment of various associate- or satellite- bodies. I conduct a brief survey of each of the major attempts at creating Muslim advocacy and unity organisations, from the early political endeavours of the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS) in the 1960s through to the Union of Muslim Organisations (UMO) in the ‘70s. I consider these to be the first forays into organised claims-making on behalf of the Muslim community on

a co-ordinated and national scale, for which the preservation of religious identity remained a central concern.

Finally I survey the various Muslim identity-based organisations that were set up from the 1960s onwards, all of which were inspired and/or connected with trans-national Islamic movements from the Muslim world. I then show how these movements set in motion the idea of large-scale organising around the notion of preserving and promoting religious identity within Muslim communities, and point out how many of these organisations later provided support as well as personnel for the Muslim umbrella and representative bodies that were later formed.

This leads me to Chapter 3, which will look at the formalisation of Muslim identity politics through the institutionalisation of national communal advocacy and representative organisations.

### **Chapter Three – The formalisation of Muslim identity politics: Responses to hate speech, discrimination and the Equality Gap.**

#### ***Foundations of a government-community ‘conversation’ (1980s – 1997 and 1997-2001)***

This chapter begins by looking at national communal organising among British Muslims in the final two decades of the Twentieth Century. This phase is distinguished from the one preceding it by the prominence of efforts that were made in coordinating Muslim communities on a national level with the ultimate purpose of actively *representing* them, and securing their rights by vocalising their needs whether politically or in other aspects of the public sphere.

I view the year 1989 as a pivotal watershed moment. Ignited by what became known as the Rushdie affair, this year witnesses the beginnings of what I will view to be modern, formalised Muslim identity politics. It was marked by an unprecedented combination of each of the following factors: intra-community, national- and regional- level communal coordination among Britain’s Muslims; high profile and consistent media coverage and public interest in British Muslim affairs; serious conversation and negotiation with government at the national level; as well as significant international attention (and even intervention). Examples to be studied will be the political work of the Muslim Parliament,

the UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs (UKACIA), the National Interim Council for Muslim Unity (NICMU), and eventually in 1997, the establishment and early years of the MCB as illustrative of the institutionalisation both within the community and by government/establishment of Muslim identity politics.

Briefly revisiting my surveys in Chapter 2 of early Muslim communal advocacy and organisation in the 1960s and '70s together with the experience of the Rushdie affair, I will contend that the central notion upon which Muslim identity politics was to develop can be described collectively as an Equality Gap. This refers to the idea that Muslims in Britain did not have the same access to equality as their fellow non-Muslim citizens. This was partly because of the privileged legal status of the Anglican religion that had evolved over time, which effectively placed followers of Islam (and technically, followers of other non-Anglican religions) at a disadvantage when seeking legal redress against cases of blasphemy for example. It was also due to the greater ease with which other religions were able to appeal to anti-discrimination legislation on the basis of racial identity, something which Muslims were not able to do. The issues which were taken up by Muslim advocacy groups were not limited to this gap, however, it encapsulates their strongest source of legitimacy and constituted a reference point which was consistently used to justify their continued work.

For purposes of comparison, I will then cast a glance at the historical development of Jewish communal organising and claims-makings, specifically the development of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Through various thematic comparisons, I will show how conditions for the development of communal representation for Muslims presented unique challenges, and that this, in part, can explain why so many attempts had to be made before, through something of a trial-and-error process, the MCB was developed. Additionally, I show where and how Muslim organisations consciously sought to emulate their Jewish predecessors and how the path trodden by Jewish community offered a model which the government and political establishment at large often held up for Muslim community leaders both as an example and as a structure within which to develop their political demands.

Finally, recognising the MCB as the culmination of many of these earlier efforts, I will look at the development of its early relationship with the government and the dynamics of this

first firm point of access to the political establishment which British Muslims had managed to secure. I will show how the initial period between 1997-2001 saw significant advances to the causes which were championed by the MCB and how its relations with the government were at their most stable, and most productive.

### Two turning points

This section will contain two chapters – each focusing on a particular period which I have identified as a ‘turning point’, where significant change of thought, direction and method took place. In looking at each of these phases, I will demonstrate the overall level of progress that has taken place in the field of Muslim identity politics since 2001, taking note of and analysing areas of regression. I will show how the experience of each of these turning points was different, and also draw out aspects of continuity. This will lead me towards my concluding section where I will put forward my reflections, assessments and recommendations.

#### **Chapter Four – Post-11<sup>th</sup> September 2001**

This period is characterised by a sharp increase in the level and intensity of community organising, much of which came about as a direct response to the rapid alterations which were taking place in the global, and national arenas in reaction to the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, and the subsequent fallout. The introduction of heightened security measures and the style, discourse and thinking behind the ‘war on terror’ provoked concerns in many quarters about silencing, restricting and/or channelling of expression and dissent as effects of:

- a) The extent of restrictions and proscriptions imposed by recent anti-terror laws,
- b) A widespread disenchantment with perceptions of attitudes and motives in the government’s foreign and domestic policies among British Muslims.

Urgent security concerns played a notable role in framing the relationship between the government and the MCB, which, by now was virtually exclusively the contact point for organised communal representation of Britain’s Muslim communities. This resulted in inevitable strains and challenges to the relationship between the two parties. At the same time, there was an (also essentially reactive) drive among Muslims to denounce and state clearly their positions on matters which they felt they were being misunderstood and seriously misjudged on – including terrorism and violence, issues of loyalty and citizenship

and the notion of separate cultures and the irreconcilability of Islam with ‘western democracy’ – often characterised as a ‘clash of civilisations’.

This drive saw a growth in Muslim involvement with broad-based social and political coalitions, such as the anti-war movement. For the first time, an official involvement in such initiatives from Muslim organisations indicated a substantive ‘mainstreaming’ of Muslim community interests. The mobilisation of confident and vocal 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generations which looked beyond ‘Muslim’ issues was reflected in the language and type of discourse that was employed, style and choice of issues to be pursued. Even the renewed calls and campaigns for outlawing religious hate speech were framed around new terms to those that had been used during the Satanic Verses crisis, with the focus more on parity of treatment with other minorities as a matter of rights within the race relations framework, and on Islamophobia as a real form of discrimination and prejudice; and less on the idea of blasphemy and offence to religious sensitivities. Coinciding with an increasingly vocal far-right which exploited the law’s helplessness against incitement to religious hatred by running ‘anti-Islam’ campaigns, coupled with a volatile backdrop of unease and community tensions that had been fed by the terrorist attacks; maturity and sophistication in political claims-making from a Muslim identity perspective could not have come at a better time.

Another arena where the arrival of this new phase became visible was in the choices and styles of self-expression that were utilised by Muslims – both in their quantity and in the range of their backgrounds and leanings, in the spectra of religion, culture and politics. There was an expansion and widening of interests in the ‘Muslim press’ – one might expect that the speed of events and their urgency in a post-9/11 Britain would have demanded no less. This raises the question of how far their reach and influence was in responding to events, and/or in actually motivating and deciding the ‘Muslim agenda’.

Self-expression in the non-conventional sense was also on the increase – through various artistic and creative forms. One example is the diversification of the popular *nasheed* genre (religious songs), to include songs with a focus on emphasising the centrality of peace to the Islamic faith, as well as a sense of pride in Muslim identity, and spirituality. These became a popular way of tackling the effects of a backlash of stereotype and hostility in the wake of 9/11, as well as communicating a developing sense of modern Muslim identity.

## **Chapter Five – Post-7<sup>th</sup> July 2005**

Although precipitated by ‘similar’ circumstances (‘another’ terrorist attack), I will argue that 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005 constituted another important turning point for British Muslim identity politics. That the attack took place in London and was carried out by British Muslims was a significant reason for introspection of a new kind both in government circles and within the Muslim communities. The new realities posed by the threat of terrorism on home soil to the sense of everyday safety and security meant that fresh (some previously un-ask-able) questions were being asked. At the crux of these lay a debate on the success or otherwise of the way that multiculturalism policy had been hitherto understood, as well as the viability of the goal of integration that was being pursued.

The Labour government’s policy since this point followed a two-pronged approach with regard to security and community cohesion – a ‘hard’ approach, consisting of new and updated anti-terror legislation, and a ‘soft’ approach of community engagement which endeavoured to ‘win over (Muslim) hearts and minds’ in the fight against terror, and what became commonly referred to as ‘violent extremism’.

The ‘hard’ approach included an update of the UK’s anti-terror legislation to reflect the now much graver appreciation that recruitment to violent extremism was taking place in the UK, specifically within Muslim communities. One key aspect which I will look at more closely is the introduction of ‘encouragement offences’. These made the ‘glorification’ of terrorism a criminal offence and allowed for the prosecution of individuals, and proscription of organisations which were found to have engaged in such activity. As I will show, this law proved widely controversial and difficult to implement. It also backfired onto the government’s aims of preventing radicalisation by contributing to a feeling of isolation and victimisation among young Muslims – thus further increasing a sense of frustration and detachment from the government and the political process that had been exacerbated by the continuing involvement of the UK in the war on terror.

With regard to the ‘soft’ approach, there was a focus on developing new and effective understandings and ways of combating radicalisation and extremism among British Muslims (in particular young men). Additionally, the government took steps to pay more serious, direct attention to the ‘Muslim question’ – through the setting up of a number of dedicated working groups and earmarking funding for community initiatives through the

Prevent strategy – all of this marking a re-categorisation of Muslim community engagement. There was a departure from previous tendencies to treat it as part of the more general area of race relations and a greater inclination towards linking it to the securitisation agenda.

Within Muslim circles, denial- and conspiracy theory- type explanations for radicalisation and terrorism – which had been relatively widely expressed in the wake of 9/11 – almost instantly held much less purchase. This change was also symptomatic of the stark and sudden realisation of the gravity of the radicalisation problem, and that it was not something which could be dealt with ‘internally’. Neither could it be simply brushed under the carpet and explained (or wished) away. Among the significant implications of this mood change has been a more proactive readiness to engage in serious intra-community debate, dialogue and cooperation on the part of many community organisations, including the MCB. There was a sense that the stakes had become too high to squabble over the future, and/or to allow it to be decided externally, leading to a drive for unity between groups of different political and theological leanings. This sense of a shared future also led to a fresh drive for openness which has in some ways replaced the suspicion and scepticism that the establishment and members of other faiths may previously have been met with. ‘Muslim issues’ now affect everyone, to some extent or other, and so now the conversation that is being had about the future of Islam and Muslims should encompass much more than *just* Muslim voices.

The MCB in particular developed a more independent line as the government’s new strategic focus further tested their previously strained relationship. The government’s dogged refusal to acknowledge the contribution of its foreign policy to disaffection within Muslim communities and the increasing securitisation of community cohesion efforts meant that the MCB took a critical stance towards government policy more often than either of them might have hoped. In 2008, it became subjected to a period of ‘silent treatment’ from the government, and although it survived, it nonetheless emerged with a permanently weakened relationship with state officials, although arguably a buoyed credibility among the Muslim grassroots.

A final aspect that I will look at is how this turning point has affected the evolution of Muslim identity politics and the development of community organisations. I will show how

this phase has underlined the need for the younger (second and third) generations to come increasingly to the forefront of debates and decision-making. Figures for the composition of Muslim community groups and leadership positions show that they are still overwhelmingly dominated by older, first generation immigrant men. For many, this remains a source of the stifling, stagnation or rigidity in many respects, of Muslim identity politics – in the sense that turnover is minimal or absent, and consequently, so are new ideas. The younger generations have made their voices heard either through the establishment of new organisations and initiatives – many with a focus on critical thinking and a questioning of orthodoxy/convention – seeking to engage with (and thus gain legitimacy from) large sections of the Muslim population who may have been detached from existing representative groups. Some of these have been more pliant to the government’s objectives of securitisation and its foreign policy ambitions, and others have taken a far more critical role than the MCB.

Ultimately, this evolving landscape has contributed towards raising the bar in the level of organisational transparency and efficiency across the board. As an ever increasing range of voices emerged to speak for Britain’s Muslims, not only did they have to learn to work with each other, but also work on becoming more relevant and more representative to those they sought to represent.

## **Chapter Six - Conclusions**

This final section will consist of a concluding chapter which will draw together and summarise the findings of the research questions that have been investigated through the course of the thesis. Additionally, it will offer assessments and recommendations – both those emerging from the study itself, and with respect to where it can potentially be taken further, for example through making policy recommendations and through suggesting suitable pathways and strategies for community leaders, groups and advocacy bodies to follow.

I will present my conclusions under a series of headings that will help to tease out the pertinent issues emerging from this thesis:

- 1- A summary of the trajectory that British Muslim identity politics has followed from the 1970s through to 2010, highlighting key developments.
- 2- The role and fate of perspectives and understandings of freedom of expression

through this trajectory.

- 3- The Equality Gap – has it been filled?
- 4- Muslim identity politics – end of the road?

I will contend that although a number of substantive developments over the past few decades have considerably narrowed the extent of the Equality Gap, certain aspects of it still remain. Additionally, developments in the 2000s have led to a change in the Gap's focus. Together, I classify these remaining and additional aspects as:

- 1- **Legal** – primarily this relates to the limitations of Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006 and the case that I will discuss for its potential strengthening.
  
- 2- **Applicative** – this relates to the application of security measures in post-9/11 and post-7/7 Britain, which has been shown to contribute to the victimisation of Muslims as a community. This feeds into the third and final category:
  
- 3- **Cultural** – this relates to the persistence, and growth of cultural anti-Muslim sentiment and Islamophobia. Modern concerns surrounding terrorism and security, the war against terrorism and debates on multiculturalism and immigration have all fed into the anti-Muslim rhetoric of the far-right. That anti-religious hatred legislation has been a weak weapon against Islamophobia has given room for its spread to go comparatively unchecked. While this is not a trend which emanates directly from any section of the government, I will discuss how official inaction or indifference towards Islamophobic discourse has contributed towards this trend. And although this problem is not one that can be appropriately solved by hard legislation, it nonetheless provides a strong reason for the continuation of Muslim identity politics into the future.

All three of these factors present together a strong case for the continuation of Muslim identity politics in the UK. However, the format of this identity politics needs to change in adaptation to the changing nature of the Equality Gap.

## Chapter Two

### Identity preservation and the birth of modern British Muslim identity politics (1960s – 1980s)

Beginning with a glance at some early examples of political awareness and organising among Muslims in the UK, I will show how during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries, there was a varied degree of Muslim political activity encompassing individuals as well as institutions and communities. Arguing that it was to set the scene for the growth of centralised Muslim identity politics, I will then move on to analyse the history and development of race identity politics, alongside that of the UK's race relations strategy, following important features of their evolution over the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. After highlighting the major legal and institutional achievements that were made in measures to support race equality and outlawing race discrimination, I will consider the later genesis and development of a distinct Muslim identity politics, which, it has been argued, had been previously subsumed under the broad categories of 'race' and 'ethnicity'.<sup>81</sup> It wasn't until the 1980s, with the emergence of local Muslim campaigns and identity-focused organisations that this began to be challenged and Muslim-specific demands were more assertively articulated.

A concern with 'cultural' identity preservation began to gain momentum in the early 1970s with the growth and development of community organisations, and reached a major watershed with the outbreak of the Rushdie affair (from 1988). I will look at how prevalent attitudes, aspirations and priorities in Muslim identity politics started out; and I will propose that with the increased permanence of their settlement, the identity politics of British Muslims came to mature and undergo a process of refinement in terms of these attitudes and priorities.

I will then look at the growth and development of an array of different identity-focused Muslim community organisations from the 1960s through to the 1980s and beyond. These reflected and often replicated the spectrum of religious tendencies that existed in the 'Muslim world', and were responsible for a wave of community organising that was focused primarily on the preservation and revival of religious identity among Britain's Muslims.

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<sup>81</sup> Tariq Modood, 'Being Somebody and Being Oppressed: catching up with Jesse Jackson' in Tariq Modood, *Not Easy Being British: colour, culture and citizenship* (London: Runnymede Trust and Trentham Books, 1992), pp.47-59.

This was as distinct from previous efforts which had been much more preoccupied with laying practical foundations for settlement and community infrastructure.

Another factor influencing developments in Muslim identity politics was the antecedent emergence of a (race-focused) equalities agenda in the political sphere, and the founding of an established place for multiculturalism in national politics and policy-making. Using case studies to illustrate how the trajectory of Muslim identity politics took its course, I will show how the recently formed institutions for race relations paved the way for the shape that Muslim identity politics was to take.

### **2.1 Muslims, Identity and 'Britishness'**

In more recent decades, the idea of a British Islam has been highly topical, as originally immigrant Muslim communities have entered into their third and fourth generations, and public debates around loyalty, identity and integration have become more and more pervasive. With the increasingly permanent establishment of various organisations and bodies within the UK's Muslim communities, there has been an ongoing evolution of structures, discourses and trends across social and political spectra. This, coupled with both local and international political priorities around terrorism and security, has made the impetus for a vocal, more mainstream conversation on British Islam more visible. Many British Muslim communities and organisations have tended to reflect religious, social, cultural and political trends from 'back home' – in some cases imitating their foreign forebears in structure, politics, language, aims and objectives. Inextricable to this phase was the experience of identity formation which crucially included coming to terms with a new context and climate – an experience which is undoubtedly shared by all immigrant communities, to one degree or other. The question of what to adopt from the cultural norms and values of the new home and what to retain from the immigrants' country of origin has, in no small part, fed into the evolution of conceptions around 'British Islam', in a way that in many respects has not been dissimilar to the experiences of other immigrant groups.<sup>82</sup>

An array of approaches and solutions to these questions has been evident from the diverse range of mosques, local and regional associations and then representative and advocacy

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<sup>82</sup> I look at areas of similarity and overlap with experiences of African-Caribbean communities in Section 4 of this chapter, and will give more attention to those with Jewish communities in Chapter 3.

bodies, the establishment of which began in earnest from the 1960s onwards,<sup>83</sup> demonstrating how the notion of British Islam (just as the notion of ‘Britishness’ itself) is both broad and variable in its meanings and connotations.<sup>84</sup> This is not least because non-religious factors that feed into identity and self-perception have been and continue to be so varied. There have been several sketches of the range of Islamic groupings and socio-political trends in the UK (and more generally, Europe).<sup>85</sup> Varying from the religiously ultra-conservative to the more liberal, and encompassing an innumerable range of sects and theological groups, political radicalism/extremism and passivity, British Muslim self-identity has notoriously found it difficult to divorce itself from vestiges of overseas ‘back home’ influence. This situation is only complicated by the fact that Islamic cultures and beliefs are understood and practiced in a multitude of different ways across the globe.

In analysing these influences, many will point to the ‘South Asian factor’, which I have alluded to in the previous chapter. However, there are also more ‘generic’ factors which have influenced a wider range of British Muslim communities – for instance the fact that many have their origins in post-colonial nations in Africa and Asia where democratic government and civil society politics are present only in part, if at all; and very recently so at that. The replication of political trends that have emerged over recent decades in countries of origin has been another feature of this situation – whereby Islamist, tribal and theological shades of community organising have all played a part in shaping opinion and preference on the ‘British Muslim street’. Philip Lewis illustrates this point well with his observation of a group of councillors in Birmingham who were ‘voted in on the back of a discrete Kashmiri political party’.<sup>86</sup>

This debate and discovery associated with Britishness and British Islam is ongoing and highly topical at the moment. My later chapters will hone in on chosen aspects of its evolution in much more detail, but for the purposes of this chapter, it is necessary for there to be an appreciation of the complexity and intricacy that the matter has continued to have

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<sup>83</sup> Particular aspects of this phase will be highlighted further on in this chapter.

<sup>84</sup> Dilwar Hussain, ‘British Muslim identity’ in M S Seddon, D Hussain and N Malik, *British Muslims Between Assimilation and Segregation: Historical, Legal and Social Realities* (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 2004).

<sup>85</sup> The most comprehensive would include Tariq Ramadan’s in his *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), pp.24-30; more empirically Jytte Klausen’s in *The Islamic Challenge* (2006), pp.87-94 and more historically, Sean McLoughlin’s in ‘The state, ‘new’ Muslim leaderships and Islam as a ‘resource’ for public engagement in Britain’ in *European Muslims and the Secular State* ed. by Jocelyn Cesari and Sean McLoughlin (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

<sup>86</sup> Lewis, *Young, British and Muslim* (2007), p.23.

over time – and how this has played out in the formative moments of an ‘officially recognised’ identity politics for British Muslims, which I shall now move on to look at.

## **2.2 Muslims in the ‘pre-multicultural’ Britain**

Although the most numerically significant waves of immigration that have gone on to form the UK’s Muslim communities occurred during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century’s chain migration period of South Asians; these were by no means the first Muslim communities to settle and to publicly organise and identify themselves by their religious affiliation. Any history of Muslim presence in the British Isles will trace it back to at least 1,000 years prior. However, with the development of identity politics being of foremost concern to our study at this point, I will limit this section to illustrating a few of the most relevant of the earlier examples.

Apart from *lascars* (maritime workers), recruited on East India Company ships from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century onwards), servants and members of Anglicising Indian elites settling in various parts of London, the UK’s South Asian Muslim communities were also preceded during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century by large numbers of Yemeni and Somali sailors who settled in areas such as South Shields in the north and in Cardiff, in Wales.<sup>87</sup> These settlers differed from the post-World War II waves of immigrants in that many did not bring their wives and families over from their countries of origin. However, a sizeable proportion did marry and/or enter into relationships with locals,<sup>88</sup> and in this way, families and communities did come about. These new families and their children, who were of mixed race and culture, continued to experience difficulties in matters of social integration, acceptance and equality of treatment right through to the interwar period. This was partially due to factors of lesser economic and social class, as well as outright racism and prejudice.<sup>89</sup> Efforts were made to organise communities together for cultural purposes, including cultural and religious activities for children. Where difficulties and discrimination were encountered in working conditions and other aspects of social life, efforts were made to organise and represent these communities, putting forward relevant complaints and demands.<sup>90</sup>

Mention must also be made of the Liverpool Muslim Institute and its founder – Abdullah (William) Quilliam. Founded in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Quilliam and his Institute engaged in

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<sup>87</sup> Ansari *The Infidel Within* (2004), pp.41-44, Halliday, *Britain’s First Muslims* (2010).

<sup>88</sup> Ansari, *The Infidel Within* (2004), pp. 98-103.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch.4.

<sup>90</sup> See Fred Halliday, *Britain’s First Muslims: portrait of an Arab community* (London: IB Tauris, 2010).

numerous social and philanthropic works including the establishment of schools, an orphanage, congregational religious services, and publishing a journal – *The Crescent*.<sup>91</sup> Quilliam's story is particularly interesting as his legacy has enjoyed longevity and as well as a recent surge in interest;<sup>92</sup> and although some efforts have been made to portray Quilliam and his community of British Muslims as a historical model for an active yet quintessentially 'native' Islam, all evidence points to Quilliam and many of his contemporaries not only being highly politicised and overtly self-conscious about their identities as British Muslims, but also rather upfront about their not so 'British' political views and affiliations.<sup>93</sup> Quilliam even fulfilled something of an ambassadorial role in his relations with the Ottoman Sultan as well as with dignitaries in various other Muslim lands – earning from the former the accolade of '*Shaykh ul Islam* of the British Isles'.

Other personalities included Lord Rowland Headley who served as president of the British Muslim Society and who travelled for Hajj with an Egyptian delegation<sup>94</sup> yet (perhaps understandably given his position in politics) was not as strident as Quilliam was in his criticism of the Empire's overseas policies. Nonetheless, he did make representations to the government on behalf of British Muslims. In 1916 he petitioned Austin Chamberlain, the Secretary of State for India requesting that a mosque be built in London 'at the country's

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<sup>91</sup> Op.Cit., pp. 35-6.

<sup>92</sup> Quilliam and many of the endeavours with which he was associated are often cited as among the first British Muslim communities which organised and identified collectively on the basis of their shared faith; including among them prominent numbers of (native) converts. An Abdullah Quilliam Society has been active in Liverpool since 1998, with the aim of restoring and making functional once again the site of 'England's first historical mosque and Islamic institution' cf. the society's website: [www.abdullahquilliam.com](http://www.abdullahquilliam.com) [accessed on 11<sup>th</sup> June 2013]. From an altogether different perspective, Quilliam's name has been adopted by a recently-established 'counter-extremism think tank' – The Quilliam Foundation (est. 2008) which sees him as a figurehead emblematic of a 'genuine British Islam, ... free from the bitter politics of the Arab and Muslim world' cf. <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/about-us.html> [accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2008], this last assertion drawing some objection from those pointing to Abdullah Quilliam's quite overt affiliations with politics and political leaders in the Arab and Muslim world, and his moments of open criticism of the British Empire and support for the Khilafa cf. Yahya Birt 'Abdullah Quilliam: Britain's first Islamist?' <http://www.yahyabirt.co.uk/?p=144> (25<sup>th</sup> January 2008) [accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2013]. In support of this view, Geaves, *Islam in Victorian Britain: the life and times of Abdullab Quilliam* (2010), the only comprehensive biographical monograph on Quilliam, devotes two chapters to Quilliam's international politics and activism. He argues that 'Quilliam is being reinvented in some circles to provide narratives of integration', and that far from eschewing Arab and Muslim politics: 'when it came to conflict between the West and the Islamic Majority world, ... He (Quilliam) was not beyond threatening the British governments of his time with the prospect of inciting the Muslims of the Empire to rise up in the cause of injustices inflicted upon fellow Muslims. It is unlikely that his fatwa could have achieved this but he was ready to do it. Such behaviour, if undertaken by a Muslim leader today, would be labelled extremism' pp. 306-7. Interestingly, the updated version of the Quilliam Foundation website now omits any mention of Abdullah Quilliam [accessed on 11<sup>th</sup> June 2013].

<sup>93</sup> Lengthy articles in *The Islamic Review* (archives at: [www.wokingmuslim.org](http://www.wokingmuslim.org)) are devoted to debating the rights and wrongs of the empire's policies abroad and the nature of loyalty to the *ummah*.

<sup>94</sup> A collection of archives relating to Lord Headley is available at the website of the Woking Muslim Mission: <http://wokingmuslim.org/pers/headley/> [accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2013].

expense... in memory of the Muslim soldiers who have died fighting for the Empire',<sup>95</sup> and later travelled to various Muslim countries seeking contributions and support towards the London Mosque Fund.

Abdullah Yusuf Ali, a lawyer in the Indian Civil Service (better known for his widely published English translation of the Qur'an) exemplifies a British Muslim who's political stance was one of almost unquestioning loyalty to the government and crown. Although a British subject (not citizen), Yusuf Ali married and settled in England and maintained close ties with the establishment through correspondence and personal relationships with key figures. During the Great War, his enthusiasm for assisting the war effort, and answering 'the call of the Empire'<sup>96</sup> was warm and eagerly expressed. Indeed his dedication was rewarded when he was later chosen on several occasions to join international government delegations and to represent the government. For instance in a 1918 mission to Scandinavia and at the post-World War I Paris Peace Conference in 1919. Here and in several speeches and writings, Yusuf Ali expressed at times a reverential, even jingoistic admiration and loyalty to the British Empire,<sup>97</sup> a stance which was unpalatable to many of his contemporaries, given misgivings among Muslims in Britain about supporting the war effort against the Ottoman Empire.<sup>98</sup>

During the interwar period, there were notable moments of significant political mobilisation among Muslim communities in other parts of the UK. Arab Muslim seamen in South Shields organised to protest against rife discrimination and vilification both from among co-workers, and the communities in which they lived. When the Muslim seamen regularly demanded representation within the National Union of Seamen, they were faced with refusal and the union indulged in further attacks using popular derogatory stereotypes to further victimise them.<sup>99</sup> Ali Said was one key figure who was vocal in making the case for the Arabs' 'right to employment on equal terms with white sailors'.<sup>100</sup> Facing similar challenges, Arab and Somali seamen in Cardiff also organised to campaign against racist discrimination and to demand equal treatment. Some Muslim seamen collaborated with

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<sup>95</sup> Lord Headley to Austin Chamberlain 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1916, quoted in Ansari, 'Introduction' in *The Making of the East London Mosque* ed. by Ansari (2011), p.11.

<sup>96</sup> M A Sherif, *Searching for Solace: A biography of Abdullah Yusuf Ali* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 1994), p.45.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. for instance cf. p.46 which mentions Yusuf Ali's lavish praise for 'the admirable manner' in which accommodations had been made, and care taken of the welfare of Indian soldiers on the European fronts.

<sup>98</sup> Ansari, *The Infidel Within* (2004), p.103.

<sup>99</sup> Lawless, *From Ta'izz to Tyneside* (1995), pp.167-8.

<sup>100</sup> Op. Cit., p.113.

other 'black' seamen, joining the Cardiff Coloured Seamen's Committee, and later the South Wales Association for the Welfare of Coloured People. Others made representations from within Muslim or Somali groups such as the Islamia Allawia Friendly Society, holding public meetings and running poster campaigns.<sup>101</sup>

Each of the above examples illustrate together how the existence of a self-ascribed, politically and socially active British Muslim identity dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries – and that the nature and form of their politics was remarkably diverse, following no single pattern and reflecting the diversity of each of their other origins, affiliations and relationships both in Britain and abroad. In the sections that follow, I will show how the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was decisively formative in determining the driving issues behind the nascent Muslim identity politics.

### **2.3 Identity politics, race relations policy and equality in the UK**

#### **2.3.1 Politics of religious identity:**

It seems appropriate here to reiterate my understanding and usage of the term 'identity politics'.<sup>102</sup> It refers to the use of identity as a primary or defining characteristic for individuals or groups in the sphere of politics. It sees identity as a factor that is separate from self-interest when it comes to political negotiations<sup>103</sup> in its nature as an integral, or 'constitutive' aspect of a person's being.<sup>104</sup> Identity can also be considered as something worthy of special respect or recognition, either because it is an unchosen aspect of someone's existence (such as gender or race), or because it relates to conscientious decisions (such as religion) which are widely thought to deserve special respect due to the gravity/importance that they command. The obvious difference between these two descriptions is that in the case of race and gender, disadvantage and discrimination experienced on account of these unchosen characteristics is, in the most part, more readily apparent and easier to prove. As for religion, there are both practical and theoretical obstacles that arise in the articulation of a politics of identity. Practically speaking, there is far greater room for debate as to where to set definitions and boundary lines. Moreover there are also a number of theoretical hurdles. Noteworthy among these are: firstly, the apparent paradox between a 'religious politics of identity' and the age-old liberal principle

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> There have been numerous definitions put forward for the term 'identity politics', as discussed by Mary Bernstein, 'Identity Politics' *Annual Review of Sociology* Vol.31 (2005), pp.47-74.

<sup>103</sup> Amy Gutmann, *Identity in Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p.9.

<sup>104</sup> Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

that conviction and belief should be firmly matters of choice, beyond official control or restriction<sup>105</sup> – be it by a state, or by group or community hierarchies which have often been observed to flourish and benefit from the cultivation of such politics.<sup>106</sup> Secondly, there is a subsequent question: granted that freedom of belief is to be considered as ‘special’, can the wider political community be required to assist a religious citizen in bearing any consequences of their belief – ones which prove particularly cumbersome against a backdrop of contrasting/opposing socio-political norms?<sup>107</sup>

Supporters of identity politics vary in the role that they see for it, ranging from those who envisage it to be of temporary necessity, until sufficient headway is made in rectifying present injustices, to those who look to an ‘ideal of diversity’,<sup>108</sup> where political recognition for identity is available .

### **2.3.2 Race relations policy in the 1960s and 70s:**

The practical problem at the heart of the question of equality as has been outlined in my introductory chapter, is that of how to facilitate a pluralist polity where the gradual establishment of ‘newly arrived’ minority groups has prompted a fresh look at existing political set-ups and raised questions as to how well they may (or may not) serve the cause of equality in this context. In the UK, it was this sort of concern that played a decisive role in pushing forward impetus for a race relations strategy among liberal (Labour) politicians during the late 1960s.<sup>109</sup> With the increasingly permanent settlement of the UK’s African-Caribbean and South Asian communities, both regions formerly linked to the British

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<sup>105</sup> Of course there is a whole debate to be had as to whether, and the extent to which, beliefs and belonging to religious or cultural groups are ‘chosen’. The question is addressed in some detail by Susan Mendus in ‘The tigers of wrath and the horses of instruction’ in *Liberalism, Multiculturalism and Toleration* ed. by John Horton (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993); Bhikhu Parekh, ‘The Rushdie Affair: Research Agenda for Political Philosophy’ in *The Rights of Minority Cultures* ed. by Will Kymlicka (Oxford: OUP, 1995) and Modood, *Multiculturalism: a civic idea* (2007), Ch.2.

<sup>106</sup> Phillips, *Multiculturalism Without Culture* (2007).

<sup>107</sup> I take this terminology from Peter Jones, ‘Bearing the Consequences of Belief’ in *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Anthology* ed. by Robert Goodin and Philip Pettit (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006). Jones draws a distinction between *burdens* of belief and *consequences* of belief. The former comprising of ‘demands intrinsic to a belief system’, invariably personal in nature, and ones for which the bearer would not suggest/request assistance from others in society. Consequences, in contrast, are more far-reaching in their impact [e.g. faith schools or time off work for prayer/ (minority) religious holidays] and arise more clearly (although not always) as a result of the bearer’s belief system being a minority whose practices/preferences differ from those of the majority.

<sup>108</sup> Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990), p.158.

<sup>109</sup> Erik Bleich, *Race Politics in Britain and France: ideas and policymaking since the 1960s* (Cambridge, New York, 2003), Ch.4.

Empire and now part of the Commonwealth,<sup>110</sup> the sentiment that policy needed to consider the implications of how these new communities and their members were to be best catered for by the state in view of the specific challenges of discrimination and inequality that they faced became more widespread and accepted.

It was in this spirit that the first race relations legislation was passed in 1965, in the wake of notable incidents of racial strife and heated public debate on matters of immigration and race relations. Central to the emerging race relations strategy during this 'liberal hour' of British politics was the increasingly apparent fact that contemporary legal and social norms did not make illegitimate the arbitrary differential treatment or discrimination against certain sections/members of society on the basis of their race or ethnicity. As a result, the direction of policy development was deeply concerned with managing in tandem the two related challenges of immigration and of race relations. Both those on the left and on the right of British politics were increasingly aware of the need to rectify features of unfair differential treatment in each of these two areas.

As for immigration, by this point there was a clear sense that during the 1950s and 1960s there had passed unchallenged discrimination with respect to members of the 'New Commonwealth'. One illustration of this type of attitude was the visible use of the 'pressure to emigrate' argument in public (immigration) institutions, differentiating between white and non-white immigrants and suggesting that the latter were 'more likely' to utilise illegitimate methods of gaining entry into the UK on the basis of the greater political and economic incentives that they had to leave their home countries;<sup>111</sup> an argument which with time was identified by both the political right and left to be indefensible. On the other hand, it was becoming much more widely felt that tangible measures needed to be taken (and needed to be seen to be taken) in order to minimise any possibility for social conflict or disturbances to public order. The development of a race relations strategy was to keep in check any potential threat of such disturbances to public order with its goal of facilitating the integration of the newly arrived immigrant communities. An important factor to the achievement of these goals was to place some limit on immigration numbers, so as to allow (already arrived) new migrants the space to settle and establish some 'demographic

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<sup>110</sup> This point being relevant to the understanding of historical connections between these newly arrived communities and their home in the UK, their reasons for settlement there (post-war labour market) and the relationships and perceptions of power between them and the UK.

<sup>111</sup> Adrian Favell, *Philosophies of Integration: immigration and the idea of citizenship in France and Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p.111.

stability’, and to allow the majority the space and time to adjust. In this way, it was argued that conditions for more lasting integration of immigrants would be better facilitated.<sup>112</sup>

That instances of discrimination such as those mentioned above could (and did) pass unchallenged by the law was considered problematic, and is indeed problematic by the standards of the perspectives on equality that I have discussed above. The professed aims and objectives of the race relations strategies that successive governments pursued naturally varied and fluctuated in their emphases, just as they were coloured by the perspectives of different key players and the prevalent tone, discourse and pressing issues of politics. Nonetheless, we can with some accuracy extract a sense for the main ideals that policy-makers argued they were working towards. Key to these ideals was the goal of *cohesion* in community relations,<sup>113</sup> and that of the *integration* of newly arrived minorities into the fabric and machinery of British politics and society.<sup>114</sup> In the articulation and understanding with which both of these goals were presented, the achievement of equality for individuals from the minority groups in question with those who were part of majorities in society was held as central, and legislation sought to lay down specific expectations and legal norms in this regard.<sup>115</sup>

It has been argued that much of this new political attitude to racism and discrimination was informed on one hand by the successive Labour governments’ concerns with the direction that the immigration debate was taking and their anxiety to be seen to be ‘balancing’ apprehensions on immigration which called for limits on it, with efforts to tackle racial discrimination.<sup>116</sup> Race relations were the subject of intense political and public attention during this period, as racism, biological or cultural, at various levels in British society in the 1950s and 1960s engendered resistance to it by those groups at its receiving end. Out of these antagonistic interactions emerged a certain kind of race/ethnic politics of identity. The outbreak of race riots in the Notting Hill area of London in 1958 only intensified racial

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid. and pp.115-6.

<sup>113</sup> The Race Relations Act 1968 describes its task as ‘the establishment of harmonious community relations’, ‘The Community Relations Commission’, *Race Relations Act 1968*, Part III, 25.

<sup>114</sup> Philip N Sooben, *The Origins of the Race Relations Act* (Coventry: CRER, 1990)

<sup>115</sup> The first Race Relations Act of 1965 was a very weak piece of legislation, covering only discrimination in ‘places of public resort’, so it was soon followed up by the Race Relations Act 1968 which further expanded on the definition of settings where discrimination was to be outlawed. But it was the Race Relations Act 1976 which made real headway by covering both indirect as well as direct discrimination, and established the Commission for Racial Equality.

<sup>116</sup> Op. Cit., p.5.

tensions in the eyes of many.<sup>117</sup> Occurrences such as these which grabbed national attention gave politicians no choice but to make efforts to deal with some of the grievances that fuelled them.

The establishment of race relations legislation was one way of doing this, and the laws that were passed outlawed discrimination that had been occurring in areas of public life including education, employment, housing and public services, as well as covering incitement to racial hatred.<sup>118</sup> Such measures were not introduced all at once and there were several revisions and developments on the initial Race Relations Act (1965) – perhaps the most notable being the 1976 Race Relations Act which established the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE). In the discussion that preceded the 1976 Act, the government made clear that its aims were achieving equality of opportunity and integration for the ‘older’ first generation ethnic minority immigrants to the UK as well as for their children who as the second and third generations, it acknowledged, were facing challenges of their own, despite their having been born, brought up and educated in the UK.<sup>119</sup>

With this formalisation of race relations strategy through statute and the establishment of specialist institutions, UK equalities policy entered a new era. Whereas previously issues around race were largely only discussed in connection with immigration (and often negatively, in relation to concerns around immigration), this new era saw race relations and the tackling of discrimination emerge as a permanent and pressing domestic issue. This development was paralleled by a growth in the number and prominence of civil society and campaigns groups with race at the heart of their agendas. While many of these groups developed organically out of genuinely held experiences of prejudice and discrimination that existed at a grass roots level in their respective communities, it can also be observed that they could not but have been influenced and encouraged, at least in the way that they were framed, by the pursuance of a race relations strategy in government circles.

Thus began the development of race identity politics in government-community relations. It was recognised by actors on both sides that, up until this point, little had been done to

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<sup>117</sup> David Cesarani, ‘The Changing Character of Citizenship and Nationality in Britain’ in *Citizenship, Nationality and Migration in Europe* ed. by David Cesarani and Mary Fulbrook (London: Routledge, 1996), pp.57-73 and p.65.

<sup>118</sup> The specified categories of discrimination that were mentioned were those on the grounds of ‘colour, race, or ethnic or national origins’. However, none of these categories were defined in the legislation, leaving judges to define how they would be understood in the courts. *Race Relations Act 1968*.

<sup>119</sup> Sooben, *The Origins of the Race Relations Act* (1990), pp.9-10.

incorporate the newly settled communities of the UK into the nation's political structures and public life, and many people attributed the realities of discrimination and inequality among citizens to this absence.<sup>120</sup> By this argument, the equality of citizens from minority groups remained only a distant aspiration so long as they could still (legally) suffer on one hand from the effects of prejudice and discrimination in areas of public life (such as allocation and treatment in employment and housing) and on the other, were structurally disadvantaged when it came to engagement with political institutions and articulating their viewpoints and concerns on a par with other citizens who 'fitted' much more easily into the majority background culture and norms. The unacceptability of the first of these is hardly a matter of much disagreement among theorists – this sort of discrimination is unjustifiable by any sound conception of equality. As for the second, the arguments of recognition theorists would strongly advocate that measures should be taken to equalise conditions and to enable minorities in their civic participation by means of their representation or wider 'presence'. In this light, the proactive efforts of government to invest energy and resources into the development of race relations and integration policy was seen as commendable – since it signifies a deliberate step towards recognising and thus assisting otherwise unjustifiably disadvantaged sections of society in attaining parity with a majority who are by 'default' in a more advantaged position when it comes to articulating their concerns and engaging with the state and its related institutions.<sup>121</sup>

### **2.3.3 A changed political agenda for equality:**

The establishment of race identity politics represented a key milestone in the path towards equality for newly arrived minorities in the UK. The placing of race relations firmly on the political agenda had the trickle-down effect of setting standards and influencing a sort of 'culture change' in national government across the board as well as local government in a way that meant that racial discrimination could no longer be overlooked, and that concerted efforts were made to assess the exclusion of minority communities (either in presence or in perspective) from the political arena, since this was deemed to be a contributory factor to inequality, or at the least, a reason for the belated action from authorities to tackle it. Naturally, it was an evolving field and policy developed over time in its scope and the extent of the protection from discrimination that it established for minorities. Back in the 1960s, the initiation of a race relations strategy was considered a milestone in itself. Four decades later, the Race Relations Amendment Act of 2000 which

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<sup>120</sup> Modood, *Multicultural Politics* (2005), Introduction pp. 1-26.

<sup>121</sup> Favell, *Philosophies of Integration* (2001), pp.111-116.

followed the 1999 Macpherson Report<sup>122</sup> was hailed as a landmark step forward, significantly in its singling out of ‘institutional racism’ as a major obstacle to the realisation of equality for minorities. This was 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 racial stereotyping’.<sup>123</sup> The significance of this definition and its application to the Metropolitan Police in the wake of the Report cannot be overstated. For the first time, a major state institution was taken to task for discriminating against minorities, and made to bear collective responsibility, thus preventing shortcomings from being blamed on a few ‘bad apples’. This acknowledgement is credited with precipitating a cultural shift within the police service,<sup>124</sup> as well as providing strong grounds for accountability and criticism in the future. To what extent this cultural shift has actually taken place remains questionable given the recent media disclosures regarding the efforts of Metropolitan Police officers at concealment of information regarding their ‘spying’ of the Stephen Lawrence’s family and friends.<sup>125</sup>

The route of multiculturalism that Britain followed was one which differed from the approach of some of her neighbours on the continent. For example, France, during this time (and enduringly) placed emphasis on the integration of minorities into a more rigid conception of a national culture. In the UK, the race relations agenda had as its goal a ‘multicultural nationalism’.<sup>126</sup> This is to say, a vision of a nation where a common understanding of civic rights and responsibilities and an idea of a shared future would keep the nation together.

Once the race relations agenda had become an established part of the political arena, it set a precedent, almost as a model for community-government/establishment relations – one

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<sup>122</sup> Sir William Macpherson *et al.*, *The report of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, into the murder of the black teenager Stephen Lawrence in 1993* (London: The Stationery Office, 1999).

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> Trevor Phillips, giving evidence to the Home Affairs Committee of the House of Commons on 28<sup>th</sup> April 2009 said that the term ‘institutional racism’ ‘was absolutely critical in shaking police forces up and down the country out of their complacency’. Home Affairs Committee ‘The Macpherson Report – ten years on’ (14<sup>th</sup> July 2009), available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmhaff/427/42702.htm#evidence> [accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2013].

<sup>125</sup> Rob Evans and Paul Lewis, ‘Police ‘smear’ campaign targeted Stephen Lawrence’s friends and family’ *The Guardian* 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2013.

<sup>126</sup> Phrase taken from Favell, *Philosophies of Integration* (2001), p.116.

against which all future endeavours in addressing equality for minority communities would frame their claims. Once certain standards of protection from discrimination and equal treatment became established for racial/ethnic minorities, future claims for equality for religious minority groups (namely Muslims) were able to ground their arguments not just in the ‘difference/recognition’ philosophical justifications that have been discussed, but also more practically in the argument for parity of treatment with other minorities, *within* this model of equalities strategy that was being developed.

#### **2.4 Muslims and Identity Politics – from subsistence as a primary concern, to the longer view**

Although the presence of Islam in the UK can historically be traced back to over a thousand years ago, the settlement of substantial Muslim populations in Britain is a fairly recent development. The first consistent and sizeable waves of immigration began in the post-war period, during the 1950s and 60s, and included groups of young (male) manual labourers from Yemen and the Indian subcontinent who after initially coming over to work, settled in the UK as economic migrants. In time, there grew a trend of chain migration as these first migrants were joined by their families and began to establish themselves more permanently. For these early communities, the preoccupation was to secure the basic necessities of life such as a steady income and a roof over their heads. Settling in industrial towns or the inner-city areas of larger cities, many first generation immigrants maintained links with their countries of origin, through family members that had remained to whom they might pay visits or send financial assistance and through the fairly concentrated settlement patterns that they had happened to follow upon immigration – whereby whole sections of communities from ‘back home’ settled in close proximity to one another, sometimes in near-replication of their original neighbourhoods.

At this stage, interaction for these early communities<sup>127</sup> with the ‘public sphere’ was limited in a large part to the relevant authorities and institutions providing for the needs of work and very basic housing.<sup>128</sup> Permanence of settlement did not feature strongly in the initial aspirations of these first migrants. Concurrently, on the part of the ‘host’ authorities and

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<sup>127</sup> I use the term ‘communities’ wherever possible throughout this thesis, in preference to ‘community’ which gives inaccurate impressions of artificial homogeneity. However I am also conscious of the possible connotations of ‘communities’ as plural monolithic blocs and of the fact that there will be many Muslim individuals relevant to my discussion who will not want to associate with any ‘community’ at all.

<sup>128</sup> Jorgen Nielsen, ‘The Impact of Islam in Contemporary Western Europe’ *CSIC Occasional Papers* (Birmingham, 2004), pp.1-3.

the state, there is little to suggest much expectation that these new immigrants would eventually settle permanently or that if they did, that much would be needed in the way of discussion regarding whether any strategy of integration might be required, what shape it should take and how it might be pursued. The impression that their stay in the UK would be a temporary one was an underlying assumption, one that was often expressed explicitly, and certainly implicitly, in the notable sparseness of any policy attempts to address the needs of these growing Muslim communities;<sup>129</sup> or any serious efforts to study how things might progress into the long term. Indeed there are indications that in contrast to other large European states which were also in receipt of Muslim immigrant-workers during this period,<sup>130</sup> no comparable British efforts were made to encourage it. On the contrary, there were expressions of hostility and unease in Whitehall, from both Labour and Conservative administrations regarding this latest wave of non-white immigration.<sup>131</sup>

This is not to say that political interaction and engagement on the part of these emerging communities were entirely absent. On the contrary, a number of concerted campaigns are recorded to have taken place, which sought to highlight discrimination and unfair disadvantage that was present in areas such as employment and housing conditions, even from as far back as the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>132</sup> In addition to this, there were also a wide range of Muslim personalities who achieved considerable and often distinguished successes in public life, public service as well as in establishing business and professional ventures, quite often attaining consultative status and maintaining good relationships with key sections of government and the establishment. However, as noteworthy as these advancements were, they nonetheless should be differentiated from the type of identity politics which concerns the discussion at hand. The main difference being that they were conducted largely on a more localised, or micro-political level,<sup>133</sup> whereas Muslim community organising in the later 20<sup>th</sup> Century featured a growth in focus on macro-politics.

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<sup>129</sup> I refer here to their needs as immigrants/newcomers to the UK. Muslim/Asian or any other specific identity is not necessarily of significance at this point.

<sup>130</sup> Such as France and Germany, where incentives and specific 'guest-worker' programmes were instituted.

<sup>131</sup> Randall Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration in Post-war Britain* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), pp.4-5.

<sup>132</sup> For instance, campaigns by lascars (seamen) and other manual workers in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century on matters of their discriminatorily poor and unequal employment status and working/living conditions. Cf. Ansari, *The Infidel Within* (2004), Ch. 4 'Being Muslim in early twentieth-century Britain'. Note that the chosen names for workers' societies and organisations more commonly reflected ethnic rather than religious identities – e.g. the Somali and Arab Clubs and the Indian Workers Association. Ibid., pp. 115-117.

<sup>133</sup> See Prina Werbner, *Imagined Diasporas among Manchester Muslims: the public performance of Pakistani transnational identity politics* (New Mexico: School of American Research Press, 2002), and Alison Shaw, *A Pakistani Community in Britain* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) for in-depth studies of micro-political engagement of Pakistani Muslim communities in the cities of Manchester and Oxford respectively.

Indeed, by the mid-late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, macro-politics became of increasing importance, as I shall explore later on in the following section. As with any cultural minority, questions of longer-term self-preservation inevitably arose, and these went hand in hand with instinctive concerns of how to secure interests which appeared not to be recognised by the state (who's appreciation of their permanence was also belated). As we have seen, earlier efforts by the state to accommodate permanent settlement of new communities, through race relations legislation or through political inclusion initiatives were framed primarily in ethnic terms. These did not preclude the palpable feeling (by at least some) that an Islamic identity of some kind was worth cultivating and preserving as a positive value and a key component of identity and lifestyle. While of course there was inevitable overlap between culture and religion, and it is impossible to demarcate clear lines between experiences/perceptions of 'ethnic difference' and 'religious difference'; the religious component did feature to some noticeable degree even at the earliest stages – with importance being attached to the development of makeshift mosques and prayer rooms as well as arrangements for the *halal* slaughter of meat as possibly the two most noticeable of Muslim communal organising efforts during this time.<sup>134</sup> During the later decades, as priorities began to shift, one key area where micro-level Muslim identity politics was initially most conspicuously played out on the ground was that of education.

## **2.5 The first phase of community organising in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

### **2.5.1 Education and local Muslim identity politics – two Bradford case-studies:**

Thus the entry of these Muslim communities (as 'Muslims') into the political 'public sphere' was in effect a matter of circumstance rather than any intricately planned and executed strategy. One important factor in propelling this development forward was the emergence of the second generation, who in their own right markedly modified the scale, type and urgency of the primary concerns that their parents had held as newcomers to the UK. Children went to school and thus interacted with the 'mainstream' in ways that their parents may not have done. Other spheres of interaction that were necessarily entered into with the arrival and growth of families included the healthcare system and other public services. This demographic development coupled with the belated realisation and acceptance by many that they were now to be permanent residents of the UK led to a shift

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<sup>134</sup> The importance accorded especially to both of these primarily religious (although functionally more than 'just' religious) features is demonstrated in the urgency with which new immigrants set about making arrangements for securing them, even before the arrival of family members.

in the self-perception and in turn, the aspiration of these communities. Whereas the first wave of worker-immigrants might have been content with the basic essentials of working and living, these new families now had changed priorities and sought to consolidate communities and consider their long-term survival in their new home.

A key indicator of this new situation was the prevalence of education and education-related issues as the centre of Muslim political activism. The first coordinated efforts that were organised in this respect began during the 1960s. The Muslim Educational Trust (MET) was set up in 1966, and based in London to represent and cater for Muslim needs in national educational matters and curricula, as well as in areas of schooling where norms, practices and expectations were considered to pose difficulties or additional hurdles for observant Muslims. This ranged from providing guidance to parents on their rights in matters where there was some cultural apprehension,<sup>135</sup> to the production of textbooks and school resources on Islam and Muslims that remain in use to this day.<sup>136</sup> Increasingly emotive areas of contention relating to the educational and schools system included collective religious worship, physical and religious education, the provision of *halal* food, school uniform regulations and of course faith schools for Muslims. That these issues attracted both sufficient attention and determination for advocacy bodies, coordination and a degree of longer term vision to develop is evidence of the rising change in mindset and aspiration within Britain's Muslim communities.

Two examples can be used to illustrate that this heightened level of commitment to educational issues was significant of a shift in vision and priorities. The first is that of the Bradford Muslim Parents Association (BMPA), which along with the MET, in 1974 fronted the campaign against the closure of Bradford's last remaining girls-only secondary school.<sup>137</sup> This campaign was prominently identified in the press with the case of an Abdullah Patel who withdrew his teenage daughter from full-time education at the co-educational school that she was allocated to, in protest, and out of religious conviction – that 'When a Muslim girl reaches puberty, she is not allowed to mix with males other than close relatives'. Both the understanding of the cause in question and the style of discourse that was used by the BMPA to articulate their position were essentially framed by an idea

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<sup>135</sup> For instance, the right to withdraw children from religious education lessons/assemblies, or to request adjustments to school uniform in compliance with Islamic dress.

<sup>136</sup> Ghulam Sarwar, *Muslims and Education in the UK* (London: MET, 1983).

<sup>137</sup> 'Bradford Muslims' 5-point plea on children's schools' *The Times*, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1974 and 'Muslim girls' schooling' in Letters to the Editor, *The Times*, 18<sup>th</sup> January 1974.

of an 'Islamic' culture and identity – one which in this context, it was imperative to protect and nurture as far as possible in the younger generation. Moreover, the very idea of a 'Muslim community', although by no means new,<sup>138</sup> was being used to mobilise a fresh and enthusiastic new constituency which was increasingly aware of the potency of manpower that it had the potential to tap into. This notion was to prove both necessary and instrumental in shoring up legitimacy for both the existence of Muslim representative and lobby bodies, and for the claims that they argued for.

Later on in 1984, the Honeyford affair also sparked off heated campaigning and activism as an expression of strongly felt views on education and schools from Muslim parents. This widely reported affair involved Ray Honeyford, the head teacher of Drummond Middle School in Bradford, a school attended overwhelmingly by Muslim pupils. His writings on race and education, most prominently those in the right-wing *Salisbury Review*, took a highly critical position on what he perceived as regressive accommodations that were being made in Bradford schools towards large Asian Muslim populations, including the provision of *halal* meat in school meals, religious instruction by Muslim leaders, as well as claims from the BMPA for single sex schools and the conversion of five state schools into Muslim voluntary-aided schools.<sup>139</sup>

Honeyford's writings provoked heated protest and local unrest among parents and the community, in response to his criticism of unfair 'accommodations' that were being made for Muslim and Asian children in schools and more generally of what he clearly saw as regressive and intrinsically inferior immigrant cultures.<sup>140</sup> With Honeyford seen to be personifying opposition to the very concerns that many Muslims had for their children in the education system, the level of organised and vocal objection to his continued position as headmaster – through political campaigns in school and local government, boycotts, picketing and the media – was telling of a confident solidarity in the community that had found cause in defending and nurturing what were understood to be Islamic aspects of

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<sup>138</sup> Of course there were self-conscious 'Muslim communities' in various parts of the UK during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, as evidenced for example by the Liverpool Muslim Institute (1887), the Woking Mosque (1889). Additionally, a glance at any early copy of the Woking Muslim Mission's *The Islamic Review* (first published in 1913) will demonstrate how the idea of an Islamic community and indeed of a wider *ummah* were often popularised and widely used concepts, that had been functioning for the preceding decades.

<sup>139</sup> Halstead, *Education, Justice and Cultural Diversity* (1988). Cf. pp.56-71 especially for fuller details of the contents of Honeyford's articles.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. In fact, Honeyford had been writing articles in various publications on the topic of multiculturalism and education since 1982, and the offending *Salisbury Review* article did not provoke protest until it was picked up by the press two months after its publication. (cf. Halstead, 1988, pp. 237-247)

identity that were felt to be under threat – either through external hostility (as with Honeyford) or through their own previous lack of adequate attention towards its preservation. Significantly, one of the leading opposition groups to Honeyford was the Bradford Council for Mosques which claimed wide representation of the city’s Muslim population and commanded a certain ‘pressure group’ authority, and the campaign was also supported by the (Muslim) Lord Mayor of Bradford, Muhammad Ajeeb. The campaign grew quickly, attracting some support from other Asian and ethnic minorities, but also drawing some opposition, to the extent that it soon dominated much of Bradford local politics and gained significant coverage in the national mainstream media, including a BBC Panorama documentary. Honeyford’s critics accused him of ‘cultural chauvinism’ and mobilised parent governors at the school, organised petitions, and withdrew their children. Honeyford, on the other hand, protested that his free speech was being curtailed and strongly resisted calls to resign.<sup>141</sup> By the close of 1985, Honeyford had been suspended, with the whole episode turning him into something of a martyr for free speech in the eyes of his supporters,<sup>142</sup> and while it is not clear that the Muslim campaigners considered the Honeyford affair in quite the same light, the controversy was definitely a major demonstration of the organising power that Muslim identity politics could have, and in this sense, it could be considered to have been a pre-cursor to the Rushdie affair.

With the state also waking up to the new multicultural realities in the country’s population, a revision of aspects of the education system was ushered in via the Swann Report of 1985. Boldly entitled ‘Education for All’, it looked (among other things) into the various challenges relating to religious, cultural and linguistic diversity in schools, and made recommendations as to which avenues would be most appropriate for schools and government to pursue. Among the increasingly customary ‘Muslim community responses’ which were put forward to the report’s findings by bodies such as the Muslim Educational Trust and the Union of Muslim Organisations, there was a clear sense that the report had hardly gone far enough. For example, there was consternation regarding a lack of uptake on requests for Islamic religious instruction for Muslim pupils and ‘official’ adjustments to uniform.<sup>143</sup> This is not to mention the growing momentum in calls for the establishment of government-funded Muslim faith schools – the earliest of which seems to have come in

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid. p.169.

<sup>142</sup> *The Daily Mail* published a three-part series of Honeyford’s account ‘The Hounding of Honeyford’ *The Daily Mail* 16<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> December 1985. Honeyford himself continued to write extensively.

<sup>143</sup> UMO National Muslim Education Council, ‘Religious Education: a Muslim perspective’ (NMEC, London, 1997) and Ghulam Sarwar, ‘British Muslims and Schools: proposals for progress’ (MET, London, 1991).

1975, in Bradford.<sup>144</sup> However, there was progress in that the report itself was commissioned, and that it seriously considered these issues, leaving (at least overtly) flexible recommendations for community cooperation and dialogue with schools and for community use of school buildings out of school hours for cultural/religious supplementary education. This was a sure sign that the landscape was beginning to change and that Muslim community groups were making some, even if minimal, headway as recognised interlocutors and stakeholders in the formulation of policy – a theme that I shall return to in greater detail Chapter 3.

Parallel to developments in local campaigning for ‘Muslim’ issues, attempts were also being made to establish unity organisations with a national focus that sought to bring together Muslims from across the UK, and to represent them. This was also a period when Islamic movements with their origins in the Muslim world began to build a visible UK presence. In seeking to cater to their members who had by now settled with their families in the UK, they were significantly concerned with the notion of preserving and promoting Muslim identity, as they understood it. In remainder of this section, I will look at these two developments in further detail.

### **2.5.2 In search of unity in the 1960s and 70s:**

#### *i. Federation of Student Islamic Societies of the UK and Ireland (FOSIS):*

Formally established in 1963, FOSIS can claim to be the oldest continuously established British Muslim community organisation. Although its focus was on unity of student bodies, in its earlier years FOSIS also fulfilled the role of voicing community concerns and aspirations in a range of forums. The demographics of Muslim students in Britain during the 60s and 70s contrasted with the present day in that a far greater proportion of them were foreign students.<sup>145</sup> Some of these made their stay in the UK temporary, whilst others eventually chose to settle with their families. There was also the notable difference of an older age profile, since many were postgraduate students who had already completed preliminary degrees. These characteristics had an impact on the key priorities and concerns of the organisation. Finally, the fact that FOSIS was the main and only national Muslim community organisation in Britain during this early period meant that inevitably there were

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<sup>144</sup> Halstead, *Education, Justice and Cultural Diversity* (1988).

<sup>145</sup> Dr Hany El-Banna, founder of Islamic Relief and early FOSIS alumnus, quoted in ‘Taking a Smile to the World’, an interview with him in *emel* issue 5, May/June 2004.

non-student individuals who got involved, if only for the lack of other available avenues towards community service and activism.

The early FOSIS grappled with issues such as the preservation of Islamic culture in a 'hostile' and 'permissive' environment.<sup>146</sup> A survey of speeches from the organisation's annual conferences as well as articles from its magazine, *The Muslim*, offers an insight into some of the issues with which FOSIS membership were preoccupied. Among the most popular themes was that of an 'Islamic movement', which although rarely defined, was understood to imply international efforts to establish Islamic governments in the Muslim world, or at the least to oppose the various post-colonial dictatorial regimes in the region which were largely seen as being puppets of 'the West'. Additionally, the Islamic education and upbringing of children,<sup>147</sup> and the role of women were occasionally discussed in its publications, with attitudes tellingly in favour of the more 'traditional' roles for men and women.<sup>148</sup>

Thus priorities that were advocated in speeches and articles included the Islamic education of children and the preservation of culture and religious values. There were also examples of political activism and efforts at representing the community's demands at times when it was felt that it had been slighted. In 1970, FOSIS along with others organised a protest march to Trafalgar Square, objecting to an offensive portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad in an article in *The Times* newspaper.<sup>149</sup>

FOSIS also maintained working links with a range of community initiatives that were on the increase during this period. These included the Muslim Students Society, the UK Islamic Mission, and the London Islamic Circle, amongst others. Additionally, FOSIS engaged in criticism of what it perceived to be corruption and indolence on the part of out of touch community leaders – a key example being the London Central Mosque. The Mosque was a regular target in the Federation's publications and its director and trustees were chastised for being aloof towards the community's needs and aspirations. Calls were regularly made for the replacement of its foreign-appointed staff with people who were actively involved in the community's day to day life, who would be able to run the mosque's affairs with more faithful reference to the community's needs and aspirations.

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<sup>146</sup> *The Muslim* December 1969.

<sup>147</sup> *The Muslim* June 1970.

<sup>148</sup> *The Muslim* March and April 1970.

<sup>149</sup> *The Muslim* April 1970.

ii. *Union of Muslim Organisations (UMO):*

Perhaps the earliest effort at creating a comprehensive nationwide platform for unity and representation, the UMO was originally set up in 1970 by Dr Syed Aziz Pasha, a lawyer of Indian origins. This was the first organisation of its kind in bringing together Muslim bodies from a range of focuses and geographical bases.<sup>150</sup> It appears to have been inspired by, or at least had some very initial involvement from diplomatic personalities, specifically the Egyptian government and its diplomatic representatives in the UK, who were reportedly very keen to get some sort of unifying project off the ground.<sup>151</sup> However, it was not long before Dr Pasha himself firmly took the reins of the organisation and he was to dominate it for the next four decades.

As an idea, it appears to have fairly advanced thinking for its time. In fact it has been hailed as ‘premature’ by some, a nod to the limited enthusiasm that the organisation received from *within* the Muslim community. The UMO, and specifically Dr Pasha, tirelessly pushed for a ‘Muslim Bill of Rights’ throughout the 70s and 80s, at a time when many other British Muslim organisations were preoccupied by foreign Islamist causes or at least substantially influenced by personalities from abroad.

However, despite its comparative foresight, sources suggest that the UMO made very limited headway – even at two and a half decades old, it seemed to have made little progress in bringing together any significant range of community efforts. At the same time, its main campaign causes were very slow to progress during this time period, indicating that its achievements were scarce. For example, the organisation’s Silver Jubilee publication showcases the highlights of its first 25 years. The section on ‘national issues’ includes a campaign agenda with priority issues on which the UMO sought to lobby government and

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<sup>150</sup> While FOSIS [est. 1963] technically preceded the UMO as an umbrella/unity group, its remit has officially been limited to student Islamic societies. Although, as I illustrate above, its interests did often extend beyond this, to family issues, education and international politics for instance, nonetheless, its reach and ambitions did not seek to concentrate on community leadership and representation in the same way that the UMO and its successors did. If anything, it became more focused and specialised over time on its student constituency, even though it continues to engage with government and other stakeholders, it has done so with a student remit.

<sup>151</sup> Cf. ‘A Propaganda Exercise’ in *The Muslim* (October 1969) p.24, where claims are made that plans were in place to establish a Muslim unity organisation with Dr Pasha as its head, modelled on the Cairo-based Young Men’s Muslim Association.

Also cf. ‘Changing schemes for unity: ‘leaders’ left groping’ *The Muslim* (October 1970) pp.22-23 on the eventual withdrawal of Egyptian officials, and of initial support from the London Central Mosque from the scheme. The position of Secretary General then went to Dr Pasha who then proceeded to establish the organisation along with a handful of other individuals.

the main political parties. A 1979 letter sent to the leaders of all main parties outlines this agenda in the run up to the general election – a similar letter was circulated before the 1983 election with practically identical wording and contents to the 1979 letter - giving the impression that achievements during the period in between had been too few to mention.<sup>152</sup>

By the 1990s, the UMO had proved consistency and commitment through its regular community activities, which included conferences, youth excursions, celebrations of *eid* and *milad ul nabi* (the Prophet Muhammad's birthday) - all of which took place annually. On the political engagement front its work also continued, with the most persistent campaign issue being a call for the application of Muslim family law as an option for British Muslims, as well as provisions for exemptions in matters of religious practice or sensitivity at school and the work place.<sup>153</sup> Such representations were regularly rejected by the government officials and political figures to whom they were addressed, often on the grounds that they were unreasonable demands and a call to some sort of exceptional or separate treatment for Muslims.<sup>154</sup>

The UMO's potential to make progress in the political arena was marred by the limited scope of its appeal and outreach both within the various Muslim communities and towards government itself. Heavily dominated by the personality of Dr Pasha, there was little opportunity for the engagement of others beyond a small circle of individuals. Thus the organisation's priorities and strategy were rarely revised, and often repetitive. Consequently, it became gradually clear that government officials and civil servants were seeking to build relations with a more contemporary, dynamic representative body that was more attuned to the grass roots.

### **2.5.3 Organising centrally to preserve and promote identity:**

In addition to the above-mentioned locally-based campaigns, and early initiatives to unite and represent Muslims on an official level, there were also an increasing number of organisations on a grass-roots level that were established, for whom Muslim identity was a central focus. These were without exception organisations that were heavily influenced, if

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<sup>152</sup> UMO, *Union of Muslim Organisations of UK and Ireland, 1970 - 1995: a record of achievement* (London, 1995).

<sup>153</sup> These included requests for official annual public holidays for Muslims on the two 'Eid festivals. Cf. *ibid.* p.22.

<sup>154</sup> Cf. correspondences with the three main political parties reproduced in *UMO 1970-1995* (1995), pp.29-39.

not directly linked with, Islamic political movements abroad – specifically in South Asia, and also in the Middle East. While they were not set up to *formally* represent Muslims as such, in the same way that the UMO or even FOSIS did, they did share a common preoccupation with Muslim identity – and with preserving it (especially among the younger generations), as well as promoting it (in the form of *da'wa* – the evangelical call to Islam). In doing so, several of these groups did occasionally venture into the field of political representation, even though this was not their primary or main purpose. When a second, and later, a third umbrella organisation were set up in the late 1980s and the late 1990s respectively (see Chapter 3 of this thesis, on UKACIA and the MCB), a great many of these Muslim community organisations threw their weight behind them, recognising the benefits of collective representation and a unified voice to the furtherance of claims-making and engagement with the government. Moreover, many individuals from these various organisations later graduated on to hold leading roles in UKACIA and the MCB, having been primed through their involvement with several of these community organisations to then take on positions of communal leadership and representation.

*Trans-national Islamist movements, their UK branches and offshoots:*

To facilitate the profiling of these organisations, I will cast a brief glance at their origins, which, for the most part, were in Islamist movements from South Asia and the Middle East. A number of movements had been established in the post-colonial Muslim world to address what was felt to be a decline in the proper understanding and practice of faith. There were variations between them, but what they shared in common was an understanding that the faith of Islam and Muslim identity deserved, indeed demanded, a far greater centrality to society and every day life than they were being afforded. For purposes of clarity and space, I will group them into three broad categories: those which had minimal political engagement, those which sought to be actively engaged in the existing political system, and finally, those wanting to set up a separate or alternative political system. It is worth mentioning here that Sadek Hamid has conducted a useful illustration (and more elaborate mapping) of the various Muslim organisations in Britain, applying to them a typology set by Tariq Ramadan to reflect the spectrum of tendencies within contemporary Islamic activism.<sup>155</sup> Following Ramadan, he places contemporary Muslim organisations under six categories: *salafi* literalism, scholastic traditionalism, political *salafi*

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<sup>155</sup> Ramadan's typology is found in Tariq Ramadan, *To be a European Muslim* (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1999), and Hamid's application of it to the British Muslim context is made in Sadek Hamid, 'British Muslim young people: facts, features and religious trends' *Religion, State and Society* (2011) Vol.39:2-3, pp.247-261.

literalism, *salafi* reformism, Sufism and liberal rational reformism. While Hamid's analysis is of the contemporary landscape of British Muslim organisations, many of the groups he assesses were established during the period under discussion (1960s-1980s), hence it is useful to use his application as a starting point, and I will reproduce his visual representation of it here, for ease of reference. Hamid's analysis<sup>156</sup> can be roughly correlated to my three broad categories of political engagement, and I demonstrate this in Figures 1 and 2 (pages 222 and 223). However, it is important to point out that these classifications are not discrete, and that within these broad categories, there were cases of overlap, for instance, where certain puritanical organisations adopted radical methods or terminologies, as well as more intricate distinctions and differences within the broad categories.

*i. Puritanical – minimal political engagement:*

Those which I class as puritanical felt that for many Muslims, the understanding of piety had lapsed into a 'blind' adherence to rituals and cultural practices from which the faith of Islam needed to be 'purified'. These included the Wahhabi movement of Saudi Arabia, which was at the forefront of modern Salafism. Salafism calls for a return to the two primary sources of Islam – the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and claims to follow *al salaf al salih* – the 'pious predecessors' – the earliest three generations of Muslims whom they regard to have practiced an Islam that was yet uncorrupted by cultural influences, in particular what was viewed as innovation and excess in the area of spirituality. In the UK, the pre-eminent *salafi* organisation was JIMAS (*Jam'iyat Ihya Minhaj asSunnah*), which translates to 'The Society for the Revival of the Prophetic Way'. It was founded and led by Manwar Ali in 1984 (throughout the 1980s and 1990s he was more commonly known by his *kunya*, as Abu Muntasir) and for the best part of a decade could claim to be the hub of Salafism in the UK.<sup>157</sup> Taking off from foundations which had been laid by the Ahle Hadith movement<sup>158</sup> JIMAS attracted and brought together the younger generations of British Muslims who were drawn to the same theological positions. Salafism was defined by a 'back-to-basics' approach to religious practice and an ideal of Islam that was unadulterated by 'innovation'

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<sup>156</sup> Hamid, 'British Muslim young people' (2011).

<sup>157</sup> Sadek Hamid, 'The Attraction of "Authentic" Islam: Salafism and British Muslim Youth' in *Global Salafism: Islam's new religious movement* ed. by Roel Meijer (London: Hurst & Co., 2009), pp.386-7.

<sup>158</sup> A network with its origins in 19<sup>th</sup> Century India, which (through settlement in the UK) had established mosques and headquarters in Birmingham. In keeping with Salafi norms, the Ahle Hadith placed emphasis on reforming 'innovated' 'Sufi practices and beliefs common among British Pakistanis'. Cf. Jonathan Birt, 'Wahhabism in the United Kingdom – manifestations and reactions' in *Transnational Connections and the Arab Gulf* ed. by Madawi Al-Rasheed (Oxon: Routledge, 2005) pp.168-171.

such as the practice of following a *madhab* (Islamic jurisprudential school of thought),<sup>159</sup> as well as a preference for stricter understandings of Islamic practice. For example some Salafis continued to consider music, various art forms and even photography or filming to be forbidden in Islam. But JIMAS were keen to make their discourse more relevant to the UK, for instance by adopting the English language in their meetings, rather than Urdu which had been preferred by their elders.<sup>160</sup> JIMAS attracted many of the British Muslims who had studied at the Islamic University in Medina, and through this, a direct channel from the UK to Saudi state-sponsored theology in the form of heavily subsidised publications, religious preachers, and ultimately funding for mosques, was firmly established.<sup>161</sup> This subsidisation of institutions, publications and preachers helped the influence of JIMAS and *salafi* thought to reach far wider audiences than their limited numbers would otherwise have allowed.<sup>162</sup>

From 1995, schisms began to emerge within JIMAS, reflecting ongoing factionalism among Salafis in the Gulf region, and this led to the formation of breakaway groups.<sup>163</sup> The most prominent of these was the Organisation of Ahl asSunnah Islamic Societies (OASIS), led by the Birmingham based Abu Khadeejah, (Abdul Wahid).<sup>164</sup> OASIS took to siding with the official line of Saudi government scholars, which was loath to criticise corrupt regimes in the Muslim world, promoting instead the notion of ‘loyalty’ to the Muslim ruler. They argued that there was a more pressing need to correct ‘deviant’ beliefs and practices among Muslims that were rooted in culture, rather than to call for political reform. This led to their being dubbed rather dismissively as ‘Saudi Salafis’ or ‘Super Salafis’ by their opponents.<sup>165</sup> Notwithstanding this criticism, ‘Saudi Salafis’ have also been credited with running important local community projects that have challenged the radicalisation narrative of Al Qaeda and drawn vulnerable youth away from it.<sup>166</sup> This is a feature that is

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<sup>159</sup> Annabel Inge, *Salafism in Britain: the new generation’s rebellion* (unpublished MA thesis, 2008).

<sup>160</sup> Hamid, ‘The Attraction of “Authentic” Islam’ (2009). NB: Exception was made for the Arabic language, which, as the language of traditional scholarship, was given great reverence since it conveyed authenticity and a feeling of closeness to the *salaf* – as demonstrated in the Arabic name in the acronym JIMAS, and the adoption by its members of *kunyas* – in emulation of the early generations of Muslims – eg. *Abu Muntasir* (Father of Muntasir).

<sup>161</sup> Birt, ‘Wahhabism in the UK’ (2005), pp.171-2

<sup>162</sup> Inge, *Salafism in Britain* (2008).

<sup>163</sup> Op. Cit. p.172, and Inge, *Salafism in Britain* (2008).

<sup>164</sup> Hamid ‘The Attraction of “Authentic” Islam’ (2009), pp.384-403.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid. p.361.

<sup>166</sup> Robert Lambert, ‘Empowering Salafis and Islamists against Al-Qaeda: a London counterterrorism case study’ *Political Science and Politics* Vol.41:1 (2008), pp.31-5.

shared with some Islamist groups,<sup>167</sup> and shows that while general theological and political trends can be delineated within British Muslim communities, they are not discrete and just as there can be overlaps among them, there can also be political contestations within them.

Another trend which also placed emphasis on puritanism, as well as scholarship, was the *Deobandi* tradition. With its origins in Indian religious seminaries, it came to be represented among Gujarati Indian communities in the UK by the *Tablighi Jamaat* (TJ) movement.<sup>168</sup> The *Deobandis* eschewed what they considered to be excessive and innovative devotional practices favoured by the *Barelvi* tradition, a South Asian form of popular Sufism which placed great emphasis on the performance of traditional customs and rituals as well as the reverence of saints. It was a religious missionary movement which invested a great deal of resources into developing religious training through schools and seminaries (*Darul Uloom*s), which have gone on to graduate probably the most consistent stream of British-trained imams and religious leaders. Among the more prominent of these have been Shaykh Abu Yusuf Riyadh ul Haq, one-time Imam of Birmingham Central Mosque and currently director of Al-Kawthar Academy in the same city; Mufti Muhammad ibn Adam al-Kawthari, who runs Daruliftaa (the Institute of Islamic Jurisprudence) in Leicester; as well as Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra, a Leicester imam, veteran interfaith activist and current Assistant Secretary General of the MCB.

*ii. Reformist – active engagement in existing political structures:*

The reformist strand owes its origins and inspiration overwhelmingly to *Jamaat-e-Islami* (JI), a major reformist Islamist movement in the Indian subcontinent.<sup>169</sup> JI followers were critical of weak political stances taken by ‘puppet’ leaders who had been installed or propped up by the western colonial powers, and thus called for Islamically inspired political reform. They also engaged in Islamically inspired social welfare schemes with the aim of encouraging people to see religion as a key aspect of their identity which could give meaning and solutions to everyday challenges and issues. Members of the JI who had settled in Britain initially set up the United Kingdom Islamic Mission (UKIM) in 1962. The idea behind the organisation was to provide a base and an outlet for workers of the JI to

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid. Such as the Muslim Association of Britain’s role in working with the police to ‘purge’ the North London Central Mosque of the influence of Abu Hamza and his associates.

<sup>168</sup> It should be noted that *Deobandi* mosques in other parts of South Asia are independent of the TJ, even though the TJ utilise *Deobandi* mosque networks to further their missionary activities.

<sup>169</sup> Ron Geaves, ‘The reproduction of Jamaat-i Islami in Britain’ *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* Vol.6:2 (1995), pp.187-210.

continue with their activism in the UK. Thus the structure of the UKIM broadly reflected that of the JI, concepts and key texts were the same as those which were used by the JI (prominently featuring the works of Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi, the JI's founder). In fact, in the early years, the UKIM was widely referred to informally as 'the *Jamaat*'. Over time, the UKIM set up mosques and Islamic centres across the UK. These provided a range of services, including supplementary Islamic education for children through an extensive *madrassa* system, regular Islamic teaching for men and women, and charitable work.<sup>170</sup> To this day, the UKIM still boasts a wide network of well-established mosques including several in London and all the major UK cities.

By the late 1970s, encouraged by the settling of a new wave of Bangladeshi exiles in the wake of the 1971 War of Independence – and in a bid to counter the emergence of nationalist and secular Bangladeshi-identity groups in the East End of London<sup>171</sup> – the Bangladeshis within the UKIM formed their own group. *Dawatul Islam* (The Call of Islam) had its own youth organisation, the Young Muslim Organisation (YMO), and for a period, took on the role of running the East London Mosque, especially after the opening of the Mosque's new purpose built premises in 1985.<sup>172</sup> Divisions among the Mosque's trustees eventually led to those who were affiliated with *Dawatul Islam* leaving the Mosque, and many of the remaining trustees forming a new organisation, Islamic Forum Europe (IFE).<sup>173</sup> All of these groups functioned within, and primarily served the Bangladeshi community, with their inspiration, focus and personalities still very much grounded in the JI framework.

In 1973, leading figures of the JI set up the Islamic Foundation in Leicester. This was a research body and publishing house which has been credited with successfully bringing the works of major reformist ideologues of the JI as well as of the Muslim Brotherhood<sup>174</sup> to a worldwide English-speaking audience. Additionally, it spearheaded the first contemporary,

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> David Garbin, 'A Diasporic Sense of Place: Dynamics of spatialization and transnational political fields among Bangladeshi Muslims in Britain' in *Transnational Ties: cities, identities and migrations* ed. by M P Smith and J Eade (London: Transaction Publishers, 2009).

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., Humayun Ansari, 'Introduction' in *The Making of the East London Mosque: 1910-1951* ed. by Humayun Ansari (Cambridge University Press, 2011) pp.65-67.

<sup>173</sup> *Dawatul Islam* now functions from a new headquarters, Darul Ummah, in Shadwell; YMO has since broken affiliation with *Dawatul Islam* and joined with the IFE as its youth wing, thus also functioning with the East London Mosque as its hub, and all three of these groups have since gained branches and followings in various parts of the UK.

<sup>174</sup> JI was roughly set up as the counterpart of the Muslim Brotherhood (est. 1928 in Egypt and with a presence across the Middle East and beyond).

colourful and accessible collection of children's books on Islam and Muslim tradition in the English language.

A further development to the growing list of JI-inspired reformist groups was the establishment in 1984 of the Young Muslims UK (YMUK), the brainchild of Khurram Murad, a previous leader of the JI's student wing and then a deputy-leader of the JI itself. YMUK was constitutionally linked to the UKIM at its inception, intended to cater for the younger generation of British Muslims, and was pioneering in its commitment to the use of English as its language of operation. It also benefited from a cohort of highly competent and motivated youth leaders who were personally trained by Murad to deliver activities that were dynamic, in-touch with everyday social and political issues and conversant with Islamic beliefs and teachings of which they were unashamedly proud.<sup>175</sup> However, its affiliation to the UKIM was short-lived as by the late 1980s YMUK eventually asserted its independence, and it was not until 1994 that it then became attached to another 'parent' organisation, as I will go on to discuss.

Also within the reformist trend were organisations established by members and sympathisers of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). The Muslim Students Society (MSS) was set up in the 1960s and catered for a growing number of Arab and Arabic-speaking students in the UK. Many of these had prior involvement with the Muslim Brotherhood back in their home countries, and the MSS was a facility both to keep them in touch with the MB networks, to cater for their spiritual and religious development, as well as providing a social and community support mechanism.<sup>176</sup> As I have mentioned earlier, when FOSIS was set up in 1963, the MSS affiliated with it. Another notable establishment of the MB was the Muslim Welfare House. This was set up in 1970 as a support and community facility for Arab students who had come to the UK, and for many years, its building in Finsbury Park in London acted as a base for MB members, hosting visiting personalities from abroad. Its role has since changed and developed considerably, now serving as a community and service centre for its immediate area.

*iii. Radical – seeking an alternative political system:*

The final category, the radicals, aspired to overturning what were deemed to be 'un-Islamic' governments and establishing a *Khilafa* – an nostalgic vision of the prophetic system of

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<sup>175</sup> Geaves, 'The reproduction of Jamaat-i Islami in Britain' (1995).

<sup>176</sup> Alison Pargeter, *The Muslim Brotherhood: the burden of tradition* (London: Saqi, 2010), pp.150-153.

government instituted by the Prophet Muhammad and his successors (the *khulafaa*). *Hizb-ut-tahrir* ('The Party of Liberation', HT) was the main purveyor of this thinking in the UK. The movement itself was founded by the Palestinian Taqiuddin Nabhani in 1953, as he broke away from the Muslim Brotherhood. It adheres to a rather polarised worldview that calls for the establishment of an Islamic state (or *khilafa*) in the mould of the imagined heritage of the Ottoman Caliphate that fell in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. HT was brought to Britain in the 1980s by exiled members of the group who arrived from the Middle East, initially working with foreign students in the hope that they could then take their message with them on their return to their home countries.<sup>177</sup>

By the 1990s, HT had begun to organise openly within British Muslim communities. It functioned as a vocal mouthpiece criticising governments and leaders of Arab and Muslim countries, in particular accusing them of corruption and straying from the imperative to establish and rule by the *khilafa*. HT in Britain agitated for the return of this *khilafa* and anticipated that its establishment would bring an end to all forms of Muslim suffering and oppression. In the 1990s this was frequently pursued using daring and provocative language and techniques. Actual acts of violence have never been claimed or endorsed by the group, however, it has been argued that HT was guilty of 'cultivating the right conditions' for violence<sup>178</sup> – although this analysis is only directly linked with a single incident, namely the murder of a Nigerian Christian student in 1995, in which it has been claimed that drug dealing, gang violence and rivalry also played a key part.<sup>179</sup> There is stronger evidence to suggest that HT splinter groups such as *Al Mubajiroun* (est.1996) and its later offshoots such as *Al Ghurabaa*, The Saviour Sect, and Muslims Against Crusades have been responsible for inciting/encouraging violent crime. This will be discussed in more depth in the following chapter.

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<sup>177</sup> Sadek Hamid, 'Islamic Political Radicalism in Britain: The Case of Hizb-ut-Tahrir' in *Islamic Political Radicalism: A European Perspective* ed. by Tahir Abbas (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp.147-8; Suha Taji-Farouki, *A Fundamental Quest: Hizb al-Tahrir and the search for the Islamic caliphate* (London: Grey Seal, 1996), p.171.

<sup>178</sup> Ed Husain, *The Islamist* (London: Penguin, 2007), pp.149-153.

<sup>179</sup> Kaashif Nawaz, a former HT member and contemporary of Husain states: 'The murder at East Ham College was not of a man who was a Christian, but of a man who was high on drugs, and carrying two knives with intent on attacking one of the students on campus, he was intercepted by a gang of Muslims – nothing to do with Islamism or HT, but more to do with gang wars.' Source: Andrew Booso, 'Review of *The Islamist*, *The Translators* 21<sup>st</sup> May 2007, available at: <http://thetranslators1.wordpress.com/2007/05/21/review-of-%E2%80%9Cthe-islamist%E2%80%9D-ust-andrew-booso-complete/> [accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2013].

By the 1980s, the various groupings that constituted these three broad strands had played a significant role in energising a sense of Muslim consciousness,<sup>180</sup> increasingly among the younger generations. These strands and their respective organisations may have been established to provide familiar havens for activists among first-generation immigrants, but by the 1990s, their differences began to be played out as rivalries, as each trend sought to attract as many recruits from the second and third generations as possible. This rivalry was especially noticeable on university and college campuses,<sup>181</sup> where the dynamics within and between many of these groups have been likened to those of football teams.<sup>182</sup> While this period might be accurately characterised as a time of tribalistic ‘struggle for hegemony in the field of Islamic activism’ between these groups,<sup>183</sup> the experience also showed that the young people were taking greater ownership of their Muslim identity and while parent organisations from abroad were still revered, they were beginning to also assert their own views and preferences.<sup>184</sup>

As a final note, and perhaps as a premonition of these movements increasingly developing and adapting in their own ways to the UK, it is worth highlighting a few developments within some of these trends during the 1990s. The Islamic Society of Britain (ISB) was established in 1990 as a joint endeavour by individuals from JI and MB heritage with the aim of catering to the growing numbers of second and third generation British Muslims, as well as converts, to whom an ‘indigenous’ Islamic movement would most appeal. It grew to attract many graduates of youth groups within the reformist strand, particularly of YMUK which in 1994 took the step of merging with the ISB and thus becoming its official youth wing. The early ISB was distinguished by a discourse that was clearly and comfortably ‘at home’ in Britain, which, back in 1990 was in sharp contrast to various other movements that were regularly preoccupied with agitating for international change abroad, or simply for ‘Muslim rights’ at home.<sup>185</sup> This is exemplified by its Islam Awareness Week project which was initiated in 1994 as an annual nationwide campaign ‘to raise awareness and

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<sup>180</sup> Here, and elsewhere in this thesis, I follow Nasar Meer’s use of this term, cf. Meer, *Citizenship, Identity and the Politics of Multiculturalism: the rise of Muslim consciousness* (2010), where Meer uses ‘Muslim-consciousness’ to describe Muslim political identification and assertiveness.

<sup>181</sup> Sadek Hamid, ‘The attraction of ‘authentic’ Islam’ (2009), pp.352-371. For a personal account, see Husain, *The Islamist* (2007), Chapters 6, 7 and 8, where he describes his experiences of Muslim-consciousness in 1990s college and university campuses.

<sup>182</sup> Hamid, ‘The attraction of ‘authentic’ Islam’ (2009), p.359.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid*, p.360.

<sup>184</sup> McLoughlin, ‘The state, ‘new’ Muslim leaderships and Islam as a ‘resource’ for public engagement in Britain’ (2005); Lewis *Islamic Britain* (1994), pp. 102-112.

<sup>185</sup> Cf. Chapter 4, Section 4.1 in this thesis.

remove misconceptions surrounding Britain's second largest faith group'.<sup>186</sup> In 1997, the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) was set up as a hub bringing together various MB members and groupings that existed around the country, again with a focus on Britain as home, but also with a proud connection to the international MB, something which, especially after 2005, it has since taken steps to play down.

Within the radical strand, *Al-Muhajiroun* was set up in 1996 by Omar Bakri Mohammed as a splinter of HT. Mohammed had been expelled from his leadership of HT in Britain in the same year, allegedly for displeasing the movement's central leadership in the Middle East with his outrageous and confrontational tactics, which 'it was felt distracted focus from the party message'.<sup>187</sup> Following the departure of Mohammed and his followers, HT in Britain underwent a 'stage of re-groupment', with *Al-Muhajiroun* continuing to occupy the more extreme and confrontational end of the spectrum, and HT itself re-emerged projecting a more serious image of itself as an organisation with its concerns grounded in mainstream domestic issues as well as international affairs, especially with respect to Britain's role in them.<sup>188</sup>

All of these examples together serve to illustrate how the various groups that owed their provenance to trans-national Islamic movements abroad were already in flux by the 1990s, and that they were, albeit in different ways, beginning to engage with the realities of a permanent and indigenous presence of Muslim communities in the UK. In the following chapter, I will move on to look at the early initiatives to unite, and eventually, to represent different Muslim organisations around the UK – firstly for better co-ordination, but soon after also for the purposes of more effective claims-making.

## **Conclusion**

The period between the 1960s-80s was characterised by a drive towards identity preservation in various quarters of Britain's Muslim communities. This was manifested on a local level through a broadening of community interests from more functional issues such as the establishment of mosques, prayer congregations, and the provision of *halal* meat, to concerns around the preservation and promotion of religious identity among the younger

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<sup>186</sup> 'What is IAW?' *Islam Awareness Week website*: <http://www.iaw.org.uk/pages/page.php?id=what> [accessed on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2013].

<sup>187</sup> Sadek Hamid, 'Islamic political radicalism in Britain: the case of Hizb-ut-Tahrir' (2007), p. 148.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

generation. This preoccupation clashed with more right wing, conservative and arguably racist perspectives; and one key location where these concerns were played out was in the arena of schooling and education. The experience of Black community organising to confront racism and to call for the recognition and rectification of racial inequalities and discrimination provided inspiration and a reference point for increasingly identity-conscious Muslims. From a policy perspective, it also served as a useful precedent, whose institutions could be utilised by emergent Muslim community organisations.

As I have shown, a series of different UK-wide groups emerged from the 1960s onwards, with the aim of organising and, occasionally representing Britain's Muslim communities. These were each dominated by different political and/or theological groupings within the community and their strengths and weaknesses have been reflected in their ultimate successes or failures in being effective. Some have survived while others have been short-lived. The UMO in particular was a pioneer in the field of communal representation to both the government and to the wider public, however its progress and development was hindered by an inability to broaden its reach to become more inclusive of the extensive theological, cultural/ethnic and geographical spread across Britain's Muslim communities. This shortcoming was compounded by its failure to develop an open, modern, and transparent structure, which would in turn have invited broader participation and input.

FOSIS has lived on and developed apace, but its focus became increasingly refined around the needs of a fast-expanding domestic Muslim student population, while other community organisations took on the role of centralised representation. However, as I shall go on to mention, FOSIS was to prove a crucial starting point for many British Muslim activists and community leaders. Additionally, it regularly provided support and input into future unity and representation initiatives. Similarly, the wide range of Muslim community organisations that developed in the period between 1960 through to the 1980s played an important role in engraining a sense of Muslim-consciousness, which proved foundational for the formalised identity politics that came about in the next decade. They also gave ample opportunity for community leaders to emerge and develop, particularly on a local level, through the building of campaigns and alliances. This too was to prove useful in the coming phase of formalised identity politics. However as the following chapter will show, an important difference was that these local campaigns generally related to single issues of concern to a local community, whereas the centralised formal identity politics of the later

1980s onwards sought to build a national consensus and a unified voice representing a whole range of Muslim communities from across the country.

## Chapter Three

### **The formalisation of Muslim identity politics: Responses to hate speech, discrimination and the Equality Gap**

*Foundations of a government-community conversation [1980 – 1997 and 1997 – 2001]*

This chapter takes a look at the formative years that led to the emergence of modern British Muslim identity politics, in the format that we are familiar with today. We have seen in the previous chapter how the first attempts at uniting Muslims across the UK through communal organisations date back to the 1960s, here I will argue that the decisive shaping of the basic structures and channels of communication through which this identity politics was to be conducted, commenced in the 1980s - 1990s.

Revisiting my earlier overview of the umbrella organisations which emerged in the 1960s-70s, namely the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS) and the Union of Muslim Organisations (UMO), I recall why they eventually proved unsuited or unable to carry forward the role of representation and advocacy for Britain's Muslim communities, while at the same time, Muslim identity organisations with links to international Islamist movements (such as HT) were gaining increasing publicity and media exposure. Following this, I will profile the numerous efforts at unity and representation that developed in the 1980s, these include local and regional campaigns that articulated growing tensions between aspects of aspiration and self-identity of groups among British Muslims, and wider society, specifically relating to social and cultural issues of mutual concern. Most notable among these were the numerous community advocacy and representation initiatives that emerged in the wake of the Rushdie affair. I argue that it was at this moment when Muslim activists began to consistently present claims that could be articulated as what I term an Equality Gap.

I then show how by the mid-1990s, the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) (and the preparatory committee which preceded it), emerged as the pre-eminent representative body, and remained so through to 2001. Although, for this period, the MCB was the main player in this field, it was nonetheless not the only one. Accordingly, I shall also look where relevant at the role played by other organisations and their respective impacts upon the direction of political engagement. Since the period preceding the MCB's official launch in 1997 is essential to understand for a fuller and more rounded overall picture of this phase, I will provide a brief overview of it, followed by a more detailed account of the MCB's

establishment. I will assess how it came about to occupy a position of primacy, the key issues that framed its relationship with government and mainstream politics; and how and why this relationship developed over the time period under discussion.

In doing this, I will argue that the nature and form of the MCB was heavily influenced by an aspiration to learn from, and, in many respects, to emulate, the greater experience and superior political leverage that was enjoyed by institutions at the helm of British Jewish identity politics – primarily the Board of Deputies of British Jews (the Board), and, in specific contexts that I shall elaborate on, the position of Chief Rabbi. I will show how British Muslim community leaders expressed clear ambitions to achieve this, and how the government also encouraged this, since it made the practicalities of its relations with religious minority communities more manageable.

I will then consider differences and similarities between the British Muslim community's experiences of political engagement and those of the British Jewish community, illustrating how a straightforward emulation of the 'Jewish model' was not easy. In a large part, this was down to different migratory conditions, and subsequently, a different 'migratory mindset', that accounted for the key differences between each community's experiences of settlement in the UK, and, in turn, of political engagement. Ultimately, Britain's Muslims benefited greatly from the Jewish community's antecedent successes – in terms of acquiring 'staple' legal exemptions and recognition necessary for religious observance; and the MCB benefited from the Board's model of communal representation and lobbying. However, the MCB found that it had to make its own way in some areas – due to the contrasting features, and the differing circumstances facing both communities. I will sum up by showing how over the past decade the fortunes of both Jewish and Muslim community organisations have been affected by both the changing nature of community politics as well as the government's approach to them – a theme which I will return to in more detail in the ensuing chapters where I examine turning points in the development of British Muslim identity politics over the past decade, as well as in the concluding chapter – when I look to the future of British Muslim identity politics in light of the point that it has reached today.

In my final section, I will look closely at the key argument at the centre of the new Muslim identity politics – the argument that ultimately represents a major justification for the continued existence of Muslim identity politics. I refer to it as the Equality Gap, since it

essentially hinges on the notion that the structure and mechanisms for equality and recognition in the British legal and political systems suffer from a gap with respect to the treatment of Muslim minorities on a par with other minorities. I will examine the basis for the argument that this Equality Gap exists, in light of the Rushdie affair – this being the crisis under which it was first articulated. I will conclude by looking at how it has continued to be articulated, the contexts in which it has been called upon in politics and by mentioning how the gap has had continued implications on the nature and style of Muslim identity politics since the late 80s.

### **3.1 Muslims and race relations policy – the Equality Gap**

In Chapter 2, we saw how efforts to represent British Muslims from a central platform through FOSIS had been only occasional, and how the UMO had made initial progress as an umbrella body, but eventually was met with limited success. In this chapter, I will show how despite being best known for the fiery mass protests that it ignited, the publication in 1988 of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* was to prove an instrumental moment in the eventual development of formal and centralised British Muslim identity politics, as well as an important milestone in coherent claims-making to the government. This was because it brought together a potent combination of factors – the outrage of so many British Muslims at the offending novel, the interest of foreign nations, the highly sensitive nature of the very subject of freedom of expression in public and political consciousness all forced Muslim community organisations to seek a united platform from which to make their representations.

In many respects, this experience of community self-expression, engagement and representation did not differ very much from that of other ethnic minority immigrant communities to the UK from the Commonwealth. But while a race relations agenda was evolving in the sphere of policy, it ultimately took circumstance more than strategy to propel Muslims into the mainstream political sphere and trigger off the growth of collective identity politics for them that was based around religion. Several chronological accounts have been drawn which trace this development,<sup>189</sup> some varying in the emphasis and importance that they place on different aspects. However it is virtually unanimous that the

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<sup>189</sup> For instance: Steven Vertovec, 'Muslims, the State, and the Public Sphere in Britain' in *Muslim Communities in the New Europe* ed. by Gerd Nonnemann, Tim Niblock and Bogdan Szajkowski (London: Ithaca, 1996); Jorgen S Nielsen, *Muslims in Western Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004); Mohammad Siddique Seddon, 'Muslim Communities in Britain: A Historiography' in Seddon, Hussain and Malik *British Muslims Between Assimilation and Segregation* (2004); Lewis, *Islamic Britain* (1994).

single most formative event in the political development of the UK's Muslim communities during the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century was the Rushdie affair and its aftermath. The publication of *The Satanic Verses* triggered off (in retrospect, predictable) uproar among Muslims in the UK who, among other emotions, felt outrage and deep hurt at what they understood to be a gratuitous and insulting attack on the Prophet Muhammad and other deeply revered personalities as well as on the Qur'an – the sacred scripture of Islam.

Responses varied but two particular products of this affair are of relevance to the discussion at hand. The first is that it brought about a sense of urgency and momentum for unity and representation through the creation of civic organisations as channels for the articulation of a 'Muslim viewpoint' or response to what was felt in many ways to be an attack. The organised response that was made to the affair by community groups and spokespeople took very seriously the precedent that was laid for it in terms of representations made to government and the press by race relations bodies that had grown over recent decades. This development of a conscious Muslim identity politics – one that articulated a sense of grievance in *not being given equal treatment by the law*, and not being treated on a par *with other minorities*<sup>190</sup> was both unprecedented and was to have an impact that long outlived the Rushdie affair.<sup>191</sup> Secondly, and partly as a consequence of the first product, was the also unprecedented scale of scrutiny and debate to which the UK's Muslim communities were subjected in the public domain – including academia, political commentary, public discourse, the media, the arts and eventually even in diplomatic relations. Both of these proved instrumental in shaping a new landscape against which Muslims came to view themselves and be viewed, and a new approach that was adopted in

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<sup>190</sup> It is important to stress here that my account of the development of Muslim identity politics in the wake of the Rushdie affair and beyond will focus primarily upon the public articulation of grievances by individual and group actors in the political arena – these were largely framed in the discourse of recognition and equality. This is not to ignore the very real (and perhaps at times far more vocal) expressions of outrage and hurt which were grounded in a feeling that blasphemy had been committed. Of course this was widely felt and expressed, but of more direct relevance to the discussion at hand is the way in which this experience triggered off both an awareness of the Equality Gap, and a momentum for a Muslim identity politics as a way of tackling this gap.

<sup>191</sup> Although the existence of Muslim political groupings and organisations in the UK much preceded the Rushdie affair (some of the earliest dating back to the early 60s), these were more localised in focus, and characterised by a preoccupation with social and intra-community issues, rather than political affairs. While several political standpoints were being articulated at this time, these were predominantly informed and coloured by 'back home' perspectives and allegiances. For many of these the Rushdie affair served to force an earnest effort to engage with the political landscape of the UK and to seek to formulate arguments that were located with a view to a permanent future in the UK. The most notable being the UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs (UKACIA) followed to a lesser degree by the more 'radical' Muslim Parliament. Both continue to exist (albeit in changed and diminished forms) to this day.

the formulation and articulation of claims and rights to the state.<sup>192</sup> The new sense of urgency that many Muslims felt both in response to the publication of *The Satanic Verses* and in frustration at the polarisation and dissonance of positions that their protests were met with by those around them, created a space for the development of community organisations, leaderships and other efforts of representation and interlocution on a new level.

### **3.1.1 The Rushdie affair and equality:**

There were two main demands that were made on the grounds of equality, both of which relied primarily on expectations of a principle of *equal treatment*. The first was one that interrogated the rationale behind the inherent privilege that was enjoyed by the Church of England, as the established church of the UK, in the protection that it had as a religion from blasphemy under the law. Under this arrangement, it was (and remained so until 2008) possible to prosecute against forms of expression or publication that are ruled to ‘contain any contemptuous, reviling, scurrilous, or ludicrous matter relating to God, Jesus Christ or the Bible, or the formulas of the Church of England as by law established’.<sup>193</sup> This arrangement was objected to as a form of discrimination that, by some interpretations, was telling of a biased (as opposed to neutral) background political culture that placed Muslims (as non-members of the Church of England!) at a basic disadvantage. The existence of a blasphemy law protecting the Church of England made the language that was employed at the time in defence of ‘freedom of speech and artistic expression’ appear acutely unfair and discriminatory. Some Muslims wondered if they could ever become/be accepted as equal citizens without giving up essential aspects of their beliefs and identities. Thus many of the earlier representations that were made in the wake of the Rushdie affair focused on calling for an extension of the blasphemy laws to cover all religions and denominations.<sup>194</sup> In the words of UKACIA’s correspondence with John Patten: ‘The crisis over *The Satanic Verses* refuses to go away... (because) our legal framework does not envisage a situation in which

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<sup>192</sup> An illustration of this kind of concerted action can be found in the UKACIA document *Muslims and the Law in Multifaith Britain* (1993) which also includes exchanges with the government incl. Home Office Minister John Patten.

<sup>193</sup> Lord Scarman, as quoted in Catriona McKinnon, *Tolerance: a critical introduction* (London: Routledge, 2006) p.130.

<sup>194</sup> UKACIA, *Muslims and the Law in Multifaith Britain* (1993). Also Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2000), Chapter 10, and Tariq Modood, ‘Muslims, Incitement to Hatred and the Law’ in *Liberalism, Multiculturalism and Toleration* ed. by John Horton (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), pp.139-156.

an offence of sacrilege could be committed against religions other than the Anglican faith'.<sup>195</sup>

The second demand focused more directly on the growing race relations agenda itself, as an object of reform. It was argued that, although welcome, in concentrating solely on ethnicity as a factor of difference, the anti-discrimination legislation that had been passed thus far lacked nuance and the necessary recognition of minority groups that were not identified primarily by ethnic terms. This in itself was one objection. However, it was complicated by the fact that as time wore on and the legislation was utilised in discrimination cases, it emerged that members of *some* religious groups could legitimately be protected from discrimination and hate speech by the very same race relations laws that excluded members of other faiths. The rationale behind this was that the religions concerned (Judaism and Sikhism) were identifiably linked with particular ethnic groups (Jews and Punjabis), and that racially motivated discrimination/hate speech against them was in effect impossible to separate from similar forms of hostility that were religiously motivated. Legal precedent had determined that the Jewish and Sikh faiths were 'mono-ethnic',<sup>196</sup> thus facilitating the prosecution of an attack against a Jew or a Sikh by appealing to the existing Race Relations Act. The most obvious religious 'minority' exclusion to this anomaly were Muslims – since even though it was possible to classify certain ethnic groups as being overwhelmingly Muslim (for instance, Pakistanis or Bangladeshis), it would be impossible to group Muslims themselves into any ethnic category since adherence to Islam itself does not follow any ethnic pattern.<sup>197</sup> This legal loophole was indicative of an inherent disadvantage that Muslims faced when seeking redress against discrimination or looking to combat hate speech which could take advantage of it.<sup>198</sup>

This second position encompassed two main strands. The more 'basic' of these was the charge that if the anti-race discrimination laws protected in their scope both Jews and

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<sup>195</sup> Letter from UKACIA to John Patten, 19<sup>th</sup> July 1989, reproduced in UKACIA, *Muslims and the Law in Multifaith Britain* (1993).

<sup>196</sup> *Mandla v. Dowell Lee* [1983] 2 AC 548 (HL), 565.

<sup>197</sup> Nasar Meer, 'The politics of voluntary and involuntary identities: are Muslims in Britain an ethnic, racial or religious minority?' *Patterns of Prejudice* Vol. 42: 1 (2008), pp. 61-81.

<sup>198</sup> See Nadeem Malik, 'Equality? The Treatment of Muslims under the English Legal System' in Seddon, Hussain and Malik, *British Muslims Between Assimilation and Segregation* (2004) for detail on the legal loophole, also Tariq Modood, 'British Muslims and Multiculturalism' in *Multiculturalism, Muslims and Citizenship: a European approach* ed. by Tariq Modood *et al* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp.42-46 situates it in the context of EU human rights regulations – noting that the Amsterdam Treaty of 1999 expects member states to outlaw religious discrimination, further highlighting the gap in the law. See Christopher Allen, 'From Race to Religion: the new form of discrimination' in *Muslim Britain: Communities under Pressure* ed. by Tahir Abbas (London: Zed Books, 2005) on the far right's exploitation of it.

Sikhs, then for the sake of fair and equal treatment, they needed to be extended to include Muslims as well. The other charge was that Muslims were facing a specific type of prejudice/discrimination that called for their inclusion in race relations/equalities legislation as a way of securing equality for them. This was to say that Muslims suffered disadvantage and discrimination because they were perceived and treated in a manner that was racist in its motivation and nature, and that this in turn meant that the experiences of discrimination that were felt by Muslims could not, straightforwardly at least, be approximated to experiences of racism that was founded on ethnic differences. Thus, it would be inaccurate to consider Muslims (from an equality and justice perspective) simply as members of their respective ethnic minority groups that suffer from socio-economic and other forms of disadvantage and discrimination. To do so would be to view them through the lens of the 'mode of oppression' rather than, through the fairer and more accurate 'mode of being'.<sup>199</sup> This mode of being was not articulated only (or even in the main) through ethnic terms. This was reason enough to treat Muslims as though they were a race, or to use Tariq Modood's phrase, an ethno-religious group.<sup>200</sup> Modood points out in reference to '1980s antiracism in Britain', that 'most Muslims – suffering all the problems that antiracists identify – hardly ever think of themselves in terms of their colour'. Because of this, and because of the 'racialised' way in which they were sometimes prejudicially viewed, 'ethno-religious' as a category made more sense. For him, the understanding of race that had thus far informed race equality legislation was impoverished insofar as its definition of race excluded Muslims.<sup>201</sup> In addition, his findings as well as those of research carried out for the Cabinet Office indicate that religion can and does constitute a factor in the actual degree and nature of disadvantage and social exclusion that communities face.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Tariq Modood, 'Muslims, race and equality in Britain: Some post-Rushdie affair reflections' *Third Text* 4:11, (1990), pp.127-134.

<sup>200</sup> This viewpoint is supported by research into negative public portrayals of Islam and Muslims. For instance John E Richardson, *(Mis)representing Islam: the racism and rhetoric of British broadsheet newspapers* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub Co., 2004) who sees racism as a 'shifting and changing concept' which is not limited to colour or ethnic differences but defined more by hierarchical and unjust social relations.

See also the distinction that Bhikhu Parekh makes between racism grounded in 'physical' difference and racism grounded in 'cultural' difference: 'over the centuries all racisms have had – and continue to have – two separate but intertwining strands. One uses physical or biologically derived signs as a way of recognising difference – skin colour, hair, features, body type, and so on. The other uses cultural features such as ways of life, customs, language, religion and dress. [...] most Muslims are recognised by physical features as well as by their culture and religion, and the biological and cultural strands in anti-Muslim racism are often impossible to disentangle.' Runnymede Trust & Bhikhu Parekh, *Report of the Commission on The Future of Multi-ethnic Britain* (London: Profile, 2000), p.62.

<sup>201</sup> Modood, *Multicultural Politics* (2005), pp.104-108 and p.114.

<sup>202</sup> This is discussed in Tufyal Choudhury, 'Comparative perspectives on discrimination law' in *Islam in the European Union: Transnationalism, Youth and the War on Terror* ed. by Yunus Samad and Kasturi Sen (Oxford: OUP, 2007), pp.187-8.

In short then, there have been two ‘gaps’ in the law that the experience of Muslim identity politics has identified and argued against:

- a) Speech: Whether it is the Church of England being given ‘special treatment’ through the continued existence of blasphemy laws,<sup>203</sup> or the arguable shortcomings of current legislation in proscribing incitement to religious hatred.
- b) Actions: The inadequacy of race relations policy (and specifically anti-discrimination legislation) in appreciating the complexity of the British Muslim experience of prejudice/discrimination as an ‘ethno-religious’ group, and therefore the need for it to be revised. The gap here being illustrated by the inclusion of Jews and Sikhs (but not followers of other religions) under anti-race discrimination legislation.

The first of these gaps is more straightforwardly provable than the second, and has remained a key focal point for Muslim representative and lobby groups until this day. It informed the representations against *The Satanic Verses*, and since then it has also, famously, and controversially been the direct impetus behind the strong support from a very broad spectrum of Muslim groups behind the introduction of a ‘religious hatred’ offence.<sup>204</sup> The offence that was eventually introduced in 2005 was not, as many had hoped, as stringent and wide-ranging as the comparable sections of race relations legislation. However, even as symbolic recognition of Muslims as an identifiable group that needed to be catered for in integration policy, it received a measured welcome as a step in the right direction.<sup>205</sup> It is worth noting here the development with time of a shift from the emphasis placed by Muslim groups on the extension of the blasphemy law as a way to achieving equality, to a more focused, and more human rights-grounded demand for protection from hate/Islamophobic speech.<sup>206</sup>

As for the second gap, it motivated the terms of the successful campaign for the recognition of religion as an identity-category in official matters through the inclusion of a ‘religion question’ in the 2001 National Census. Without the collection of such data, it was

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<sup>203</sup> The offences of blasphemy and blasphemous libel were finally repealed by the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008.

<sup>204</sup> Pnina Werbner, ‘Islamophobia: Incitement to religious hatred - legislating for a new fear?’ in *Anthropology Today* 21:1 Feb 2005. Also Modood, ‘British Muslims and the politics of multiculturalism’, (2005).

<sup>205</sup> ‘Religious Hatred Law Perpetuates Inequality After Commons Vote’ MCB Press Release 1<sup>st</sup> February 2006. Available at: [http://www.mcb.org.uk/media/presstext.php?ann\\_id=186](http://www.mcb.org.uk/media/presstext.php?ann_id=186) [accessed on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2013].

<sup>206</sup> McLoughlin, ‘The state, ‘new’ Muslim leaderships and Islam as a ‘resource’ for public engagement in Britain’ (2005). See also Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism, *The Religious Offences Bill 2002: A Response* (October 2002).

argued, there would never be any accurate and comprehensive aggregation of population numbers and demographics for the UK's Muslims; and without this, it would never be accurately known how many Muslims actually *were* experiencing discrimination. It was only once such statistics were obtained that the more formidable task of assessing how much of this discrimination was based on their 'Muslimness', and how much was founded on other aspects of identity. Those involved in the campaign contended that it 'represented a long-standing dissatisfaction with the focus on race and ethnicity alone as a statistical marker for planning and resource allocation in the public sector' and that 'without it, British Muslims would remain statistically invisible'.<sup>207</sup> Interestingly, and in support of the earlier arguments that I have made, the rationale behind this campaign also followed closely the push for a 'race/ethnicity' question which had taken place ten years prior and had achieved success in time for the 1991 census.

While each of these examples represents differing goals, they both provide useful illustrations of how the case for addressing the Equality Gap is gaining increasing currency. With the benefit of time and experience (its own and that of race identity politics), the articulation of the Gap by Muslim civic organisations and lobby groups is becoming clearer and stronger. At the same time, it is becoming more evident to policy makers that without addressing the gap, equality as recognition – in the tradition that has been set by the British race relations policy agenda – can hardly be claimed to have been fully achieved. From a philosophical perspective, the understanding of recognition that I outlined in the first section requires that the gap be closed, if we are to move beyond addressing (simply) the socio-economic disadvantages that many immigrant (and post-immigrant) communities face; and aim for an arrangement not only where we are aware that there will be specific challenges and disadvantages faced by each community, but to also find ways for the legal and political system to respond to those disadvantages that are unjustifiable or have disproportionate impact. From a practical perspective, straightforward equality of treatment under the law also means that a reassessment of present anomalies (such as the ambiguity around the inclusion of Jews and Sikhs under race relation legislation – and the legal disadvantage that this leaves Muslims and members of other minority faiths under) is also called for.

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<sup>207</sup> Jamil Sherif, 'Campaigning for a religion question in the 2001 Census' presentation delivered at *The Demographic Profile of the UK's Muslim Community*, conference held at the Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre, London, 26<sup>th</sup> September 2001.

### 3.1.2 Initial large-scale organising and representation on a national level:

The mid-1990s represented a period of marked change in several areas of politics and witnessed the forging and development of political relationships which have held much significance in the ensuing years. The almost two-decade-long succession of Conservative administrations was drawing to a weary close, and there was a perceptible air of enthusiasm – both broadly-speaking, in politics, as well as more specifically among Muslim advocacy bodies. A number of factors catalysed or at least encouraged this enthusiasm. In terms of the intra-community situation, there had been growing realisations from many quarters that some form of coordinated voice would most effectively serve the shared aspirations of political voice and recognition that were now being so vigorously called for, since the Rushdie affair. The arrival of these new unity initiatives effectively illustrated how the UMO was becoming overshadowed and overtaken in its ambition to remain as the main representative and advocate for British Muslims. In what follows, I outline some of the two most notable efforts in this regard:

*i. The Muslim Parliament:*

1992 saw the launch of a Muslim Parliament of Great Britain - an organisation founded on the premise that ‘all political parties and the mass media in Britain are now engaged in a relentless campaign to reduce Muslim citizens of this country to the status of a disparaged and oppressed minority’ and that as such, ‘greater cohesion and dynamism’ was needed among mosques and institutions in order to implement a ‘strategy for survival’.<sup>208</sup> Dominated by ex-*Guardian* journalist Kalim Siddiqui, and funded by the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Muslim Parliament (MP) was heavy on ideology and rhetoric yet apparently quite sparse in terms of concrete action. In many ways an overambitious and staunchly confrontational endeavour, it devoted its efforts towards the planning of a comprehensively self-sufficient and parallel infrastructure for the Muslim community, encompassing a parliament (basically a council), a central community fund (*Baitul Mal*), educational institutions including schools and a university, a research body (The Muslim Institute), as well as youth and women’s organisations.

Although the MP did not ever officially cease to exist, it can be considered to have been short-lived for a number of reasons. Firstly, as with most projects that revolve around single personalities, it was dealt a heavy blow with the demise of its leader, Kalim Siddiqui,

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<sup>208</sup> *The Muslim Manifesto* (The Muslim Parliament, London: 1990).

in 1996. This left the crucial role of a central, unifying figure in the organisation unfulfilled, allowing for in-fighting and divisions to emerge amongst the MP's ranks. Eventually this took the form of a split - with Kalim Siddiqui's son, Iqbal, leading the newly-created splinter – the Institute of Contemporary Islamic Thought (ICIT), and Muhammad Ghayasuddin Siddiqui (no relation) assuming the role of the MP's leader, a position that he occupies until today. Neither branch has ever really been successful in achieving either support or influence beyond their immediate sphere of contact - and neither has since proved capable of enjoying the degree of influence or recognition that they have aspired to.

While Ghayasuddin Siddiqui has continued to perform an occasional role of spokesman through the MP mouthpiece on eclectic issues, this has been of a rather limited reach, and often as a 'lone voice' in relation to the rest of the community.<sup>209</sup> On the other hand, Iqbal Siddiqui's ICIT is practically obscure to the public eye. Its website does not appear to have been updated since 2000, and its principal preoccupation has been to present a history of the MP and Muslim Institute under Kalim Siddiqui as well as to promote his ideas through providing access to a collection of his articles and papers.<sup>210</sup> Its magazine – *Crescent International* – does however continue to be published online, although it primarily deals with international political affairs rather than issues more directly concerning British Muslims.<sup>211</sup> Other than these functions, the ICIT is, to all intents and purposes, non-existent.

*ii. UKACIA:*

In a related vein yet with much more direct ambitions, the UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs (founded in 1989) had built up substantial momentum among local and regional groups,<sup>212</sup> and by 1993 had already accrued enough rapport with government to be able to submit its report entitled *Muslims and the Law in Multi-faith Britain: the need for reform*'. Presented as a contribution to the CRE's consultation for the second review of the 1976

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<sup>209</sup> Ghayasuddin Siddiqui has in recent times joined the British Muslims for Secular Democracy (BMSD, cf. Table1). He has also undergone a rather dramatic shift in his opinions, now being a vocal opponent of Islamism and a proponent of 'liberal' Islam. He has also been involved in the rebirth of the Muslim Institute, which was re-established in December 2009 with a new structure, staff, and a revised outlook aiming 'to promote and support the growth of thought, knowledge, research, creativity and open debate within the Muslim community and wider society.' Cf. [www.musliminstitute.org](http://www.musliminstitute.org) [accessed on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2013].

<sup>210</sup> Cf. [www.islamicthought.org](http://www.islamicthought.org) [accessed on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2013].

<sup>211</sup> *Crescent International* can be read online at [www.crescentic.it](http://www.crescentic.it) [accessed on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2013].

<sup>212</sup> Cf. *Sacrilege versus Civility* ed. by Ahsan and Kidwai (1991), p. 342.

Race Relations Act,<sup>213</sup> this paper forthrightly advocated that the persistence of several issues of inequality in British politics and public life was in urgent need of redress by government. Supported by articles from academics in law and politics, this collection drew arguments from the perspective that British Muslims constituted a group that required advocacy and representation in law and politics on a similar level with ethnic minorities. These arguments were largely grounded in the terms that I refer to as the Equality Gap - that this need for recognition and greater representation was not simply because their shared religion was considered to qualify them as a distinct group – but more as a result of reasons that the status quo in law and politics left British Muslims a conspicuously vulnerable minority.

The UKACIA set out to avoid the challenges which had earlier faced the UMO and the MP by calling together a considerably more diverse group of community representatives – including various regions in the UK as well as a range of religious and political persuasions and cultural backgrounds. Moreover, it made resourceful use of established institutions, such as the London Central Mosque in Regents Park (where it became based) and by making appeals for support to the UK ambassadors of several Muslim countries. The Director of the London Central Mosque, Dr. Ali Al-Ghamdi, also served as chairman of the UKACIA's steering committee and later became Co-convenor of the organisation along with Iqbal Sacranie.<sup>214</sup> The combination of these factors appears to have contributed towards earning it some form of standing and recognition in its relationship with the government. So by the mid-1990s it held a central position as interlocutor for 'religious' concerns of Muslims – as distinct to concerns rooted or understood through the lens of race or ethnicity.

Nonetheless, the UKACIA did have significant limitations. Key among these was that it was in essence a collective that was founded on the notion of protest – this being both a reactive as well as a primarily defensive organising tactic. With the Rushdie affair and offensive representations of Islam and Muslims in literature and the media as its main preoccupation, it became somewhat defined by its call for a widening of the blasphemy laws. As such, it did not appear to offer British society any tangible positive contributions and this may have detracted from the seriousness with which its demands were received.

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<sup>213</sup> 'Muslims, the Law and Multi-Faith Britain' in *British Muslims Monthly Survey* (Birmingham, August 1993), Vol. I, No. 8, pp. 5-6.

<sup>214</sup> *Sacrilege Versus Civility* ed. by Ahsan and Kidwai (1991), p.363.

Moreover, while it did enjoy some levels of prominent support in the community, there was no real consensus that it was to be *the* official representative or umbrella body for Muslim groups in the UK. Its diverse constituent groups meant that sufficient assent to an official status for the UKACIA was all the more important and that following on from this, regulated and standardised structures and mechanisms were also necessary in order to ensure viability and survival as an established organisation into the long-term. In addition, a certain level of reliance upon overseas support and funding may have played a part in creating perceptions of the UKACIA as being somewhat agenda-driven.<sup>215</sup>

Both the Muslim Parliament and UKACIA displayed a keenness to push forward with presenting a case for equal treatment for Muslim, albeit using different styles. Whilst the Muslim Parliament adopted a more confrontational tone, its level of influence both in terms of community backing and durability was relatively limited in comparison to that of UKACIA. On the other hand, UKACIA was rather more broad-based, whilst at the same time officially preferring ‘to channel Muslim protest through economic, legal and diplomatic pressure’.<sup>216</sup>

Although this new level of dialogue was originally ignited by anger at the realisation that they had no recourse to the law against what was considered grave blasphemy; it signified an important step up for British Muslims into a national level of advocacy that was both more focused and more coordinated than any preceding experience. What is more, it gave scope to the development of more coherent arguments regarding both the sense of hurt that was felt by Muslims on issues such as blasphemy, and in the areas of legal rights and claims-making.

### **3.2 The formalisation of unity - and competition for representation**

The need for coordination and unity in political advocacy had become most apparent back in 1988 when the first reactions to the Rushdie affair were being formulated. It was at this point, more than at any preceding juncture that Muslim community leaders became so desperate to make their case heard with a united voice. Sources from this period are telling of a sense of being misunderstood and a frustration at the sheer level of opposition that

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<sup>215</sup> Kenan Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad: the Rushdie affair and its legacy* (Atlantic Books, UK: 2009), p.123.

<sup>216</sup> *The Rushdie Affair 1988-1991 at Salaam:*

<http://www.salaam.co.uk/themeofthemonth/september03/events.html> [accessed on 17th June 2013].

they were being faced with.<sup>217</sup> One example is worth quoting at length. M H Faruqi argues that Muslim protesters against *The Satanic Verses*:

(b)elieved that they were raising the most ordinary point about decency and dignity. They were not concerned about the faults or merits of the 'novel'... or its 'theological' or 'scholarly' criticism. They had no wish or intention to challenge anyone's freedom of expression or to impose their 'mediaeval' or 'censorious' values over the 'civilised' world.

What they (wanted) was not even exclusively Islamic, it was the universal value... that it is not civilised to abuse and insult whatever the context or form of expression. They did not assume any malice on the part of the publishers.<sup>218</sup>

Furthermore:

There was never an attempt to understand Muslim feelings of deep hurt caused by the book, yet they were condemned *ex parte* as vandals and enemies of freedom! ...The climax of incomprehension came when the Home Secretary armed with such sensational appreciation of the situation travelled to Birmingham to lecture the community to abide by laws of the country or else – to get out... (Yet) Their expression within the laws and etiquette of their country of citizenship was in fact an act of integration but surprisingly they (sic) are construed as refusal or unwillingness to integrate.<sup>219</sup>

These sorts of sentiments convinced Muslim community leaders of the imperative need for unity in order to maximise their effectiveness and to achieve their common goal. Preceding efforts at unity had been characterised by a number of limitations in terms of their scope:

Some of the more vocal initiatives were arguably out of touch with their self-ascribed community constituents. As I have illustrated above, the UMO provides a notable example in this regard. Its aspiration to be an umbrella body bringing together local and regional organisational efforts to facilitate a united voice had more success on paper than in practice. The Muslim Parliament, although outspoken and vociferous in its tone, was hindered by its lack of broad-based support and probably also by its closeness to the Iranian regime from which it received funding.<sup>220</sup> In addition, both the UMO and the Muslim Parliament appear to have had little presence outside of London, and thus could hardly have in areas beyond the capital city. The UKACIA was also hindered by its

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<sup>217</sup> Cf. the numerous documents in Chapter 5, 'The Muslim Argument' in the anthology *Sacrilege Versus Civility* ed. by Ahsan and Kidwai (1991).

<sup>218</sup> M H Faruqi 'Muslims and Britain' in *Sacrilege versus Civility* ed. by Ahsan and Kidwai (1991), pp.193-199, (reprinted from *Impact International* 10<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1989, pp.5-8).

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad* (2009).

apparent close association with the Saudi regime. Indeed it has been suggested that the support of the Saudi and the Iranian governments for the UKACIA and the Muslim Parliament respectively was part of the wider rivalry that the two regimes were engaged in, as they vied with one another over who could claim the greater influence within the 'Muslim world'.<sup>221</sup>

What was left, therefore, by the early 1990s, was a situation where there were a number of different bodies each claiming to possess mandates for representation and a more authentic/legitimate connection with the UK's Muslim communities. However, each body was subject in its own way to significant limitations. These limitations were most clearly played out in the form of a sort of rivalry or competition that took place between them for exposure and attention. A clear example of this rivalry is evident in the drifting apart of the ICIT and the MP, and the manner of their subsequent references to one another.<sup>222</sup> Each tried to portray the other in a negative light as a way of affirming its own exclusivity and legitimacy. In the meantime, work undertaken by the UMO's National Muslim Education Council and the Muslim Education Trust (MET), while pursuing very similar aims, was not linked or co-ordinated in any visible way.<sup>223</sup> Similarly, there was overlap between work of the UKACIA on political engagement and media monitoring and that of the UMO, and specifically the latter's Vigilance Committee which also kept a watchful eye on press and public bodies for any 'offensive' or 'anti-Islamic' discourse.<sup>224</sup>

Efforts to rectify these regular obstacles to effectiveness were commenced a few years later - driven in a large part by individuals who had been involved with UKACIA. Preparatory meetings of a National Interim Council for Muslim Unity (NICMU) took place between 1994-1996; identifying widespread consultation as their main objective. Having already accepted the need for organised unity for advocacy and representation, the fifty or so community networks behind NICMU visited and corresponded with Muslims across the UK as a way of gauging support for the project, and receiving consultations on the form

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid. Also Madawi Al-Rasheed, 'Saudi religious transnationalism in London' in *Transnational Connections and the Arab Gulf* ed. by Madawi Al-Rasheed (Oxon: Routledge, 2005), pp. 155-6.

<sup>222</sup> Cf. <http://www.islamicthought.org/mp-intro.html> under the heading: 'The decline of the Muslim Parliament' [accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> April 2009].

<sup>223</sup> Cf. the two separate publications: NMEC, *Religious Education: a Muslim perspective* (1997); and MET, *Issues in Islamic Education* (1996).

<sup>224</sup> 'UMO Vigilance Committee' in UMO, *UMO 1970 - 1995* (1995), p.15.

and structures that it would adopt.<sup>225</sup> These exercises paved the way for the establishment of the MCB, which set out to assume the role of a credible and effective interlocutor between Muslims and government - one which was genuinely and independently rooted in the UK and which was able to occupy a position which both parties were keen to see filled. By extension, this role gave the MCB the requisite capacity and exposure to occupy the prominent position of 'authoritative spokesman' on Muslim affairs in the media.

As much as it could be criticised for other limitations, the early MCB did have the unprecedented asset of being the first Muslim body of its kind with some form of significant mandate and legitimacy to undertake leadership and representation. In its first year of existence, the MCB attracted affiliations from 250 organisations from around the UK, a number which has continued to increase consistently. Its legitimacy was also bolstered by its instituting of official and transparent procedures for membership, voting and decision making that were eventually formalised in its constitution and which made up the substance of its official launch in 1997. As such, the MCB quickly became the *de facto* port of call for government and official bodies when seeking dialogue and/or negotiation with Muslim community representatives. Further, this arrangement added important credibility to any pro-active lobbying that the MCB or individuals backed by the MCB decided to undertake.

### **3.3 New Labour and Muslim representation**

Apart from the formal establishment of the MCB, 1997 was politically important for many other reasons - most of which are related to the Labour general election victory of that year. Historically, many of the manufacturing-class immigrant communities that had grown from the 1960s and 70s had been traditional Labour supporters. For them, the prospect of a Labour government represented a new hope, upon which many an expectation was pinned. It was anticipated that what had been variously characterised by so many Muslim commentators as a cold, post-colonialist, or just a plain anti-Muslim track record<sup>226</sup> from the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher and that of her successor, John Major, could only be improved upon by the comparatively upbeat manner and overt keenness that

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<sup>225</sup> Source: 'Was the MCB founded by the government of the day?' in *Frequently asked questions*, <http://www.mcb.org.uk/faq/faq.php> [accessed on 10th April 2009] and 'S for Surveys' at <http://www.salaam.co.uk/maktabi/survey.html> [accessed on 20th March 2009].

<sup>226</sup> Kalim Siddiqui, 'Generating "power" without politics', speech delivered at Muslim Parliament's London conference - *The Future of Islam in Britain* on 14<sup>th</sup> July 1990 (London: Muslim Institute, 1992), Letter from UKACIA to John Patten (19th July 1989) reproduced in UKACIA, *Muslims and the Law in Multi-faith Britain: the need for reform* (1993), pp. 31-33.

was shown by New Labour to address the main issues of concern put forward by Muslim advocacy groups.<sup>227</sup> What is more, the broader promise of a more approachable style of government under Labour was a source of encouragement for Muslims that they would be given the space and resources to voice their issues, and that government was prepared to genuinely listen to them *as Muslims*.

#### *What did Muslim 'identity politics' mean?*

Before examining how a British Muslim identity politics was formally institutionalised, it is worth establishing what practical meanings the term itself carried. I posit that it was about recognition, rights and the capacity to lobby, by Muslims *qua* Muslim. The first aspect relates to *recognition*. As I have already discussed in my first chapter, the need for recognition is quite often the first motivator for the expression of identity in politics by a minority or marginalised group. The initial way in which this need was expressed took the form of self-identification. This includes the titles by which community organisations choose to refer to themselves and to their leaders - all of which indicate the strong primacy of the Islamic/Muslim aspect of their identities, before any other aspect.

Following on from this, the nature of the claims made to the state by Muslim advocacy bodies indicate the desire for recognition as Muslims - in the sense that they were both framed and premised on the idea of a communal Muslim identity that required both *acknowledgement* and *rights* in order for equality to be delivered. In other words, that the Muslim community required access to both official acknowledgement and to certain rights (be they exemptions/exceptional rights or rights that were already accorded to the mainstream, but where a loophole currently excluded them), in order to have true access to equality on a par with other citizens.

This main aim of identity politics naturally leads to the final aspect, which is the space and capacity to *lobby*. All the Muslim representative organisations which I discuss here have lobbying as the most central of their functions. While they could never have been denied the right to make political representations or seek to apply influence or pressure on matters of concern to them, what British Muslim organisations have sought to achieve has been the establishment and formalisation of a direct, centralised channel of communication towards

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<sup>227</sup> By the time of its election into government in May 1997, the Labour Party was already in communication with Muslim groups (UKACIA and then the MCB) about the introduction of religious discrimination legislation and the state funding of Muslim schools. See *British Muslims Monthly Survey* from June 1997 through to January 1998.

government, decision-making bodies and the media. This direct channel, it was hoped, would hold the same position as the one enjoyed by the Board of Deputies of British Jews (the Board).<sup>228</sup> Although the Board, and the Chief Rabbi have not been without their own share of critics, as I will go on to show, it had established over time a widely recognised role as British Jewry's spokesperson on both domestic and international politics as well as issues specifically relating to the state of Israel.

This same aspiration to emulate what was seen as Jewish success in achieving effective ecclesiastical leadership is also illustrated by attempts in October 2010 to create a 'Grand Mufti' for the UK, claiming credence from Egypt's Al-Azhar University – and envisaged as some sort of counterpart to the Chief Rabbi and the Archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>229</sup> However, the enterprise failed to take off and was disowned by several quarters as inauthentic, 'divisive' and 'regrettable'.<sup>230</sup>

At this point, it is worth casting a glance at the establishment of Jewish identity politics in Britain and the origins of communal organisation among British Jews. In the following section, my survey of the institutionalisation of Jewish identity politics will provide a basis for my argument that the Jewish experience provided inspiration and an exemplar for the institutionalisation of a formally recognised Muslim identity politics, through the MCB, to aspire to.

### **3.4 Jewish community organising in the UK – a survey**

When considering how British Muslim community organising became formalised in recent history, the question of how other religious-minority communities fared naturally arises. How did this formalisation compare with the experiences of other minority faith communities, in particular those which were also largely composed of immigrants? Can any

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<sup>228</sup> During the Rushdie affair, Shabbir Akhtar had not been alone in arguing that had Muslims 'been a powerful, well-organised lobby like the Jews, Rushdie's outrages would never have got into print', quoted in Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad* (2009), p.126 and calls to emulate the 'Jewish model' were made regularly. Iqbal Sacranie is also reported to have once said: "We are going to model ourselves on the Jewish Board of Deputies. See how much power they have in this country when we have none." Quoted by Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, 'Muslims can learn from this new Jewish group' *The Independent* 12<sup>th</sup> February 2007.

<sup>229</sup> Cf. Letter to *The Times* 'Support for UK Grand Mufti', 4<sup>th</sup> February 2011 and 'Announcement by scholars of *Al-Azhar Al-Sharif* concerning the declaration of "*Banu Ibrahim* – Children of Abraham" on dialogue between Muslims, Jews and Christians, and the establishment of the Office of Grand Mufti of the United Kingdom', released 7<sup>th</sup> October 2010, available at the [www.deenport.com](http://www.deenport.com) message board [accessed on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2012].

<sup>230</sup> Michael Binyon, 'Grand Mufti claim highlights the pros and cons of Islam's lack of ecclesiastical hierarchies' *The Times* 28<sup>th</sup> January 2011.

comparisons and patterns be drawn, and what was unique about the Muslim experience? In an effort to answer some of these questions, I will look at the experience of Jewish communal organising in the UK and ask how and why it was that they managed to secure a firmer position within British law and establishment, and how their experience influenced the later development of Muslim community organising. After some background on British Jewish communal organising, specifically the Board of Deputies of British Jews, I will look at how the political engagement of both Jewish and Muslim immigrant communities was affected by cultural prejudices, migratory conditions, international connections and migratory mindsets. I will show how while there were common factors experienced by both communities, they each interacted in different ways with these factors. Ultimately, a combination of migratory conditions and subsequent political choices greatly facilitated the Board's establishment and acceptance into the UK's political landscape. While the MCB and its predecessors tried to forge a similar path, their success was limited by their interactions with their own migratory conditions and, crucially, much slower coming to terms with permanent settlement in the UK on the part of immigrant Muslim communities.

#### **3.4.1 British Jewish community organising: a brief history of early achievements:**

British Jewish community organisations have a far longer history than their Muslim counterparts. As an historically oppressed community, British Jews have long been engaged in the politics of identity, since the circumstances of their arrival, as exiles and refugees has meant that the intention to settle permanently has been clear from the outset. Thus both institution-building, and political engagement have been more focused (see section 3.5, iii). The Board of Deputies of British Jews, which has long enjoyed a quasi-official status as the official public representative of Anglo-Jewry traces its origins back to 1760, when the first meetings of coordination took place between appointed delegates from each of the *Ashkenazi* and *Sephardi* congregations in the UK.<sup>231</sup> Of course with a history in excess of two and a half centuries, it will be impossible to do justice here to a comprehensive history of the Board, and of Jewish representative politics in the UK. However, what I will do here is to point out a few major milestones and show how they have been relevant in shaping the developing role of the Board.

In this first instance, the Board's purpose was to arrange for the two congregations' joint communication to 'testify their homage' to King George III on the occasion of his

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<sup>231</sup> Raphael Langham, *250 Years of Convention and Contention: a history of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, 1760-2010* (Edgware, Middlesex: Vallentine Mitchell, 2010), pp.8-10.

accession to the throne. There followed a formal agreement that those delegates would ‘thereafter... deal with the most urgent matters which present themselves in connection with our nation’.<sup>232</sup> However, the Board (or the London Committee of Jewish Deputies as it was initially known) met sparsely and irregularly during the early decades. Its first major spurt of development is generally associated with the presidency of Sir Moses Montefiore that spanned between the years 1835-74 (with gaps). Montefiore has been widely credited with laying down firm institutional foundations for the Board, formalising its constitution, structure, earning official recognition from the government and giving it an overall sense of permanency.<sup>233</sup>

The Board consisted of lay-representatives, who were delegates from the various member congregations. Although the Board was technically open to congregations from across Britain, it was nonetheless dominated by those in and around London.<sup>234</sup> As time passed, its remit broadened to cover not only official community representations to government, but also the role of regulation and authorisation of institutions and religious rites within the community – a role that often required cooperation with the two ‘ecclesiastical authorities’ – the Chief Rabbi of the United Synagogue as well as the *Habam* of the *Sephardi* congregations. In theory, these two posts were parallel ecclesiastical authorities, representing the *Ashkenazi* and the *Sephardi* congregations respectively, but in practice, the Chief Rabbi has come to be the most dominant of the two, due in part to the superior numbers of the congregations over which he claims authority, as well as a more extensive demographic spread, and more effective communal infrastructure.<sup>235</sup> So while its initial role was one of providing a platform for British Jewry to express their loyalty to the Crown, the progressive institutionalisation of the Board and its development has led to its current status as the quasi-official representative body of Britain’s Jewish communities, participating in national events and negotiating on behalf of British Jews on matters of concern. The extent to which it has been successful is debatable, and as I shall go on to show, it has not been without its critics from among British Jews themselves. However its continued existence has been an important symbol of Jewish identity politics and provided

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<sup>232</sup> Extracted from the minute books of the London Committee of Deputies of British Jews, and quoted in C Emmanuel, *A Century and a Half of Jewish History* (London: Routledge, 1910), p.1.

<sup>233</sup> Michael Clark, *Albion and Jerusalem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.110; Langham, *250 Years of Convention and Contention* (2010), pp.21-75.

<sup>234</sup> Clark, *Albion and Jerusalem* (2009), pp.113-116.

<sup>235</sup> Todd Endelman, *The Jews of Britain, 1650 to 2000* (California: University of California Press, 2002), p.51.

a focal point both for the political establishment and other minority communities (such as Muslims) who looked to emulate the Board.

*Overcoming legal hurdles:*

British Jewry's experience of emancipation and political engagement also set a precedent for future religious minorities. Ever since formal emancipation was inaugurated by the 1830 Jewish Relief Act, there followed a succession of legal developments which removed official barriers that had previously restricted the civil and political rights of non-Anglicans. Many of these laws were passed specifically with Jews in mind, and so procedures specific to the Jewish communities were sometimes incorporated. These specific procedures, as I will show, helped to tacitly establish the Board of Deputies as the official custodian of Jewish civic and political affairs.

For instance, the Marriage Registration Act of 1836 recognised the London Committee of Jewish Deputies, as it was then known, as the sole body that was permitted to certify Jewish places of worship for the purposes of marriage registration. As the first legal acknowledgement of the Committee, this implicitly conferred upon the Board a status of authority and legitimacy within the Jewish community, and recognised it as a representative body. The Act also bestowed legitimacy on the Chief Rabbi, albeit by proxy, due to the Board's effective deference to the Chief Rabbi as its ecclesiastical authority. The 1846 Religious Disabilities Act gave legal recognition to Jewish schools, places of worship and educational and charitable funds, thus putting their legal status on a par with counterpart non-conformist Christian institutions.<sup>236</sup> By 1858, and after much wrangling between both Houses of Parliament, provisions were made in the Oath Act for Jewish MPs who had been elected to take up their seats in parliament by omitting reference to 'Christian faith', and subsequently Lionel de Rothschild became that year the first Jewish MP to take up his seat in parliament.<sup>237</sup>

Similarly, the success of Britain's Jews in securing official recognition and the relevant legal exemptions for specific aspects of religious practice also paved the way for Muslims. The Slaughter of Poultry Act 1967 and the Slaughterhouses Act 1974 both provide for exemptions on religious grounds for the practice of *Shechita* (Jewish ritual slaughter) from

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<sup>236</sup> 'United Kingdom legislation concerning Jews' in *The Jewish Yearbook 1999* ed. by Stephen W. Massil (Essex: Vallentine Mitchell and Co., 1999).

<sup>237</sup> Benjamin Disraeli, who preceded him, although Jewish by descent, had converted to Anglicanism at the age of 12.

the otherwise blanket requirement to stun animals before slaughter. The development of *Beth Din*, Jewish arbitrational courts to resolve civil disputes outside of English courts preceded the later establishment of Islamic Shari'a Councils to fulfil similar functions. Interestingly, an indication of a changed context to identity politics is that although *Beth Din* have been functioning for centuries, they have never generated the kind of controversy, criticism and opposition from wider society that Shari'a Councils have, in particular, the vitriolic media reactions to the reflections on the incorporation of certain aspects of *shari'a* by the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams in 2008.<sup>238</sup>

All in all, the lifting of various restrictions relating to education, civic participation and public office for example meant that Britain's Jews were unwittingly blazing a trail – by tackling the hurdles that they faced to equal citizenship, it meant that in the future, Britain's Muslim communities, for example, would not have to face them either.

### **3.5 Institutionalisation of Muslim Identity Politics in Britain – unique challenges**

To return to British Muslims, the institutionalisation of the MCB took place in a wholly different era and context to that of the Board of Deputies. Whereas the Board had the benefit of the contemporaneous Board of Dissenting Deputies to look to for inspiration, the MCB was on its own. This was coupled with several unique challenges that Muslim communities faced when it came to successfully establishing and maintaining political engagement, as compared with Britain's Jewish communities. I place these under four headings: cultural prejudice, international connections, background and migratory conditions, and finally, migratory mindsets. In discussing these challenges alongside the experiences of British Jews, I will show how they contributed towards a unique set of circumstances within which Muslims in Britain were to forge their path towards formal political engagement.

#### *i. Cultural prejudice:*

For both Islam and Judaism, there has been a history stretching as far back as medieval times of fear, prejudice and demonisation that appeared in popular English culture and was regularly reflected in official channels through policy or discourse. Jews have long borne the brunt of historical 'Christian theological contempt for Judaism',<sup>239</sup> which painted a picture of Jews as being in league with the devil and/or the Antichrist, as blasphemers and

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<sup>238</sup> Philip Maughan, 'Rowan Williams: Sharia law question "still pertinent"' *New Statesman* 5<sup>th</sup> June 2013.

<sup>239</sup> Endelman, *The Jews of Britain* (2002), p.68.

enemies of Christians and Christianity. Added to this there were popular stereotypes which utilised and exaggerated derided ‘features’ of the Jews – Shylock the rich and stingy moneylender in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, and Fagin, leader of a gang of child pickpockets in Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* are both examples of characters which provide ample material on the nature of negative Jewish stereotyping in English culture.<sup>240</sup>

Yet although there were significant historical differences and divergences between Judaism and Christianity, there was nonetheless arguably more common ground between the Jewish communities and the background political culture of the Britain in which they had settled, than there was between British culture and the UK’s immigrant Muslim communities. A shared Judaeo-Christian religious heritage meant that while some cultural and ritualistic aspects of Jewish religious identity may well have seemed foreign, they were comparatively more fathomable to the average person than cultural and religious practices of the Muslim immigrant communities that were to later arrive on Britain’s shores. Since Judaism historically precedes Christianity, there is an overlap of shared Biblical heritage from which a sense of familiarity can be extracted. As much as there has been historic prejudice and hostility towards Jews, the Old Testament remained a text that Christians recognised and referred to, and importantly, were much more likely to have come across it than the Qur’an. Islam, being the newest of the three faiths, arrived in modern Britain in the form of the spiritually-infused, folklore-influenced faith as practiced by Muslim immigrants from rural South-Asia.<sup>241</sup> When political organising picked up and the first Muslim advocacy organisations were established, they were often headed by individuals associated with Islamic political movements ‘back home’ in their countries of origin.<sup>242</sup> British Jews on the other hand were for a long time very wary about ‘importing’ ideas or techniques from political movements abroad. This is demonstrated by the vehement opposition that Theodore Herzl received when he first mooted his ideas about a Jewish state in the *Jewish Chronicle* in 1896.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> There is a debate to be had about whether the respective authors intended to indulge in or endorse anti-Semitism through creating these characters, or whether they simply sought to reflect and portray the tragedy of real ethnic prejudices as they were lived in the society of their time. However, the images are telling of the type and nature of Jewish stereotypes that existed in society.

<sup>241</sup> Cf. Chapter 1 of this thesis for a discussion of this.

<sup>242</sup> Such as the *Jamaat-e-Islami* and *Deobandi* movements in the Indian Subcontinent, and various branches of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East.

<sup>243</sup> David Cesarani, *The Jewish Chronicle and Anglo Jewry, 1841-1991* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), p.86.

ii. *International connections:*

Both Jewish and Muslim immigrant communities arrived to the UK with links and affinities to counterpart communities, whether ‘back home’ in the countries from which they emigrated, or more generally wherever Jews and Muslims reside. For Muslims, there is a sense of loyalty to the *ummah*<sup>244</sup> or the ‘Muslim world’ and for many Jews there has often been a similar sense of loyalty or attachment to the wider Diaspora as well as the state of Israel, both as an aspiration in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and after its eventual establishment in 1948. Yet it seems fair to say that each of the two communities interacted with these connections differently.

As I highlight in various parts of this thesis, Muslim community organisations have, in most instances, been far more prone to overseas influence and even control. This is exemplified by the influence of trans-national movements on Muslim identity organisations; additionally, the UMO was initially linked to the Egyptian government’s aspirations for an international network of pan-Arab/Muslim organisations, and the UKACIA and Muslim Parliament were both financially linked to Saudi Arabia and Iran respectively. Additionally, the MCB has been dominated ever since its establishment by individuals who bear (at least historical) links with the *Jamaat-e-Islami* and similar Islamist organisations from the Muslim world. Although there has recently been a palpable distancing between Muslim organisations and Muslim political causes abroad, particularly since 7/7, this development has come effectively in reverse order to the Jewish community’s experience. As David Cesarani has argued, support for Zionism and the idea of an Israeli state seems to have picked up among official channels among British Jews, and specifically the Board of Deputies, only *after* the Holocaust.<sup>245</sup> Prior to this, Zionism had received a poor reception for fear that it carried an implication that Jews ‘could not assimilate into Europe’. In fact, the Board of Deputies actively opposed ‘Zionist aspirations’ during the First World War, through to the interwar period,<sup>246</sup> and its vocal backing of Israel only really began to gain momentum in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, when it was over one and a half centuries old.

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<sup>244</sup> I discuss this in more depth in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

<sup>245</sup> David Cesarani, ‘The transformation of communal authority in Anglo-Jewry 1914-1940’ in *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry* ed. by David Cesarani (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp.115-40.

<sup>246</sup> Paul Goodman, *Zionism in England* (London: English Zionist Federation, 1929), p.48.

iii. *Background and migratory conditions:*

Unlike Britain's South Asian Muslim immigrants, Jewish immigrants to the UK were 'twice-minorities'. They hailed largely from Eastern Europe, where they had already lived as minorities, and where they had often faced far more acute persecution and discrimination than they would ever encounter in the UK. Indeed for many, the UK was positively a safe haven where they could escape from a history of pogroms and the day-to-day experiences of anti-Semitism, as well as (much later), the Holocaust.<sup>247</sup>

For these Jewish immigrants, there was a clear intention to settle in the UK from the start, and this is exemplified by the early but cautious and measured forays into politics as well as ready expressions of loyalty to crown and country. An important example of this is the keenness of 'acculturated, middle-class Jews' to volunteer in the First World War as a demonstration of their loyalty.<sup>248</sup> The establishment of schools, community arbitration courts (*Beth Din*) and synagogues among other aspects of community infrastructure all took the shape of a community aspiring to permanence and indigenoussness.

The wave of Muslim arrivals of the 1950s and 60s was the product of completely difference circumstances. These were mostly young, male labourers who arrived without their families, seeking to earn some money by filling a gap in the labour market of post-war Britain. In the main, they did not arrive with the resolve to settle, hence their willingness to put up with squalid living conditions and their belated interest in family-oriented community projects.<sup>249</sup> This initial assumption that migration to the UK was primarily a temporary, economic measure meant that long-term planning did not feature so heavily in the life of Britain's immigrant Muslim communities.<sup>250</sup> The 'myth of return' endured, leading to lack of commitment to their newly established 'homes'. Community institutions were built in a more gradual, piecemeal fashion. Even economic investment was often channelled directly to supporting family members 'back home' – a direct contrast to the long tradition of philanthropy amongst wealthy Jews, many of whom funded schools, synagogues and a range of other community establishments.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Endelman, *The Jews of Britain* (2002), pp.2-5.

<sup>248</sup> Endelman, *The Jews of Britain* (2002), pp.183-4.

<sup>249</sup> Ansari, *The Infidel Within* (2004), pp.147-153.

<sup>250</sup> Muhammad Anwar, *The Myth of Return: Pakistanis in Britain* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1979).

<sup>251</sup> Mordechai Rozin, *The Rich and the Poor: Jewish Philanthropy and Social Control in Nineteenth Century England* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1999).

*iv. Migratory mindsets:*

From its inception, the Board self-consciously sought to present itself to the establishment in a similar light to representatives of Christian non-conformists of the day.<sup>252</sup> The very name – London Board of Jewish Deputies, bore obvious parallels to the pre-existing London Board of Dissenting Deputies (est. 1732), and according to Michael Clark, was ‘a clear statement of the place Anglo-Jewry believed it inhabited in Britain’s religiously plural society’.<sup>253</sup> This approach indicates an aspiration from the outset for the Board to pursue an ‘integrationist’ path. By this I mean one where it hoped the Jewish community would fit in to the existing British socio-political landscape, rather than mark itself out as separate by functioning outside the political set-up of the day. That the very establishment of the Board was triggered by a desire to present a united expression of allegiance to the Crown is once again telling of the overarching desire to integrate and ‘fit in’. In contrast to this, the beginnings of representative groups within Britain’s Muslim community are found to have been moments of crisis and perceived attack, most famously exemplified by the Rushdie affair which triggered the formation of the UKACIA and the Muslim Parliament.<sup>254</sup>

This same aspiration to integrate and ‘fit in’ is aptly illustrated by contrasting the apparent motivations behind the establishment of Jewish and Muslim community schools. Michael Clark notes how early Jewish communal education was ‘not designed to inculcate religion.’ Rather, ‘The separate Jewish schooling network was maintained in this era primarily for the purposes of disciplining, occupying and ‘improving’ the Jewish poor’.<sup>255</sup> The Jews Free School (JFS) in London clearly saw social mobility for the community’s poor as its main target, while the children of middle and upper class families were sent to mainstream schools, where they were expected to ‘mingle’ with their Christian peers.<sup>256</sup> In a similar vein, teachers at the JFS forced school-children to change Yiddish sounding names – evidently part of wider efforts towards acculturation and integration of the Jewish poor.<sup>257</sup>

So the focus was on building academic achievement and ‘culturing’ for the sake of social mobility and integration. There was of course some religious ethos in Jewish day schools,

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<sup>252</sup> Aubrey Newman, *The Board of Deputies of British Jews 1760-1985 – a brief survey* (London: Vallentine Mitchell and Co., 1987), p.5.

<sup>253</sup> Clark, *Albion and Jerusalem* (2009), p.110.

<sup>254</sup> Cf. Section 3.1 in this chapter.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.196-8.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, p.199.

<sup>257</sup> R. Livshin, ‘The Acculturation of the Children of Immigrant Jews in Manchester, c.1890-1920’, in *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry* ed. by Cesarani (1990), p.82.

but more intensive, traditional-style religious instruction was generally the preserve of *Hadarim* – small after-school enterprises providing religious teaching in immigrant districts. These were also frowned upon as a barrier to integration.<sup>258</sup>

Muslim community schools on the other hand were clearly established specifically to safeguard the Islamic education and identity of Muslim children. The aim does not seem to have always been specifically to establish *separate* education *per se*,<sup>259</sup> it was more the difficulty that Muslim parents had in securing their desired adjustments to the state education system which propelled them towards setting up a Muslim school sector. These included, variously: segregation of the sexes, especially girls; exemptions from music, art, physical education, religious education lessons and religious assemblies; arrangements for prayer rooms and/or Friday congregational prayers; adjustments to uniforms to incorporate Islamic notions of ‘modesty’; the provision of *halal* meat in school meals.<sup>260</sup> Muslim schools were regarded as a comprehensive solution to these various challenges, preventing the dilution of culture and providing a safe space for Muslim children to learn about their faith alongside their wider education, without having to necessarily make ‘compromises’ to their beliefs and culture that were demanded by participation in the mainstream sector.<sup>261</sup>

### **3.6 The MCB and its genesis**

There is now an old clichéd story that is told of how the Muslim Council of Britain was set up, or at the least, crucially supported and decisively moulded by the interests of New Labour, and that its first decade of existence was delimited by a relationship of understanding with successive government personalities and sections of the civil service.<sup>262</sup> By this account, the nature of the most successful British Muslim representative umbrella body to date would be that of an almost quasi-non-governmental body – one that although

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<sup>258</sup> Endelman, *The Jews of Britain* (2002) p.146.

<sup>259</sup> Marie Parker-Jenkins, ‘Equal access to state funding: the case of Muslim Schools in Britain’, paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, Queen’s University of Belfast, Northern Ireland, 27<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> August 1998, available at: <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/000000911.htm> [accessed on 22nd April 2012].

<sup>260</sup> Lewis, *Islamic Britain* (1994), pp.70-71.

<sup>261</sup> Shabbir Akhtar, *The Muslim Parents’ Handbook: what every Muslim parent should know* (London: Ta Ha Publishers, 1993), Sarwar, *Muslims and Education in the UK* (1983).

<sup>262</sup> Laurence, *The Emancipation of Europe’s Muslims* (2012), pp.160-162. There has, thus far, been hardly any academic literature devoted to the MCB, its history and development. Studies I have identified are Konrad Pedziwiatr, ‘Creating New Discursive Arenas and Influencing the Policies of the State: The Case of the Muslim Council of Britain’ *Social Compass* Vol.54:2 (2007), pp.267-280, and an unpublished MSc dissertation at Birkbeck College, University of London, entitled ‘The Muslim Council of Britain and the participation of Islam focused interest groups in British politics’, (2010).

not formally instituted at the behest and direction of government, was nonetheless indebted to the Labour government for its impact and success, and thus, for its continued existence over the course of its early history.

In fact, as I have mentioned previously, evidence shows that unity initiatives among Muslims date significantly further back than 1997. Back in 1994, representations to the Conservative government were deemed not to merit serious consideration since they came across as insufficiently coordinated and lacking in a clear voice. This sentiment was perhaps most directly expressed by the then home secretary, Michael Howard, who actually suggested to Muslim leaders meeting with him that their various representations surrounding the common issue of religious discrimination would be more attentively received if they were to present their political case under a single, authoritative and united body.<sup>263</sup> The idea was that this arrangement would provide the requisite coordination in voice and action for coherent government-community negotiation to develop. Since there was greater potential for misunderstanding to occur during this stage,<sup>264</sup> the need for a coordinated voice and coherent organisation is understandable.

As I have mentioned, the MCB was not the first attempt by Muslims to organise themselves under a unified banner for purposes of representation and advocacy. Indeed many key figures among the MCB's founding 'old guard' are veterans of preceding initiatives in communal representation. Iqbal Sacranie served previously as the convenor of UKACIA, while Muhammad Abdul Bari, his successor as MCB Secretary-General was a previous President of the Islamic Forum Europe – a federal organisation linking various community initiatives in London, around Manchester and beyond, as well as a long-serving key figure at the East London Mosque.<sup>265</sup> Since its inception, the majority of the MCB's office bearers have tended to be drawn from a common 'pool' of prominent individuals, many of whom found their first calling in the field of national politics in the wake of the Rushdie affair,<sup>266</sup> and a majority of whom also have backgrounds in the 'reformist' strand

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<sup>263</sup> Ansari, *The Infidel Within* (2004), p.364.

<sup>264</sup> Cf. Chapter 2 of this thesis on the distance in understanding between government/establishment and community representatives.

<sup>265</sup> Author's personal conversation with Dr Abdul Bari, October 2011. Also see [www.islamicforumeurope.com](http://www.islamicforumeurope.com) [accessed on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2012] for more information about the IFE and its activities.

<sup>266</sup> Philip Lewis, 'British 'ulama and the politics of social visibility' in *Politics of visibility: Young Muslims in European Public Spaces* ed. by Gerdien Jonker and Valerie Amiraux (London: Transaction Publishers, 2006), p.170.

of community activism.<sup>267</sup> However, unlike its predecessors such as the UKACIA, the UMO and the Muslim Parliament, the MCB garnered from the outset a high level of endorsement from government and the establishment that proved pivotal in cementing its position as the primary point of contact and/or liaison whenever the need arose. This advantage paid substantial dividends in the form of credibility and networking, both of which have been crucial in maintaining the rate of success that the MCB has had in effective lobbying and having the establishment and the media's 'ear'.

The view from mainstream politics during this time was also conducive to the MCB's growth and stability, as the building of the New Labour project under Tony Blair's leadership represented the prospect of a substantially fresh style of politics – one which took an altogether different tone to emphasise new priorities and concerns. This was not least due to Labour's acute appreciation that if it was to survive, and even hope to thrive into the long term, it needed to appeal and relate to a much broader constituency than to which the party had ever done before. As such, the level at which senior Labour figures engaged with Muslim representatives was both more frequent and more promising in its approach.

### **3.6.1 New Labour and the MCB – early achievements:**

For example, directly after the General Election of 1997, there were hints and suggestions that a Labour government would be favourable towards the conferment of government funding to Muslim schools, and that there was sympathy with the case for anti-religious discrimination legislation, the possibilities for which would at least be seriously considered.<sup>268</sup> This build-up served to raise the bar of expectations as to what Muslim representatives hoped could be delivered under Labour. On its own initiative, Labour endorsed Mohammad Sarwar as the first Muslim to run for a safe parliamentary seat in the 1997 elections. Sarwar won the election and thus became the first Muslim MP in the UK, representing Glasgow Govan. This milestone was shortly followed in 1998 by the appointment to the House of Lords of two Muslim peers, also from the Labour party – Nazir Ahmed of Rotherham and Pola Uddin of Bethnal Green – making them the first Muslim peers in post-war Britain.<sup>269</sup> As such, the late 1990s was a time when both

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<sup>267</sup> Cf. Fig. 2, p.224 of this thesis.

<sup>268</sup> 'Religious Discrimination Legislation' *British Muslims Monthly Survey* (Birmingham, June 1997), Vol. V, No. 6, p.1 and 'New Blasphemy Law?' *British Muslims Monthly Survey* (Birmingham, July 1997), Vol. V, No. 7, p.3.

<sup>269</sup> Lord Henry Stanley of Alderley (d. 1903) was the first Muslim peer, having converted to Islam in 1862. He received a Muslim burial, attended by diplomats from the Ottoman Embassy in London, and a *janaza* prayer

government and community representatives felt that there was much to be gained from forging greater mutual understanding and a fresh, more flexible approach towards calls for recognition.

Muslim activists on the matter of education and schools were heartened that the prospect for state funded Muslim schools was drawing closer<sup>270</sup> and as such, campaigning was stepped up by the Association of Muslim Schools and in particular the Islamia School in north west London - which had submitted its first application for state funding in 1984. Sure enough, by January 1998, only eight months after Labour came to power, both the Islamia School and Al-Furqan School in Birmingham were granted government funding. This decision signified a policy change from the consistent refusal that funding requests had previously been met with from successive Conservative governments. Labour's active engagement with the MCB on the census' religion question consultations, and on the issue of religious discrimination legislation, were both also seen as promising signs of a future of greatly enhanced cooperation and understanding between Muslim groups and the government.

There were other gestures that provided both symbolic and real practical encouragement to British Muslims. In 1999, the post of Muslim Advisor to the Prison Service was created. The role included coordination of the work of dozens of imams who were already providing (often voluntary) religious support services for Muslim inmates within the UK's prison system, as well as the provision of official advice and guidance on all matters relating to Islam and Muslims, including dietary needs, religious obligations and religious holy days.<sup>271</sup> This development had come about after several years of consultation and representations to the government from the Iqra Trust and the Islamic Cultural Centre (the London Central Mosque) – both of whom had been engaged in support and educational work within prisons for some time.

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was performed for him by Abdullah Quilliam at the Liverpool Mosque. Later on, Lord Rowland Headley (d.1935) and Lady Evelyn Cobbold (d.1963) were both hereditary peers who converted to Islam during the inter-war period, however, Labour's appointed Muslim peers were marked out by their appointment not only as Muslim peers, but with an implicit understanding that they would communicate and represent Muslim community interests – which they did.

<sup>270</sup> *British Muslims Monthly Survey* (Birmingham, January 1997), Vol. V, No. 1, p. 7 and May 1997 Vol. V, No. 5, p. 4

<sup>271</sup> 'First Muslim Advisor to Prison Service', *The Common Good* Vol.1, Issue 2, December 1999.

The same year also saw the launch of the first government-backed British Hajj Delegation. This was a scheme whereby the Foreign and Commonwealth Office funded and organised the stay of a British medical team of volunteers to provide on-hand medical assistance to British pilgrims to Mecca and Medina during the Hajj season, should they require it. Additionally, there was a consular aspect which ensured that basic consular assistance and advice was on hand. The scheme was enthusiastically received not only for the genuine services and reassurance that it provided for pilgrims and their families, but it was also appreciated as part of a friendly approach from the government in taking the recognition of the specific needs of British Muslims beyond lip-service, by providing actual resources into improving an area where there was specific need.

On the matter of religious discrimination, and quite in fitting with the prevailing political mood of the time, the year 1997 also saw the release of the Runnymede Trust's report on Islamophobia.<sup>272</sup> This represented the moment when the term 'Islamophobia' first began to be used in public discourse - in itself a sign of much wider recognition for the Equality Gap, its existence and its problems. Defining the term as 'unfounded hostility towards Muslims, the dread and hatred of Islam - and, therefore, to fear or dislike all or most Muslims',<sup>273</sup> it is credited with having opened the way towards an unprecedented level of official attention in addressing the problems of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim

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<sup>272</sup> Runnymede Trust, *Islamophobia: a challenge for us all* (London, 1997).

Only two years later, in 1999, the Macpherson Inquiry's report into the murder of Stephen Lawrence was published, which aside from crucial recommendations to the Metropolitan Police, also prompted enormous soul-searching in matters relating to race-relations and discrimination in politics and society on a more general level. Notably, Dr Richard Stone, a member of the commission which produced the report was also an advisor to the Macpherson Inquiry.

<sup>273</sup> The Runnymede definition of Islamophobia has not gone uncontested cf. Humayun Ansari and Farid Hafez, 'Islamophobia: an introduction' in *From the Far Right to the Mainstream: Islamophobia in Party Politics and the Media* ed. by Humayun Ansari and Farid Hafez (Campus, 2012), esp. pp.14-20. Among the main criticisms are that the definition is too simplistic, describing the features of Islamophobia in binary, black and white terms. For instance, that 'Islam is seen as separate and other, rather than similar and interdependent', or 'Islam is seen as an enemy – violent, threatening and terroristic, rather than as a partner'. Runnymede Trust, *Islamophobia: a challenge for us all* (London, 1997). Chris Allen argues that such a definition is problematic because it overlooks the reality that many manifestations of Islamophobia in every day life will be of a more 'grey' variety. In other words, the Runnymede definition does not tackle arguments about the face-veil being a 'barrier' to social cohesion or those about the 'death' of multiculturalism. These, he argues, are fertile ground from which the likes of the BNP have been making gains. Cf. Chris Allen 'K.I.S.S – Keeping Islamophobia Simple and Stupid 28<sup>th</sup> April 2008, available at [www.chris-allen.co.uk](http://www.chris-allen.co.uk) [accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2013]. Such a view is not dissimilar to the arguments made by Baroness Warsi in her 2011 speech on 'dinner table Islamophobia' (see Postscript). Another weakness, argue Nasar Meer and Tariq Modood, is the use of the term 'unfounded hostility', since this would be open to interpretation in the courts. They additionally express concern that the term 'Islamophobia' has itself been overused, producing a 'victimology' and potentially providing ammunition to those critics who might like to deny its significance or claim it has been overexaggerated. See Nasar Meer and Tariq Modood 'Refutations of racism in the 'Muslim question'' *Patterns of Prejudice* Vol. 43:3-4 (2009) pp.335-54. So while the report itself was definitely a step forward in official recognition of how widespread Islamophobia was, it nevertheless left substantial outstanding unresolved issues in definition.

discrimination.<sup>274</sup> Whereas preceding Conservative governments had simply refused to acknowledge issues of anti-Muslim discrimination as warranting official attention (see discussions of the Rushdie affair in Chapter 3 of this thesis), the ready reception of the Runnymede report in 1997 was again indicative of Labour's preparedness to forge a new approach towards Muslim identity politics.

Yet it proved not enough for the Labour government to simply be prepared to acknowledge Islamophobia as a real and pressing social ill. What the MCB was after was a concrete legal development that protected Muslim citizens from discrimination or harassment on the basis of religion. While amendments to the Crime and Disorder Act in 1998 created separate offences for crimes that were 'racially or religiously aggravated'<sup>275</sup> which made provisions for the prosecution of any religiously aggravated crime that could be shown to be even partially racially motivated, these were still considered to be lacking by the MCB:

Even the last minute amendments to the Crime and Disorder Act do not apply to me or those like me. I cannot summon indirect reference to my race – and find protection there. Indeed why would I want to? I feel sorry for those who are forced to surreptitiously use the clever language of the law to find protection.<sup>276</sup>

While the Labour government did show initial indifference towards supporting this specific cause of legislative reform, campaigning continued apace until finally in 2006 the Racial and Religious Discrimination Act was introduced.<sup>277</sup> Although this did take several years, the MCB had assiduously sustained the debate and maintained dialogue with the government throughout this period.

Overall, the period between 1997-2001 was a time when relations between both the newly formed MCB and the newly elected Labour government were marked by a mutual desire

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<sup>274</sup> Chris Allen, 'The 'first' decade of Islamophobia' 5<sup>th</sup> July 2007, available at [www.chris-allen.co.uk](http://www.chris-allen.co.uk) [accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> April 2013]; Yahya Birt 'Defining Islamophobia today: the state of the art' 15<sup>th</sup> September 2009, available at: <http://www.yahyabirt.co.uk/?p=175> [accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2013].

<sup>275</sup> Crime and Disorder Act 1998, Part II, Racially or religiously aggravated offences: England and Wales.

<sup>276</sup> Extract from a speech by Sarah Joseph, then of the MCB's Social Welfare and Regeneration Committee, quoted in Ahmed Versi, 'Cabinet Minister accepts Muslim lunch invitation' *The Muslim News*, 25<sup>th</sup> December 1998.

<sup>277</sup> As I go on to discuss in Chapter 4, the Act was strongly contested, and the form in which it was ultimately passed was considerably amended in places so that it could get past the House of Lords. Yet while it was welcomed, the extent to which it has the power to forcefully prosecute racists, and specifically anti-Muslim racists, has been held in serious doubt. Still, it was seen as progress, albeit limited.

for progress in terms of recognition and understanding for the needs of British Muslims, and generally, for better relations for the future.

### **Conclusion**

The period between the 1980s and 2001 contained the most formative and defining years for contemporary Muslim identity politics. Preoccupation with and organising around identity preservation continued during the 1980s, and the Rushdie affair towards the end of the decade prompted urgent steps towards the co-ordination and formalisation of communal representation efforts across the UK. This opened up the way for more effective calls for recognition as a community and a much more coherent articulation of claims to the government and the wider establishment, that, it was hoped, would bring about greater civic equality for British Muslims. I have summarised these claims into what I have termed the Equality Gap, and it has been the different aspects of this gap that have continued to form a justificatory basis for the continued functioning of Muslim community and representative groups. The persistence of Muslim community activists in raising the Equality Gap as an issue over the decades is indicative of the reality of the challenges and obstacles that are posed by its continued existence. The Rushdie affair and its aftermath represented a learning curve for both government and the Muslim communities' new-found representatives. Over time, arguments and approaches have been revised and fine-tuned, whilst some have been discarded altogether in favour of new ones. The most enduring grievance which has been voiced in the context of several claims and requests put forward to government has been that of the Equality Gap. My thesis will proceed to look at Muslim identity politics with an understanding of the central justification that the Equality Gap embodies, with a special focus on the role and experience of civil liberties in their development.

In the wake of the Rushdie affair, there had emerged a number of structures aspiring to voice the concerns of British Muslims and to secure their rights. Some, such as the MP, took a more confrontational approach, others such as UKACIA preferred to pursue dialogue and diplomacy by campaigning and making representations to the government. But by the late 1990s, a combination of years of consultative groundwork and active encouragement from the government had placed the newly formed MCB at the helm of British Muslim identity politics.

The MCB has been the most long-lived of these and the most successful to date, not least because of the substantial endorsement that was afforded to its establishment by the government, and also because of its efforts to secure legitimacy through bringing on board affiliates from across the country and from a range of different sections within British Muslim religious and cultural spectra. In fact by the closing years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the establishment of the MCB and its early development can be considered as something of a formalisation of British Muslim identity politics, in the same way that Jewish identity politics had been formalised over the years through the functioning of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Indeed, a survey of the development of identity politics and community representation among both British Jews and British Muslims reveals interesting points of comparison as well as contrasts.

Different migratory conditions have meant that each community approached its settlement in the UK differently. Long-term community planning played a greater role in the establishment of Jewish pan-community representation, whereas for Muslims, this came about more as a reaction to external circumstances. Ultimately, the formalisation of Muslim identity politics came about as a result of a sort of trial-and-error process, as consecutive efforts – from the 1960s, up until the mid-1990s – to unite British Muslims and represent them politically encountered hurdles, and fresh efforts took their place.

Yet despite these unique challenges, by the turn of the century, Muslim identity politics had made a number of tangible achievements. A favourable political climate had afforded the MCB the type of official recognition that had long been craved by Muslim communal leaders, and with this came the achievement of considerable milestones in narrowing aspects of the Equality Gap – the first state funding for Muslim schools, a commitment from government to tackle religious hatred in the law, the success of the MCB-led campaign to include a religion question in the national census, as well as greater political representation, and formal state recognition and provision for the specific needs of British Muslims in various areas. In Chapter 4, I will show how the terrorist attacks of 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001 prompted a turning point in this quasi-official status that Muslim identity politics, primarily through the MCB, had recently acquired.

## Chapter Four:

### *The development of British Muslim Identity Politics: Turning Point 1*

#### **The Aftermath of the September 11<sup>th</sup> Attacks:**

**(September 2001 – July 2005)**

This period is characterised by a sharp increase in the level of Muslim political agency and the intensity of community organising. Much of this increase came about as a direct response to the rapid alterations which were taking place in the global and national arenas in reaction to the US terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>. The introduction of heightened security measures and the style, discourse and thinking behind the resulting ‘war on terror’ provoked concerns in many quarters about silencing, restricting and/or channelling of expression and dissent as effects of:

- a) Restrictions/proscriptions imposed by anti-terror laws, and
- b) Disenchantment with perceptions of attitudes and motives in government foreign and domestic policies.

These presented Muslim representatives and the government with fresh challenges that resulted in a defining moment in their relationship, leading to a somewhat cool and more cautious attitude between them. At the same time, there was a (also essentially reactive) drive among Muslims to state clearly their positions on matters which they felt they were being misunderstood and seriously misjudged on – including the denouncement of terrorism and violence, issues of loyalty and citizenship, and the notion of separate cultures and the irreconcilability of Islam with western democracy – often characterised as a ‘clash of civilisations’. The latter concept, as I will show later on in this chapter, became increasingly utilised as a tool by the far-right and others to justify an emergent ‘clean-faced’, respectable form of Islamophobia.

This period also saw a growth in Muslim involvement within broad-based social and political coalitions (such as the anti-war movement), as well as the emergence and development of various new and more creative modes of Muslim self-expression to join pre-existing ones. It also witnessed a refreshed, more nuanced approach to reasoning that was used by Muslims to argue for their causes in the public-political domain, in particular the old issue of a legal response to religious discrimination and incitement to religious hatred.

In this chapter, I will first outline notable aspects of British Muslim political consciousness in the few years prior to the attacks of 9/11. This will help me to draw out exactly how this juncture represents a turning point and the role that freedom of expression and civil liberties played in these changes. I will look at the reactions to 9/11 across government and Muslim advocacy groups and then discuss the changes that took place during the four years between 9/11 and the summer of 2005 (just before the 7<sup>th</sup> July attacks in London) under four main headings: new security legislation and the language of securitization, government-MCB relations, developments in the far-right and Islamophobia, and innovative forms of self-expression among British Muslims. I will analyse what the various developments under each of these four themes meant for Muslim groups, in particular the MCB, and also what they meant for the government's relations with them as well as British Muslim political consciousness in general. This analysis will include a consideration of the policy developments related to each of these respective themes.

#### **4.1 British Islam at the turn of the millennium**

In the years running up to the new millennium, British Muslim public and political life was developing to become both outgoing and highly confident. The intense efforts at institution building that took place during the 1990s paid off by creating a generation of young, politically conscious and religiously committed British Muslims who viewed their Islamic identity and its primacy in their lives not only as something to protect and preserve, but also to positively promote.

As I have discussed in the previous chapter, religio-political activism in the wake of the Rushdie affair had attracted the interest and subsequently, consolidated the influence of Islamic movements from around the Muslim world on the Muslim communities of the UK. One impact of this was that young British Muslims found that they now had easier access to a whole range of different political interests and perspectives – each was keen to widen its sphere of influence as far as possible. For many young Muslims in this generation there was something of a collective discovery that their 'Muslim identity' could be represented by a whole range of different political interests and perspectives. Youth and student groups, spurred on by this growing 'Muslim-consciousness', vied with one another to win a following amongst the second and third generations who had grown up without the kinds of psychological and practical struggles that their parents had faced. Whereas the

newly arrived first generation had been preoccupied with laying down foundations for their families' basic needs, their children enjoyed a far greater degree of confidence and capability to assert what was distinctive about their own identities rather than trying hard to blend in with wider society.

The new 'primarily Muslim' religious identity that had been fostered by the events of the Rushdie affair was carried with pride by many of the community's young people. Visible manifestations of this included a steady increase in those who preferred to wear traditional religious or cultural dress. While such a development is clearly difficult to measure since no statistics directly measuring such a fluid aspect of individual choice as clothing can be obtained, anecdotal evidence sourced from articles and accounts written about this period are useful in giving an idea of how much the 1990s were a period of religious discovery and self-assertion for young British Muslims.<sup>278</sup> And while the socio-economic status of many Muslim communities remained relatively low, significant numbers of young Muslims had nonetheless enjoyed access to good education, often better than that of their parents. Their entry into universities and the professions injected greater levels of confidence within their communities, not to mention diversity of opinion, aptitude and expertise.

Strides had been made in political representation too, and the number of Muslims entering local politics was on the increase. While the statistics for Muslims in local politics can only be approximated from more general statistics on race and ethnicity in the field, they are definitely indicative of a steady, if limited, rise during this period,<sup>279</sup> although as Hussain notes, this was largely due to individual endeavours rather than group participation or mass-organising. Indeed, where there were attempts at group participation in politics, such

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<sup>278</sup> For instance, Jonathan Birt reports on the preferred dress of a local salafi meeting-group of young men. I quote: 'Some members of the group had developed a 'look': Pakistani-style *shalwar kameez* in camouflage, an Afghan hat alongside the obligatory Doctor Martin boots or Nike trainers. This was recognized among local Muslims as the 'jihadi' style.' From Jonathan Birt 'The Radical Nineties Revisited: jihadi discourses in Britain' in *Dying for Faith: Religiously motivated violence in the contemporary world* ed. by Madawi Al-Rasheed and Marat Shterin (I.B.Tauris, London; 2009), p.106.

Also cf. Atif Imtiaz 'A Marcher's Song' in his anthology *Wandering Lonely in a Crowd* (Kube, Leicester: 2011), esp. pp. 64-76, which recounts his own personal experiences of activism in British Muslim youth organisations [specifically FOSIS and YMUK], and highlights the intricacies of inter-group rivalries and debates during the 1990s: 'I think most of these inter-group debates, if we were to talk about them with non-Muslims, they'd think we've lost it. We have a highly developed internal or private language ... between ourselves, and a hardly-developed public language'.

<sup>279</sup> Dilwar Hussain 'Councillors and Caliphs: Muslim Political Participation in Britain' in Seddon, Hussain, and Malik, *British Muslims between Assimilation and Segregation: Historical, Legal and Social Realities* (2004), pp.173-200; and Muhammad Anwar 'Issues, Policy and Practice' in *Muslims in Britain* ed. by Abbas (2005), pp.38-9.

as the Islamic Party of Britain<sup>280</sup> and the Muslim Parliament (discussed earlier), results were poor and projects were short-lived.

In terms of public self-image, and how Muslim communities saw themselves reflected in the mainstream, it was not uncommon to find a deep suspicion and mistrust of the portrayal of Islam and Muslims in the media ingrained in the collective psyche of many in the Muslim community. A large part of this can be put down to memories of the Rushdie affair, which were still fresh,<sup>281</sup> but also goes back much further in the past.<sup>282</sup> Both print and broadcast media were frequently portrayed as a form of enemy, who had ulterior vested interests in projecting a negative image of the Muslim community to their wider audiences. Such an understanding fed neatly into a polarised postcolonial perspective of 'The West versus Islam' which featured Islam and Muslims as downtrodden and mistreated by an exploitative, and godless (or at least anti-Islamic) 'West'.

#### *International security:*

Britain was by this stage sheltering a whole host of different political refugees from the Muslim world, who were attracting followers from among the country's own Muslim population. For better or for worse, the UK's perceived leniency when it came to allowances for political asylum seekers made it a popular destination for those Islamic political activists who were in exile or on the run from oppressive regimes in their home countries. Many exiled dissidents would cite the UK's scope for freedom of expression as well as its historic reputation for sheltering 'foreign dissidents, from Karl Marx to Victor Hugo'.<sup>283</sup> The UK's position as a 'destination of choice' was no doubt enhanced by its geography. In terms of distance, it was not too far to travel from their home countries in the Muslim world (as compared with North America for instance), the UK also had the benefit of easier access to mainland Europe, as well as the fact that the English language itself is widely spoken as a second language. In addition, Britain's imperial past may well have fed into a sense of entitlement among political agitators seeking asylum, insofar as

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid. and the IPB website [www.islamicparty.com](http://www.islamicparty.com) [accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2013]

<sup>281</sup> See Chapter 1, Section 1.1.2 of this thesis on British-Muslim cultural disorientations.

<sup>282</sup> For a window into British historical perceptions of Islam and Muslims cf. works by Nabil Matar, including his chapter: 'Britons and Muslims in the early modern period: from prejudice to (a theory of) toleration' in *Anti-Muslim Prejudice: past and present* ed. by Maleiha Malik (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), pp.7-25, where he shows how Muslims and Islam typically suffered prejudice and negative stereotypes in their portrayals in literature and theology, while actual interactions by diplomats and traders with Muslims led to less hostile, and more tolerant perspectives of Muslims and Muslim cultures.

<sup>283</sup> 'Shutting the door in the face of Islam's bogeymen' *The Guardian* 27<sup>th</sup> May 1995.

their utilising the UK as a haven amounted to ‘taking back’ from a former empire which had previously exploited and dominated their homelands.

The influence of international political dissidents was not limited to those who were resident in the UK – leading personalities from a spectrum of Islamist movements operating abroad were regularly hosted to speak at events in the UK. Such gatherings were used not only to spread their ideas and drum up support in the UK, but also to fundraise for these political movements.<sup>284</sup> Hailing from countries such as Algeria, Bangladesh, Egypt, the Sudan, Pakistan and Syria, the UK provided opportunities for speeches and fundraising activities that were rather more difficult for these movements to arrange within those home countries that were the objects of their struggles.

*Language and self-identity:*

International events such as the first Gulf War (Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and the subsequent US invasion of Iraq) and later the conflict in former Yugoslavia and the tragic events in Bosnia, all served to rally together a sense of communal or, as Modood puts it, ‘associational’ identity.<sup>285</sup> Such events also prompted difficult questions about loyalty for British Muslims, many of whom opposed their government’s support for the war against Iraq and had natural ties and sympathies with the wider *ummah* abroad. This dilemma was only exacerbated by the perspective amongst some that the conflict in the Gulf was one between the ‘imperialist’ western Allies and the ‘anti-imperialist’ Saddam Hussein. Long standing grievances about US and British support for Israel were also invoked by radical groups such as HT to further support this characterisation. Furthermore, Saudi Arabian official ‘collusion’ with the Western powers was vigorously denounced as traitorous, and evidence that, as per HT’s worldview, regimes in the Muslim world needed to be toppled and replaced by a virtuous *Khilafa*.<sup>286</sup> As for the war in Bosnia, the close proximity of the conflict and the ‘European-ness’ of Bosnian Muslims, coupled with the perceived reluctance of western nations to sanction military intervention simply reinforced the dilemma around loyalty and identity. As McRoy notes:

The Bosnian crisis shocked the community, partly because Bosnian Muslims held the very identity that government ministers were understood to be suggesting for British Muslims, yet this did not

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<sup>284</sup> ‘Militants in the line-up for conference season’ *The Guardian* 5<sup>th</sup> August 1995.

<sup>285</sup> Tariq Modood, ‘Difference’, Cultural Racism and anti-Racism’ in *Debating Cultural Hybridity: multicultural identities and the politics of anti-racism* ed. by Tariq Modood and Pnina Werbner (London: Zed Books, 1997).

<sup>286</sup> Anthony McRoy, *From Rushdie to 7/7: The radicalisation of Islam in Britain* (London: The Social Affairs Unit, 2006), pp.15-22.

prevent their being slaughtered. This discredited government statements at the time of the Rushdie crisis yet further... Their perception was that Muslims were unwanted in Europe, and that this prejudice had led to the massacre of their brethren elsewhere on the continent... Muslim voices expressed concern that they could be the next victims of European Islamophobia.<sup>287</sup>

These international events contributed towards a reinforced sense of pride and association with the *ummah* on one hand, and a sense of distrust of, or at least, a sense of grievance towards 'the West' on the other. Among the manifestations of this attitude were conspiracy theories around Zionist-US plots to control and/or bring down the Muslim world. By the mid-1990s, these factors combined had all contributed to a general heightened awareness of the *ummah* among British Muslims. Right-wing commentators would have us believe that there was some kind of loyalty trade-off, whereby young Muslims who had been deeply affected by injustices abroad began to feel greater allegiances towards the *ummah* at the expense of the UK. Yet sources from the time convey less of a hostile sentiment towards British civic life or disengagement from it, than they do a feeling that double-standards were being employed towards Muslims when it came to foreign policy.<sup>288</sup>

Somewhat linked to this was the display by many Muslim organisations in their discourse and activities of a confident (perhaps overconfident) and unguarded sense of openness that was raw, fresh and even acutely naïve in its choice of language and emphasis. Among the mainstream groups within the community there was sometimes a sense of pride taken in harbouring the desire to bring Islamic rule to the UK. In the main part, it was hoped to achieve such ambitions through peaceful *da'wa* (the evangelical call to Islam), however there was some talk among the most extreme of more violent means, although how seriously such talk was intended is a matter of debate, which I will come to shortly.

More moderate thinkers within this strain spoke of a Britain that was 'in search of a vision and a direction' and to which its Muslim citizens bore the responsibility of offering guidance.<sup>289</sup> On this basis, they emphasised the importance of civic participation. However, this was often accompanied with the qualification that responsible citizenship would further the cause of *da'wa*, and that community service was a means through which Islamically inspired social values could be disseminated through to wider society. By

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Cf. 'Concern for Bosnia' *British Muslims Monthly Survey* (Birmingham, July 1995), Vol. III, No. 7, pp.1-2.

<sup>289</sup> *The Muslim News* 24<sup>th</sup> November 1995, reporting on speeches at Islamic Convention held in September 1995 at the London Arena by the Islamic Society of Britain.

highlighting this aspect, I am not suggesting that this attitude towards social participation was inherently disingenuous or insidious; however, it is telling that these sorts of justifications were so readily used. As I shall demonstrate later on in this chapter, the experience of building broad political partnerships post-9/11 catalysed a change in approaches to civic participation, such that it became more open, more pragmatic and less conditional upon religiously-grounded caveats and justifications.

On the more extreme end of the scale, the British arm of Hizb ut Tahrir (HT), an Islamic political party with its roots in the Middle East provides one window into perspectives among radical Muslims during this period.<sup>290</sup> During the 1990s its activities regularly grabbed headlines for their dramatic and confrontational nature.<sup>291</sup> HT provoked anxiety and outrage in equal measures as it called for the ‘supremacy’ of Islam and preaching separatism to its followers, in addition to indulging regularly in anti-Semitism and clashes with gay and Jewish groups on university campuses.<sup>292</sup> Probably its most highly publicised activity during this period was an international ‘*Khilafa* Conference’ that was organised in August 1994 at the Wembley Arena in London. The event courted plenty of controversy before it even happened. Bright, luminous publicity stickers were posted in high streets and public places, boasting of: ‘*Khilafa* – coming soon, to a country near you’.<sup>293</sup> Invited speakers included individuals who were linked with the organisation from various Arab and Muslim countries. The conference organisers spoke of bold ambitions to ‘fly the flag of Islam above Number 10 Downing Street’ and there was even a call for the assassination of Prime Minister John Major from the leader of HT.<sup>294</sup> However although organisers anticipated 8-10,000 attendees and an enthusiastic reception (*The Guardian* and *The Independent* 4<sup>th</sup> August 1994), the conference did not meet these expectations, with a much more modest audience turning up and barely any tangible impact beyond the few alarmist newspaper headlines that were generated.<sup>295</sup> While the comparison of HT-type views with those of the ‘moderate mainstream’ is stark; in many instances, they both rely on some

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<sup>290</sup> Cf. Chapter 2 of this thesis for a summary of HT’s origins in Britain during the 1990s.

<sup>291</sup> For a useful overview of HT during this period cf. Hamid, ‘Islamic Political Radicalism in Britain: The Case of Hizb-ut-Tahrir’ (2007), pp.145-159.

<sup>292</sup> Taji-Farouki, *A Fundamental Quest* (1996), pp.172-176.

<sup>293</sup> A sketchy personal account of the build up for this conference and of the event itself is given by Ed Husain in his memoir – Husain, *The Islamist* (2007), pp. 134-138. Another (observer’s) account of the conference features in ‘Much Ado About Nothing’ *Q News* (12<sup>th</sup> August 1994).

<sup>294</sup> Op. cit., p.145.

<sup>295</sup> Examples include: ‘Muslim body accused of racism: Muslim rally angers Jews’ *The Independent* (7<sup>th</sup> August 1994), Tim Kelsey, ‘Fundamentalist gathering seeks political overthrow of Western democracies: Muslims call for Israeli state to be destroyed’ *The Independent* 8<sup>th</sup> August 1994, and ‘Wembley survives the Muslim call to arms’ *The Daily Telegraph* (8<sup>th</sup> August 1994).

degree to the notion of Islamic religious and cultural primacy, juxtaposing it with some notion of western decadence.

As a final example, I will look at a case among groups with more *salafi* (literalist) and *jibadi* leanings.<sup>296</sup> Jonathan Birt sheds light on a mood of isolationism in which self-identification was constituted in opposition not only to ‘the West’, but also to their own communities, both locally and as an *ummah*. All of these were seen to be misguided in various ways – whether through godlessness, or through ‘associating with’ or ‘following’ the godless West. Central to this way of thinking was the notion of ‘*al wala wal bara*’; a concept with roots in early Islamic thought which roughly translates as ‘loyalty and disassociation’. Many *salafis* and *jihadists* would use this as a mantra to justify an exclusivist and self-righteous world view whereby their own remaining on the ‘straight and narrow’ was inextricably linked with a vehement denouncement of those around them for their misguidance – whether wilful or erroneous. So at a meeting of a typical *jibadi* study-group, Birt reports of a mentor urging attendees to ‘cut your ties from the people of *shirk* (polytheism), because you can’t cut your ties from *shirk* except that you cut your ties from the people of *shirk*’.<sup>297</sup> He then goes on to elaborate on the grave differences between ‘believers’ and *kuffar* (unbelievers), including the direct link, as he sees it, between faith and an obligation of *jihad*; in addition to emphasising the ‘need’ for true Muslims to migrate to the Muslim world, to *dar al Islam* and away from *dar al kufr*,<sup>298</sup> since doing so was an appropriate and necessary demonstration of their loyalty to the faith and their disassociation from disbelief and decadence.

The language and approach that was used by these types of groups is chilling and would certainly raise alarm bells in today’s securitised post-9/11 Britain. Talk of an obligation of *jihad* and of disassociation from non-believers would hardly be permitted to take place openly in mosques, nor would these sorts of conversations happen in open gatherings that members of the public could freely join. When considered with the benefit of hindsight acquired over the past decade, this sort of approach may well give impressions of an aggressive or threatening desire to violently dominate Britain and impose Islamic ideals on culture, politics and society in general. However, it is important to resist forming an instant

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<sup>296</sup> I use both of these terms as they would generally be used in day to day parlance. The *salafi* trend referring to a preoccupation with a strict and often puritanically literalist interpretation of original sources and texts, coupled with a deep suspicion of any ‘innovation’ in religion. The *jibadi* trend, which often attracts sympathisers from *salafi* circles, is broadly descriptive of a support for violence/armed fighting in the name of Islam – during this period, still very much confined to the international (rather than domestic) arena.

<sup>297</sup> Jonathan Birt, ‘The Radical Nineties Revisited’ (2009), pp.107-109.

<sup>298</sup> Arabic for ‘realm of Islam’ and ‘realm of disbelief’, respectively.

teleological judgement of these groups and to consider the period and context in question. As Birt (and others<sup>299</sup>) point out, the mainstream of the Muslim community rarely took such groups seriously and preferred instead to ignore or sideline them. For many, (Muslims and non Muslims), these types of characters were nothing more than ‘affable fools’,<sup>300</sup> rather than an urgent threat. At the same time, these groups in actuality had very little to hide – in essence many of them were talk-shops; gathering together disgruntled Muslim youth who faced common grievances or who were dealing with similar challenges in life. Often these included day-to-day issues such as difficulties in education or finding work, providing for their families or simply ‘fitting in’ with their peers. Overlapping with or running alongside these were the challenges of practising their faith, reconciling their Britishness with their cultures of origin and dealing with experiences (whether real or perceived) discrimination and injustice – such as Islamophobia or cases of unequal legal treatment, as well as frustration at aspects of British foreign policy that were interpreted as being anti-Islamic.

In summary, the British Muslim ‘scene’ by the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century was one of increasing diversity, confidence and growing sophistication in the nature and style of its political participation. However, many within the Muslim communities retained a strong element of naïveté regarding the true nature and meaning of citizenship and civic participation.

#### **4.2 Muslims, Freedom of Expression and Civil Liberties in a Post-9/11 Britain**

*11<sup>th</sup> September 2001 – Immediate Reactions:*

11<sup>th</sup> September 2001 has come to be seen as a historic watershed moment in so many different respects, the world over; but extremely acutely so for the Muslim communities of western countries. British Muslims are a case in point, and the ‘before’ and ‘after’ comparisons that can be made are innumerable. From the very outset, a deep sensitivity was attached to the attacks that took place in the US – both as a reaction to their very happening, and in response to the association (whether covert or explicit) that was widely made between them and the Muslim faith. I will look at how this turning point came about in each of three areas: government, Muslim representative organisations and Muslim ‘grass

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<sup>299</sup> Jon Ronson recalls his shadowing of Omar Bakri Mohammad and his *Al Mubajiroun* throughout 1997 in his article: ‘My Night of Jihad’ *The Guardian Comment is Free* 30<sup>th</sup> April 2007 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/apr/30/mynightofjihad> [accessed 26th October 2012].

<sup>300</sup> Hamid, ‘Islamic Political Radicalism in Britain: The Case of Hizb-ut-Tahrir’ (2007), p.148.

roots’ – meaning ‘ordinary’ Muslim individuals and smaller/local groupings. I will then discuss the impact of the changes in discourse and communication that were precipitated by the events of 9/11 under four main categories: security, Islamophobia, government-community relations and innovation in self-expression.

#### **4.2.1 Government responses to 9/11:**

For government, the most immediate and pressing concern was naturally that of national security. The attacks were of such a large and unprecedented magnitude, that an immediate response was called for, and considering that the motives<sup>301</sup> for the attacks were traced back to international Muslim terror networks, the potential threat to British national security was clear and pressing. At the same time, the fact that the link was with *Muslim* terror networks meant that government had to deal with the impact of the attacks on community relations, and most specifically, to minimise the impacts of the backlash against Britain’s Muslims through the racism, discrimination, or ‘revenge attacks’ that took place across the country,<sup>302</sup> to reassure Britain’s Muslims by emphasising unity, shared values and especially a shared abhorrence of terrorism, violence and victimisation.<sup>303</sup>

##### *i. Legal developments and securitization:*

From the security perspective, steps were taken to revise existing anti-terror legislation in order to have it reflect the new threats that the post-9/11 era would pose. This primarily included an extension to the recently introduced Terrorism Act of 2000 (TA 2000), which had superseded pre-existing anti-terror laws, and broadened their scope by addressing terrorism beyond activities that were associated specifically with the Northern Ireland conflict. The TA 2000’s defining features were its identification of a list of international terror organisations – the association with, or support of which was to be banned. In addition it made a provision for the first time for police to be allowed to detain terrorist suspects for questioning, for up to seven days. This act itself had not been passed without

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<sup>301</sup> At this very early stage, still only apparent motives, as evidence of the perpetrators had not yet been uncovered.

<sup>302</sup> Cf. ‘In the eye of the storm: The MCB – fulfilling its responsibilities’ in *The Quest for Sanity* (London: MCB, 2002), Section 2, pp.29-37, for documentation of the kind of anti-Muslim hostility that took place in the wake of 9/11. Other reports include ‘September 11 and its Aftermath’ at [http://www.salaam.co.uk/themeofthemonth/september03\\_index.php?l=34](http://www.salaam.co.uk/themeofthemonth/september03_index.php?l=34) [accessed 16<sup>th</sup> June 2013]. Also a log of Islamophobic incidents in the UK as reported to the Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism (FAIR) between 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001 and 18<sup>th</sup> January 2005 at <http://www.fairuk.org/research/FAIRuk-ResearchData-IslamophobicIncidentLog.pdf> [accessed 16<sup>th</sup> June 2013].

<sup>303</sup> This sort of gesture became a regular feature of government-community conversation, used by Tony Blair and other prominent politicians both domestically and internationally. Stephen Lyon describes it as ‘the rise of universal values’ in his chapter: ‘The Shadow of September 11: Multiculturalism and Identity’ in *Muslim Britain* ed. by Abbas, (2005), pp.79-84.

intense debate and scrutiny, and indeed was watered down on its way to the statute books as part of this process. The 2001 Anti-terrorism Crime and Security Act consciously sought to complete the 2000 legislation by making provisions for foreign terrorist suspects to be detained indefinitely pending deportation, even where deportation is ruled prohibited (for instance due to a real risk of torture at the destination country). It also introduced new regulations pertaining to the security and detention of aircraft where there is suspicion of an act of violence against a person on board, allowed police to obtain fingerprints and other identifying features to ascertain an individual's identity by force, and gave powers to the Home Secretary for the regulation of internet and telephone communication companies' retention of data for the purpose of national security.<sup>304</sup>

In addition to these legislative measures, Tony Blair's Labour government advanced decisive policies at home and abroad to ensure that it was seen to be in control in dealing with the new terror threat. These included a more hard-line approach in matters of immigration – for instance through the introduction of compulsory citizenship tests. This attitude was also played out in a new phase of foreign policy, one which placed much emphasis on Great Britain's 'special relationship' with the USA and the shared interest in combating international terrorism – both through increased security measures as well as going to war in Afghanistan.

*ii. Rhetoric and relationship-building:*

On the home front, the government took steps to indicate its commitment to containing and minimising the terrorist threat, and significantly, stability and cohesion within and among the country's communities, in particular with regard to Britain's Muslims. On 12<sup>th</sup> September, the day following the attacks, Tony Blair made specific mention of the 'British Muslim Council' (sic) in his address to the nation from Downing Street, praising their 'strong statement of condemnation' and going on to assert that 'the vast majority of Muslims are decent, upright people who share our horror at what happened.'<sup>305</sup> On 14<sup>th</sup> September at an emergency session for which the House of Commons had been recalled, he addressed 'our Arab and Muslim friends' and referred to the attacks as 'barbarism that is totally foreign to the true spirit and teachings of Islam'.<sup>306</sup> On 27<sup>th</sup> September, Blair held a

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<sup>304</sup> Parts 4, 9, 10 and 11 of the *Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001*, respectively.

<sup>305</sup> The full text of Blair's statement is available at:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2001/sep/12/politicalnews.september111> [accessed 19<sup>th</sup> June 2013].

<sup>306</sup> Speech by Tony Blair to House of Commons on 14<sup>th</sup> September 2001. Full text available at

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2001/sep/14/houseofcommons.uk1> [accessed 19<sup>th</sup> June 2013].

meeting with MCB representatives from which they stood together for the press, presenting the powerful image of a united front.<sup>307</sup> Blair declared that racism and revenge-type attacks on Muslims ‘have no proper place in our country’ and similarly, remarked upon the shared heritage between Islam and Christianity, in an effort to inject positivity into a mood that was weighed down by feelings of anger, suspicion and vulnerability.

Together, these remarks represent an affirmative drive on the government’s part to speak to Muslims in the UK, and also internationally. This drive was a first in terms of its scale and its pro-activeness and was indicative of a conciliatory desire to open up dialogue and build partnership and trust. From the perspective of securing community cohesion and diffusing the very real atmosphere of unease and apprehension that was stoked by sensationalist media coverage on ‘Islamic terrorism’,<sup>308</sup> this kind of language and gesture from the government was absolutely needed. However, when considered alongside the evermore stringent and heavy handed legal strand of the Government’s post-9/11 response, it is difficult not to suspect that the associated motives must have contained some element of instrumentalism. Perhaps it was thought that the ongoing introduction of restrictive and highly controversial anti-terror laws coupled with the pursuit of a foreign policy approach that attracted widespread opposition could be sweetened with efforts to reassure British Muslims and underline their (at least nominal) inclusion in the evolving national conversation on security, citizenship and cohesion.

#### **4.2.2 Muslim groups’ responses to 9/11:**

As for Muslim organisations, there was a near-unanimous immediate reaction of swift and unequivocal condemnation.<sup>309</sup> Press releases and a dense, consistent flow of media writings and appearances were the hallmark efforts of all Muslim advocacy groups and representatives, whatever their size, constituency or location. The Muslim Council of Britain was most prominent in this respect – with daily media appearances, it quickly built

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<sup>307</sup> ‘Muslims and Christians Share Values – Blair’, *BBC Website*, 27<sup>th</sup> September 2001 [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/1567187.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/1567187.stm) [accessed 19<sup>th</sup> June 2013]; ‘Blair condemns racist attacks – PM stresses shared heritage’, *The Guardian*, 28<sup>th</sup> September 2001.

<sup>308</sup> Richardson, *(Mis)representing Islam* (2004); Elizabeth Poole, *Reporting Islam: Media representations of British Muslims* (London: I B Tauris, 2002).

<sup>309</sup> The only exceptions to this were extremist elements such as *Al Mubajiroun* who (often provocatively) expressed praise and approval of the attacks, and eventually held an ‘anniversary’ event celebrating the ‘Magnificent 19’, a reference to the 19 hijackers who carried out the three attacks on 9/11. See ‘Rallies will highlight “Magnificent 19” of Sept 11’ in *The Daily Telegraph* 10<sup>th</sup> September 2003. Also Parveen Akhtar, ‘(Re)turn to Religion’ and Radical Islam’ in *Muslim Britain* ed. by Abbas (2005), p.164. However, even these were lone, marginal voices that were given very little serious attention by the mainstream within Muslim communities.

up a public profile as the official Muslim interlocutor on matters relating to the US terror attacks in particular, as well as more generally on questions pertaining to Islam and Muslims themselves. The attacks had sparked a remarkable level of public interest in Islam that was motivated by curiosity and a desire to understand more just as often as it was driven by hostility and paranoia.

With proficient and media-friendly spokespeople, this was a role that the MCB readily assumed. The benefit of this was that there was always somebody to ‘speak’ for the Muslim community. The established and organised channel of communication that both Muslim activists and the government had so long desired seemed to have finally found its calling and come into its own – albeit under extraordinarily highly-pressurised circumstances that it would hardly have wished for! On a community level, the MCB worked consistently to encourage and promote initiatives by its affiliates to develop ‘positive’ responses to the 9/11 attacks. For example, the annual Islam Awareness Week for November 2001 had as its theme ‘Islam for Peace and Justice’ and held events across the country with the aim of dispelling the abundant tabloid myths of an inherently violent Islam as well as tackling questions on the nature of a just and commensurate response to the attacks.<sup>310</sup>

*The MCB’s political balancing act:*

There were drawbacks to the MCB’s newfound role as the voice of Britain’s Muslim communities. The intensity of the spotlight on the MCB meant that it was open to greater scrutiny and more readily held to blame for flaws and shortcomings that may otherwise have passed unnoticed. The tenuousness of this situation was played out in the two years after 9/11 as securitization and foreign policy concerns became heavily influential factors in government relations with the Muslim community.

For example, the MCB’s concerted efforts at speaking in condemnation of the terrorist attacks could not easily be followed by a reticent silence against the backdrop of government foreign policy which was preoccupied with preparations to enter war in Afghanistan, and later in Iraq. As such, there were delicate decisions to make relating to its stance on post-9/11 foreign policy – the MCB could not command credibility by diplomatically ‘sitting on the fence’, yet at the same time, just one ‘wrong foot’ could damage the organisation’s hard-earned position as quasi-official gatekeeper to British Islam.

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<sup>310</sup> Cf. Islam Awareness Week website page for 2001: [www.iaw.org.uk/previous/2001/](http://www.iaw.org.uk/previous/2001/) [accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> October 2010].

After some deliberation, the MCB eventually found itself faced with ‘an important trade off’ to make.<sup>311</sup> Initial hesitation to vocally oppose the War on Terror was met with growing disquiet amongst its affiliates, and the Muslim community in general.<sup>312</sup> As Birt points out, this coincided with repeated attempts from the Blair government to keep the MCB ‘on side’, or at the very least, to keep it passive about the invasion of Afghanistan. The situation was difficult, to say the least. Here was the first time that a British Muslim representative body had simultaneously earned real credence in the community and was given respectability in establishment circles; yet here it was being expected to toe the government line on an issue that its constituents were overwhelmingly and strongly opposed to. Diplomacy, political bartering and even threats were all methods that were employed to win the MCB over,<sup>313</sup> yet in the end it proved inconceivable for the MCB *not* to oppose the war. With the vast majority of Britain’s Muslim communities actively opposing military action, anything short of this from the MCB would effectively have been political suicide.

When the Council *did* make a decision to come out clearly against the war, it precipitated a moment when each of the government, the MCB itself, and Muslim community groups made important realisations. For the government, that it was important not to ‘put all its eggs in one basket’ again, by relying solely on the MCB as the official representative of the Muslim community and its channel of communication with it.<sup>314</sup> For the MCB, it made the realisation that it could not assume that either government support, or that of its constituency (its affiliate groups primarily but also British Muslims communities in general), to be automatically theirs by right. Politics was politics at the end of the day, and support, respect and credibility had to be earned and sustained, as with any other advocacy or lobbying arrangement. For Muslim grassroots organisations, this experience opened up doors to new ways of making their voice heard. Uneasy with the slow pace with which the MCB’s position developed, a number of community groups generated their own responses in opposition to the War on Terror. Most significantly, these included partnerships with the left-wing Socialist Workers Party to create the Stop the War Coalition. The Muslim

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<sup>311</sup> Tahir Abbas, ‘British South Asian Muslims: before and after September 11’ in *Muslim Britain* ed. by Abbas (2005), p.15.

<sup>312</sup> Jonathan Birt, ‘Lobbying and Marching: British Muslims and the State’ in *Muslim Britain* ed. by Abbas (2005), p.95; Faisal Bodi ‘Opportunistic Cronies’ *The Guardian* 13<sup>th</sup> November 2001.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.* Birt, (2005) pp.93-99

<sup>314</sup> Abbas, ‘British South Asian Muslims: before and after September 11’ in *Muslim Britain* ed. by Abbas (2005), p.16.

Association of Britain (an MCB affiliate) took a lead role in this, as did a number of other local and regional groups.<sup>315</sup> Activities largely consisted of organising mass protest marches and demonstrations as well as petitions and campaigns to build up public awareness of and ultimately, opposition to what as seen as Britain's gravely mistaken foray into unjustified international pursuits led by self-serving ambitions, and those of a 'neoconservative' US administration.

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<sup>315</sup> Op.cit.

### 4.3 New community challenges and policy trends: some losses, some gains

#### *Islamophobia – smokescreen for a new racism:*

Another noteworthy change which came about during this period was a rather bold resurgence of the Islamophobic far-right. Racists and the far-right were able to play on genuine fears and paranoia in the wake of the 9/11 events and build up hostility that was directed squarely at Islam and Muslims in the UK. The British National Party exploited a loophole in the law (the Equality Gap which I discuss at length and define in Chapter 3) and launched a ‘Campaign Against Islam’,<sup>316</sup> focusing its efforts particularly in areas of the country which housed large Muslim communities. On the back of recent race riots that had taken place in the Northern towns of Burnley and Oldham during the summer of 2001, coupled with the fallout from the 9/11 attacks, these campaigns made use of a number of widespread stereotypes regarding violence, intolerance and the subjugation of women, among others, and sought to warn the public of the perils of the impending ‘Islamification’ of Britain, and the need to stop it in its tracks.

Chris Allen has demonstrated how the arguments employed in the party’s literature and campaign material were built on remarkably shaky and highly skewed foundations.<sup>317</sup> Indeed, judging by the sheer incredulity of the numerous implausible accusations that were made, it seems that the BNP was intent on transferring the blame for each and every social ill or irritation that the ‘indigenous Anglo-Saxon white working classes’<sup>318</sup> suffered from, onto the shoulders of Britain’s Muslims. In addition to the ‘usual’ charges of ‘stealing’ the ‘native’ population’s jobs, housing and public services, the BNP promoted the notion that the religion and culture of Muslims were intrinsically and irrevocably sinister and incompatible with British life. For example, Nick Griffin, speaking to a gathering in

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<sup>316</sup> According to Matthew Goodwin at the University of Nottingham, this campaign was launched ‘in the hours following the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001’. ‘The BNP and Islam’ at the election blog of the University’s School of Politics and International Relations <http://electionblog2010.blogspot.co.uk/2010/04/bnp-and-islam.html> [accessed on 10th June 2013].

<sup>317</sup> Allen, ‘From Race to Religion: the new face of discrimination’ in *Muslim Britain* ed. by Abbas (2005), esp. pp.55-63.

<sup>318</sup> The BNP under the leadership of Nick Griffin has been at pains to portray itself as respectable, patriotic and wholly un-racist. In doing so, it describes its struggle as that of the native, or indigenous white population of the British Isles, whose culture, language, religion and other norms are being threatened by immigration and multiculturalism. In the words of Griffin: ‘Towns and cities all over our beautiful country now resemble parts of Africa or Asia. British people have become a minority in many areas already, and within a few decades, we will become a minority across the country as a whole.’ – ‘A Message from BNP Leader Nick Griffin MEP’ available at: [www.bnp.org.uk/introduction](http://www.bnp.org.uk/introduction) [accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> June 2013].

See also Matthew J Goodwin, ‘In search of the winning formula: Nick Griffin and the ‘modernization’ of the British National Party’ in *The New Extremism in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Britain* ed. by R Eatwell and M J Goodwin (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), pp.167-190.

Keighley, Yorkshire, claimed that the Qur'an instructs Muslim men to rape white women and children:

... and you will find verse after verse after verse which says that you can take any women you want as long as they're not Muslim women - any woman that your right arm can own. That's the sword arm, it's the fighting arm, it's the arm you hit a white lad with a baseball bat with ... Any woman that they can take by force or guile is theirs. If they get a non Muslim girl and they get her pregnant then her community doesn't want her and the child generally grows up to be a Muslim. And that's the way that this wicked vicious faith has expanded from a handful of cranky lunatics about thirteen hundred years ago, till it's now sweeping country after country before it all over the world...<sup>319</sup>

He went on to insist that 'You have got to stand up and do something for the British National Party because otherwise they [Muslims] will do for someone in your family, that is the truth.'<sup>320</sup> Further, campaign leaflets distributed by the BNP during this period depicted Islam as an acronym: ISLAM = Intolerance, Slaughter, Looting, Arson, Molestation of Women, it reinforced the message that the faith itself was centrally linked to despicable social ills and criminality.<sup>321</sup>

Although politicians and public figures of every shade did denounce and distance themselves from this bold new trend in the far-right political agenda,<sup>322</sup> much of it remained technically legal, and this reality highlighted anew the old problem of how to deal with prejudice and discrimination when it was targeted at groups that were identified by their religion, or where, as Kay Goodall describes it, 'religion is used as a surrogate for racism'.<sup>323</sup>

*Policy reactions: a narrowing of the Equality Gap.*

While the BNP's anti-Islam campaign was ongoing, activity was stepped up during election time, and targeted areas with large Muslim populations and where segregation was a problem. The language that was used exploited a gap in anti-discrimination legislation which at that point (the council elections in 2002, European, London Mayoral and council elections in 2004 and the General Election in 2005) did not yet outlaw incitement to hatred

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<sup>319</sup> Transcript of BBC documentary 'The Secret Agent', aired on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2004, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/newsnight/3896921.stm> [accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2013].

<sup>320</sup> Ibid. Also see Matthew Taylor, 'BNP leaders may face charges after TV exposé of racism' *The Guardian* 15<sup>th</sup> July 2004.

<sup>321</sup> Chris Allen, *Islamophobia* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), pp.88-9.

<sup>322</sup> 'What they said about... The BNP' *The Guardian*, 17<sup>th</sup> July 2004 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2004/jul/17/race.thefarright> [accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2013].

<sup>323</sup> Kay Goodall, 'Incitement to Religious Hatred: All Talk and no Substance?' (2007) 70(1) *Modern Law Review*, p. 89

on the basis of religion. Publicity material – both printed and online – was careful to criticise Islam and Muslims as a religion, and culture, rather than in a racial way.<sup>324</sup> It also defined the party as defending Britain’s ‘heritage’, its ‘Christian values’ and guarding against their dilution – partly through immigration and partly through its incorporation of immigrants (in particular Muslims) into society through access to resources. Another tactic employed by the BNP was to showcase its ‘ethnic’ membership, in a bid to shake off its racist image, while simultaneously attacking Islam and Muslims. This included featuring a turban-wearing Sikh man in its 2004 election broadcast and fielding Jewish and mixed-race candidates.<sup>325</sup>

On the policy side, this new wave of open Islamophobia generated renewed debates on whether this Equality Gap’s continued existence could be justified. It also prompted discussions on the arguably fine line between calls for the criminalisation of incitement to religious hatred, and instituting what could be construed as a new form of blasphemy law whereby criticism of any religion or its texts could be penalised, and free speech restricted as a result.<sup>326</sup> Lobbying from the MCB<sup>327</sup> and other Muslim bodies<sup>328</sup> was bolstered by recommendations that had been made throughout this period from organisations such as the Runnymede Trust’s Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia – which published in 2004 a report to review and discuss progress and developments since its previous (1997) ground-breaking report on Islamophobia.<sup>329</sup> The 2004 report was extensive in its coverage and comprehensive in its analysis – making specific recommendations for a whole range of government departments to adopt as a way of tackling Islamophobia. Importantly, it made detailed recommendations regarding the need to ‘make discrimination

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<sup>324</sup> Ibid. pp. 93-4, in which Goodall documents (now purged) online statements from the BNP website where party leader Nick Griffin provides guidance for contributors. To quote directly: ‘Emotive words, however justified they may be, must be avoided. Truth hurts, so words like ‘alien’, ‘vermin’, ‘gang’ instead of ‘group’, and such like must be avoided. A white rapist may be described as a ‘beast’ or an ‘animal’, but a black one must be merely a ‘criminal’.

<sup>325</sup> Goodwin, ‘In search of the winning formula’ (2010) p.178, the broadcast itself can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2epLm34iNok> [accessed on 30<sup>th</sup> July 2013].

<sup>326</sup> Op. cit. Also Allen, ‘From Race to Religion: the new face of discrimination’ (2005). A high-profile public campaign against the religious hatred legislation was led by the comedian Rowan Atkinson cf. his speech: ‘Every Joke Has a Victim’ transcript at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2006/jan/30/immigrationpolicy.religion> [accessed 1<sup>st</sup> June 2013].

<sup>327</sup> For example, ‘Muslims laud Tony Blair’s stand on faith schools, but concerned over rise in Islamophobia’ MCB Press Release 20<sup>th</sup> May 2002. Available at: <http://www.mcb.org.uk/media/pr/200502.htm> [accessed on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2012].

<sup>328</sup> FAIR: ‘The Religious Offences Bill 2002: A Response’ (October 2002) emphatically makes the case for policy changes to criminalise incitement against religious identity, along with discrimination on the grounds of religion.

<sup>329</sup> Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, ‘Islamophobia: Issues, Challenges and Action’ (London: Runnymede Trust, 2004), p.75

on religious grounds unlawful’, noting that while EU laws had brought this about in the area of employment, ‘the government’s continuing failure to deal robustly (on all levels) with this matter remains a matter of great concern’.<sup>330</sup>

The government made several attempts to pass a law during this period dealing with religious hatred, but these were regularly opposed and voted out by the House of Lords. Nonetheless, a Select Committee was set up to look into the matter and by the 2005 General Election, the government made a firm manifesto commitment that it would: ‘give people of all faiths the same protection against incitement to hatred on the basis of their religion. We will legislate to outlaw it and will continue the dialogue we have started with faith groups from all backgrounds about how best to balance protection, tolerance and free speech’.<sup>331</sup> A law was eventually passed in 2006, and although this falls just outside of the time-frame under consideration in this chapter, I shall discuss it briefly, since its enactment can be attributed in a large part to the post-9/11 discussions that took place on the matter.

The Act weathered significant resistance and controversy from diverse quarters. Outside of parliament, a host of actors, comedians, writers and artists opposed the law, seeing it as a threat to freedom of expression and artistic freedoms, including the space to be able to laugh at religion, religious dogma and establishment. The civil liberties group, Liberty, while acknowledging the need to protect minority groups, argued that freedom of speech was a value far more worthy of preservation. Moreover, it argued (along with the Discrimination Law Association, and many others) that the legislation, as proposed by the government, was not much more than an effort to ‘placate’ Muslims communities, in particular the MCB, who were aggrieved by foreign policy and relentless draconian anti-terrorism measures at home.<sup>332</sup> Within parliament there was a large voting rebellion by Labour backbenchers and strong opposition from the Conservatives, Liberal Democrats and many in the House of Lords. As a consequence, the final piece of legislation was passed with two amendments introduced by the Lords. These changes stipulated that the law should only criminalise ‘A person who uses threatening words or behaviour, or displays any written material which is threatening... if he intends thereby to stir up religious hatred’,<sup>333</sup> thus limiting its application so that it could not cover words that were ‘merely’ abusive or

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<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

<sup>331</sup> Labour Party Manifesto, 'Forward not Back' (2005), pp.111-112.

<sup>332</sup> Meer, *Citizenship, identity, and the politics of multiculturalism*, (2010), pp.163-4.

<sup>333</sup> Part 3A: ‘Acts intended to stir up religious hatred’ in Schedule: Hatred against persons on religious grounds, *Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006*.

insulting; in addition to making it a requirement for there to be an actual intention to stir up hatred, rather than simply a possibility.

It was this last requirement of intent that proved to disappoint supporters of the law. With the requirement of intent clearly stipulated, it meant that in cases where defendants denied intent, prosecutors would be faced with the almost impossible task of proving it. This, as Goodall points out, renders the new legislation ‘almost unenforceable’, since while ‘extremist clerics who confess their intentions may be caught ... racist activists will have little trouble adapting their rhetoric’<sup>334</sup> to avoid falling foul of the intent clause. The MCB expressed its dismay at this development, arguing that it had now created ‘a hierarchy of rights among British citizens’<sup>335</sup>

The government’s clear and firm intent by 2005 to pass a law on religious hatred, despite the fierce controversy that it drew, represents how much had changed during this period in its policy relations with the Muslim community. Back in 1997, Home Secretary Jack Straw had been unwilling to consider any such legislation,<sup>336</sup> yet by 2005 his party was on its third attempt to pass religious hatred legislation and was prepared to suffer extensive criticism and one of its most humiliating Commons defeats, in order to have it enacted. When considered in context, this new commitment must have been prompted by factors that were not present in 1997 – and, as was suggested at the time by the government’s critics in parliament, a desire to appease otherwise disgruntled Muslim communities seems a convincing explanation.<sup>337</sup> Nonetheless, it also represents progress in the maturing government-community political conversation, as the lobbying by the MCB and Muslim pressure groups was lodged squarely in the language of equalities legislation,<sup>338</sup> and all but discarded entirely the argument from blasphemy that was so often rehearsed during and after the Rushdie affair. As such, the MCB was able to confidently present its case alongside other interest-groups, as their support for the law shared common foundations. For example in January 2005 it held a meeting at the House of Commons jointly with the

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<sup>334</sup> Goodall, ‘Incitement to religious hatred: all talk and no substance?’ *The Modern Law Review* (2007) Vol. 70:1, p.113.

<sup>335</sup> ‘Religious hatred law perpetuates inequality after Commons vote’ MCB Press Release 1<sup>st</sup> February 2006. Available at: [http://www.mcb.org.uk/media/presstext.php?ann\\_id=186](http://www.mcb.org.uk/media/presstext.php?ann_id=186) [accessed on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2012].

<sup>336</sup> *The Daily Telegraph* 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1997.

<sup>337</sup> Goodall, ‘Incitement to religious hatred: all talk and no substance?’ *The Modern Law Review* (2007) Vol. 70:1, p.91.

<sup>338</sup> FAIR ‘The Religious Offences Bill 2002: A Response’ (October 2002) and ‘MCB calls for an end to misrepresentation of proposed incitement law’ MCB Press Release 13 January 2005 [http://www.mcb.org.uk/media/presstext.php?ann\\_id=128](http://www.mcb.org.uk/media/presstext.php?ann_id=128) [accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2013].

Commission for Racial Equality, the British Humanist Association and Justice on ‘The Need to Protect Faith Communities from Incitement to Hatred’.<sup>339</sup>

*Policy reactions: tough talk on integration and immigration*

In addition to the developments in the area of religious discrimination, another reaction to the rise of the ‘respectable’ far-right was in the field of immigration and the integration of immigrants and minority groups. As I have mentioned, the main parties were regularly at pains to denounce and isolate the BNP. However, the BNP’s very act of raising such issues, coupled with the constant (often media-fuelled)<sup>340</sup> public concerns around security meant that the main political players were forced to tackle them in their own political agendas – if only as a matter of political expediency, to retain voters who were being attracted to the BNP, and to allay public fears regarding immigration and security.<sup>341</sup> What this meant was that while there was a politics of reconciliation towards minorities in matters relating to tackling discrimination and racism, there was on the other hand a growth in ‘tough talk’ on immigration – especially so when it came to immigrants from outside the European Economic Community. In real terms, this trend impacted on Muslim communities more strongly than other minority communities. Legislation tightening the conditions required for immigrants to obtain citizenship called for applicants to learn to speak English to a minimum standard and to pass a test on ‘Life in the UK’. Other legislation made seeking asylum a far more rigorous process, making detention and deportation very real outcomes of asylum seeking attempts for those who could not provide watertight evidence to support their cases.

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<sup>339</sup> Ibid.

<sup>340</sup> John E Richardson, “‘Get shot the lot of them’”: election reporting of Muslims in British newspapers’ in *Anti-Muslim Prejudice: past and present* ed. by Maleiha Malik (Routledge, Oxon: 2010), pp.146-168; and John R Bowen, *Blaming Islam* (Cambridge, Mass., London: The MIT Press, 2012).

<sup>341</sup> Roger Eatwell, ‘Responses to the Extreme Right in Britain’ in *The New Extremism in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Britain* ed. by Roger Eatwell and Matthew J Goodwin (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), pp.213-220.

#### **4.4 Proactive self-expression – through politics, civil society engagement and creativity**

A final development worth noting is the growth of momentum in the field of diverse and creative forms of expression within Britain's Muslim communities during this period. I have already discussed the significant political leap that was taken by several Muslim groups by entering into partnerships with left wing organisations to voice their opposition to the war. It is arguable that this move was made more out of circumstance than any preferred choice, since it came about only after the MCB failed to move swiftly and decisively in leading a Muslim opposition to the war. Nonetheless, as pragmatic a deal as it was, it was entered into wholeheartedly, and this move in itself represented a capacity among British Muslims to explore new avenues for self-expression and making themselves heard.<sup>342</sup> At the start of this chapter, I observed how British Islam of the 1990s was somewhat hindered in its reach and its progress by an underdeveloped sense of citizenship, and a rather overrated sense of self-mission. By the early 2000s, this mindset was changing at a steadily growing pace.

The Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) had positioned itself as a key partner in the British anti-war movement, playing a central role in organising for the epic demonstration of March 2003 that took place on the eve of the invasion of Iraq. Its alliance with the left was not without criticism (both from more extreme Muslim groups such as HT, and the liberal, pro-war left).<sup>343</sup> However, the support it enjoyed was widespread, and the partnership provided invaluable learning experiences and networking opportunities for Muslim anti-war activists and groups. For example, this intensive participation in mainstream political movements paved the way for Muslim anti-war personalities standing as candidates for the recently formed Respect Party during the 2004 European, council and London mayoral elections. These included Anas Altikriti, himself a former President of the MAB, and Salma Yaqoob who cut her political teeth as a founder and leader of the Stop the War Coalition in Birmingham in 2001, as well as Yvonne Ridley, a former *Sunday Express* reporter who had been held captive by the Taliban and subsequently converted to Islam. The experience of working with the Left served to broaden the political experience

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<sup>342</sup> Richard Phillips, 'Standing Together: The Muslim Association of Britain and the anti-war movement' *Race and Class* 2008 Vol. 50(2) pp.101-113.

<sup>343</sup> Classic critiques of the Muslim-Left anti-war alliance can be found in Nick Cohen, *What's Left: how liberals lost their way* (London: Fourth Estate, 2007) and Andrew Anthony, *The Fallout: how a guilty liberal lost his innocence* (Jonathan Cape, 2007).

of many within the Muslim community, in addition to accelerating the pace at which their level of mainstream political engagement intensified.

The burgeoning of Muslim self-expression was not limited to politics and foreign affairs. This period also witnessed a growth in Muslim press and media. *Q News* – originally founded in the early 1990s as a Muslim community newspaper with local preoccupations and a limited circulation, had recently reinvented itself as a glossy magazine. Post-9/11 Britain was an optimal environment within which it could flourish – and it did, with impressive (albeit irregular) issues covering wide-ranging, topical and controversial topics.<sup>344</sup> *The Muslim Paper*, *The Muslim Weekly* and the *London Muslim* were altogether new newspaper initiatives born during this period, each devoting large sections of their publications to politics and Muslim identity issues – yet also making space for art, culture, sport and finance. The year 2003 saw the launch of *emel*, a Muslim lifestyle magazine which sought to provide an upbeat yet honest perspective into British Islam by providing ‘a window into the Muslim community away from the clichés’.<sup>345</sup> In the area of new media, websites and blogs grew at a phenomenal rate, being used especially by younger Muslims to express themselves and make connections and networks in ways that weren’t possible before. Some are worth particular mention due to their longevity and continuous development since this period, proving their utility of purpose and relevance. These include [www.salaam.co.uk](http://www.salaam.co.uk) – which was devoted to documenting wide-ranging information and data on British Muslim history as well as providing magazine-type features and directories of services, mosques and jobs; and [www.deenport.com](http://www.deenport.com), a multi-faceted internet portal bringing together discussion forums, blogs, articles and artwork. Both of these sites were first set up in 2003 and have served as a point of expression, conversation and information on British Muslim communities for the individuals who run them as well as their users.

On the more creative side, this period also witnessed a bolder proliferation and experimentation with traditional *nasbeeds*. A notable example is the release in 2003 of the British artist Sami Yusuf’s first album. Yusuf’s songs blended authentic English with authentic Arabic, eastern music with western, and importantly, shifted away from the direct religious preaching-style which had traditionally been the norm. Instead, he offered a blend of spirituality and social justice themes, a style which proved accessible and appealing to a very wide audience. The idea of a young, indigenous British Muslim identity that was

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<sup>344</sup> Archive at <http://www.q-news.com/buy-UK.htm> [accessed on 19th May 2013]

<sup>345</sup> Stuart Wavell, ‘Putting a good glossy on the Muslim lifestyle’ *The Sunday Times* 9<sup>th</sup> October 2005.

comfortable with its heritage and history as well as confident about its future was also something that Yusuf was keen to promote. To quote him:

I feel as though (my fans) see me as representing them, not Osama Bin Laden... A lot of young guys are going through an identity crisis and I think that's where people like me come in and say you can be British, you can be Muslim, you can be hip, you can be having fun — its not either or.<sup>346</sup>

Yusuf's work has been credited not only with triggering a 'revolution in Islamic pop', but also with playing an immensely positive international ambassadorial role for Britain, for instance, he has been invited on more than one occasion by the British Council and the Foreign Office to feature at their events.<sup>347</sup>

Other initiatives included Living Islam – a large four day summer country residential event for Muslim families which was first organised by the Islamic Society of Britain in 2003 incorporating arts, culture, speeches and debates as well as children's activities and entertainment. In July 2005, a weekend Islam Expo was organised by many of the personalities who had spearheaded the MAB-Left anti-war alliance. Showcasing Islamic contributions to art, culture, science and civilisation, politics was nonetheless central to this event's programme, which boasted participation from political figures across the spectrum, but in particular, the patronage of the then London Mayor, Ken Livingstone. Interesting parallels have been drawn between this event and the European Social Forum which was held prior to it, in London, in 2004. Both used Alexandra Palace in North London as their venue, and both events followed very similar formats, suggesting a direct link between the Muslim-Left alliance and the nature and direction in which aspects of Muslim civic engagement had developed. Finally, in the field of media and research, Anas Altikriti, veteran anti-war leader and Respect Party candidate, established the Cordoba Foundation, a research and public relations organisation with the aim of promoting dialogue and peaceful coexistence between cultures through research, facilitation and advisory roles.<sup>348</sup>

All of these developments paint the picture of a sharper, more complex landscape in British Muslim identity politics that had developed by 2005, owing a great deal of its

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<sup>346</sup>'Sami Yusuf hopes music helps Muslim image' *Arab News* 19<sup>th</sup> August 2007. Available at: <http://archive.arabnews.com/?page=9&section=0&article=100116&d=19&m=8&y=2007> [accessed on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2013].

<sup>347</sup> Samia Rahman, 'The biggest star in the Middle East is a Brit' *The Guardian* 27<sup>th</sup> April 2006.

<sup>348</sup> The Cordoba Foundation – About Us [http://www.thecordobafoundation.com/about\\_us.php](http://www.thecordobafoundation.com/about_us.php) [accessed on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2013].

development to factors related to the events of 9/11 and reactions to it. Indeed, if it can ever be said that the impact of 9/11 gifted British Islam(s) with anything, then perhaps it could be that this was it: a deepened sense of humility, bringing with it a more accurate understanding of their exact place in the wider scheme of things. The magnitude and suddenness of the 9/11 attacks and the overwhelming nature of the world's reactions to it meant that Muslims really had to 'think on their feet' – to be able to deal with the immediate shock, question their feelings and identity, affirm it, defend it and make their views on the War on Terror known – all practically simultaneously.

### **Conclusion**

The four year intervening period in between the events of 9/11 and preceding the summer of 2005 was one of momentous change and development for British Muslim identity politics. 9/11 threw open a large public window into British Muslim communities, creating an atmosphere of pressure, urgency and self-defence. Faced with pressing security concerns, the government strove to address them, but found it difficult to maintain a balance between fulfilling its foreign policy commitments and winning the loyalty of a Muslim community which sought political even-handedness both at home *and* abroad. For community organisation and representation – this definitely came of age in the crucible of post-9/11 politics, pushing for age-old Muslim issues such as the criminalisation of religious hatred in a more contextual, mature and inclusive manner. Islamophobia and its manipulation by the rising far-right prompted serious government attention to this matter, as well as to the restriction of immigration and a more stringent approach to the integration of minority communities and newcomers to the country. Finally, a host of factors, in particular the decision to enthusiastically participate in mainstream political activity alongside other interest groups sparked real development, change and diversification within the British Muslim political landscape, which, when compared with that of the 1990s, shows just how far British Muslim politics has travelled over this period.

## Chapter Five:

### *The development of Muslim identity politics: Turning Point 2*

#### **Identity politics and the threat of terrorism at home**

**(7<sup>th</sup> July 2005 – June 2010)**

This chapter will consider how the terror attacks that took place in London on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005 heralded a second major turning point in the development of British Muslim identity politics, from the perspective of freedom of expression specifically; and civil liberties more generally.

1) Following on from the preceding chapter, I will first give a brief overview of how this date served as a turning point in terms of specific events and reactions to them. I will proceed to discuss how the acute and urgent nature of the 7/7 attacks – being in the UK’s capital city and carried out by British citizens – instigated sharper reactions from each of the parties under discussion.

2) Secondly I will examine legal developments initiated by the government – specifically the anti-terror policy and legislation dealing with speech and communication issues. After 7/7, the government pursued a twin-track approach to anti-terrorism, where the ‘hard’ approach involved the introduction of tighter anti-terrorism legislation and the ‘soft’ approach was represented by the Contest scheme, and especially its Prevent strand, which focused on the task of combating radicalisation by ‘winning hearts and minds’. I analyse whether or not government’s keen pursuit of such a ‘hard’ legal path was conducive to the amelioration of developing Muslim identity politics, and I will use case-studies to assess how far this new legislation managed to achieve its desired outcomes. I will also look at the ‘softer’ tactics that were pursued by the government as part of its tough new approach on terrorism and what became known as ‘violent extremism’. This primarily includes various aspects of the Prevent strategy and its affiliated initiatives, such as efforts by politicians to ‘direct’ or channel the discourse and attitudes within Muslim groups as a way of proliferating the anti-radicalisation message deeper into the community; as well as attempts to gather, and ‘map’ information about groups and individuals within Muslim communities. I will consider what, if any, implications these developments had on the Equality Gap.

3) Next, I will look specifically at the MCB, as the pre-eminent Muslim advocacy and representative group at the start of this period – 2005. I will consider how the MCB came under increasingly intense public scrutiny and criticism. After looking at the role of the media, and non-governmental parties in contributing to these challenges to the MCB's position, I will discuss how and under what pressures the MCB eventually took the step of acknowledging and attempting to deal with the realities of the 'violent extremist' influence in the Muslim community and of cooperating with the government on matters of security. I will especially consider how these developments panned out in the language and attitudes through which the MCB chose to express itself, both in its relations with the government and with other Muslim groups. I will show how the MCB was distinguished in its readiness to adopt a more independent and occasionally critical line towards the government whilst at the same time developing greater self-confidence and humility in recognising its own limitations. Faced with increasing 'competition' in the form of a growing number of Muslim groups clamouring for representative 'status', the MCB took steps, albeit reluctantly, towards acknowledging the contributions of other players in this field by gradually letting go of its previously characteristic insistence on exclusivity when it came to negotiations with government and the public representation of British Muslims.

4) Finally, I will look at the emergence of a broad multitude of Muslim voices and organisations from 2005 onwards, each seeking to speak for Muslims, represent them and argue for various 'Muslim causes' (loosely defined). I will consider the factors that led to this development, arguing that the strong reactions and disagreements between the government and by the MCB respectively created a suitable environment for Muslim identity politics to blossom and diversify, and for these various voices to come to the fore. In addition, I will show how many of these newer initiatives were sponsored whether financially or ideologically by parties which harboured interests in the direction of the public debate on British Muslims and security issues, considering the extent to which such support influenced the stances that these groups chose to adopt at various junctures.

In concluding, I will sum up how this second turning point of the 21<sup>st</sup> century heralds the end of Muslim identity politics as we have known it. I will point out how the challenges of post-7/7 Britain have led to a far more fluid relationship between government and Muslim communities. This has not decreased in the importance of communication and co-operation between the two, but it has meant that the scenario is much less clearly defined

than it was between the years 2001-2005, during the days of the Labour government's acquiescence to the MCB's pre-eminence.

*Background:*

In Chapter 4, we saw how the period between September 2001 and 2005 was overwhelmingly defined by the 9/11 attacks and the ensuing fallout. They, along with the government's response to the attacks in the area of security, framed the priorities for Muslim identity politics during this period and the course that it was to chart. Despite the intense pressures that this period placed on Muslims, it proved to be a time of significant strides in the maturing of Britain's Muslim communities. Met with new and unexpected challenges, the British-born Muslim generations showed confidence and effectiveness in their political engagement, developing and enhancing the arguments that they deployed for recognition on various fronts. Additionally there were signs of a more assured sense of self within Britain's Muslim communities, as partnerships were forged with others on the basis of shared interests and through embracing far more creative and diverse modes and subjects of self-expression. The recently established Muslim Council of Britain was also able to cement its new position as primary interlocutor for Muslims within the British establishment, holding onto good relations with government whilst opposing aspects of its foreign policy, and while a resurgence of the far-right which capitalised on the backlash after 9/11 posed new challenges, strides (albeit limited ones) were also made in narrowing the Equality Gap through legislation. But the events of July 2005 were to stimulate another turning point, when terrorism struck the British capital as four co-ordinated explosions took place on London's transport system, killing 52 people, including the perpetrators.

## **5.1 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005: Terrorism on home soil**

### **5.1.1 Context:**

Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005 has come to represent a moment in history when striking changes took place in the UK on the level of both the shorter and longer term. The former is best illustrated by contrasting the public mood in London on the 7<sup>th</sup>, with that on the preceding day. Wednesday the 6<sup>th</sup> had witnessed great expressions of jubilation and pride in the capital as news of its successful bid to host the 2012 Olympic Games was celebrated in Trafalgar Square, and indeed across the country. The capital's cultural diversity and international connections were presented as sources of strength – assets that had helped to win the bid for London and that would make the 2012 Games all the more successful and

welcoming to athletes as well as spectators. The fact that London had beaten Paris in the final lap of the race to host the 2012 Olympics was hailed by many as a testament to the strength and durability of the British capital's confident approach to diversity and multiculturalism over the French establishment's preference for *laïcité* and reputed disdain towards multicultural pride.

Multiculturalism in both countries (as indeed, across Europe), had been drawn into question by the recent experiences of serious urban unrest involving young people from minority ethnic backgrounds. England's northern towns of Bradford, Oldham and Burnley experienced severe race riots in 2001, memories of which were still fresh, and simmering socio-economic problems in Paris's *banlieues* eventually erupted later on in 2005 in the form of heavy rioting involving youths of North African immigrant parentage. Both of these occurrences shone a light upon the dramatic clash between the far-right's aspirations to assimilate ethnic and religious minorities, or exclude them, and the realities of multicultural urban life. Additionally, they highlighted the urgency of problems around social deprivation, equality of opportunity, discrimination as well as the need for greater social cohesion in areas that were inhabited by large populations of immigrant communities (in these two cases, Muslim immigrant communities).<sup>349</sup>

Yet despite this troubled background to multiculturalism, the city of London, and crucially, its Mayor, Ken Livingstone, was able to present an image where multiculturalism was not only accepted as a reality, but positively celebrated as a source of vibrancy and strength.<sup>350</sup> However if the celebration of a successful Olympic bid on 6<sup>th</sup> July symbolised a peak in optimism about London's multiculturalism and sense of unity, the shock and horror of the attacks the following morning ushered in something of a rude awakening – prompting deep, raw and searching questions about the nature, depth and durability of the nation's civic unity.<sup>351</sup> The 7/7 attacks also served to inject a renewed sense of urgent seriousness to

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<sup>349</sup> On the Bradford riots see: Chris Allen, *Fair Justice: The Bradford Disturbances, the Sentencing and the Impact* (London: FAIR, 2003).

<sup>350</sup> For a personal account of the 'Diversity and Inclusion' remit of the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) see Muhammad Abdul Bari, 'London 2012: a celebration of Britain's diversity' *Huffington Post UK* 21<sup>st</sup> February 2012, available at: [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/muhammad-abdul-bari/olympics-london-2012-a-celebration\\_b\\_1292015.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/muhammad-abdul-bari/olympics-london-2012-a-celebration_b_1292015.html) [accessed on 22nd May 2012].

<sup>351</sup> From a government perspective, cf. Trevor Phillips's speech of 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2005: 'After 7/7: Sleepwalking into Segregation' available at: <http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/socialchange/research/social-change/summer-workshops/documents/sleepwalking.pdf> [accessed on 24th October 2011] – in which he remarked that the nature of British multiculturalism needed to be reviewed in the light of 7/7 and that too much emphasis had

a national vigilance towards security, and proponents of a ‘Londonistan’ thesis, that the UK had for too long turned a blind eye towards extremist ideas on its very doorstep, or at least allowed them to go unchecked in the name of multiculturalism, argued that an ideological battle was absolutely essential to defend ‘our values’, at home as well as abroad.<sup>352</sup> As to the longer term impact of the attacks – this became evident in the changing approach of government in the areas of anti-terror legislation, relations with the Muslim community and with Muslim community organisations, and the direction in which public discourses on radicalisation, identity and national security developed.

In the following section I will consider the backgrounds of the four young men who carried out the 7/7 attacks, and discuss whether their profiles can tell us anything about the nature of radicalisation among young British Muslims and the threats to security that it poses in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century. I will refer back to this analysis later on in this chapter when I examine the government’s justifications for new legislative approaches restricting speech and expression, as well as its heavy investment into its new community-centred approach to tackling radicalisation.

### **5.1.2 Background to the perpetrators:**

As to the bombers themselves, many analysts have attempted to look into their characters and pasts in order to develop an understanding of how and why they became attracted to terrorist activity. At the face of it, their lives seemed unremarkable. There do not appear to have been any obvious major dramatic incidents that specifically or personally marked them out from their peers. Indeed, there were outward indications that they were ‘the very epitome of assimilation into British society’<sup>353</sup>, and that their day to day lives did not display any significant indications of internal cultural or religious conflict or any antipathy towards Britain. For example, friends and acquaintances of Mohammed Siddique Khan have related that he ‘was called “Sid” at school, had more white friends than Asian ones... He was not

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been placed respecting and making space for the various differences about Britain’s minorities, at the expense of developing a common and unifying shared culture.

Tariq Modood, ‘Remaking Multiculturalism after 7/7’ *Open Democracy*

[http://www.opendemocracy.net/conflict-terrorism/multiculturalism\\_2879.jsp](http://www.opendemocracy.net/conflict-terrorism/multiculturalism_2879.jsp) [accessed on 10th June 2013] summarises the range of commentary on the debate about the viability of multiculturalism as policy in Britain post-7/7.

<sup>352</sup> Michael Gove, *Celsius 7/7* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2006).

<sup>353</sup> Milan Rai, *7/7, the London bombings, Islam and the Iraq War* (London: Pluto, 2006), p.31.

interested in religion. He ignored debates about the plight of Muslims abroad... [and] “apart from the colour of his skin, he was just an English lad”<sup>354</sup>.

Thus, conclusions have varied widely – at one end of the analytical spectrum is the view that these bombers were second generation immigrants and thus enjoyed greater privileges to those that their parents had had access to. They had access to education, opportunity, leisure and all the amenities and life-chances associated with modern western lifestyles. In this narrative, it is often deduced that their main motivation was ideological and this is often used to support the ‘clash of civilisations’ thesis and more generally what has become known as the ‘neoconservative’ world-view.<sup>355</sup>

At the other end, attention is drawn to the fact that while these were of course westernised young men in so many senses of the word, they nonetheless experienced social exclusion and alienation on a number of levels. For example, none of the 7/7 bombers were educated to a professional level. Most did not proceed beyond the minimum level of schooling and of the few who did, the most successful was ‘ringleader’ Mohammed Siddique Khan who worked as a classroom teaching assistant. Moreover, even if they did not *directly* experience social exclusion, they certainly were witnesses to it. Each of them hailed from towns in North Yorkshire where racial segregation was a problem and where Muslim communities received consistently low scores in all socio-economic indicators. They had all attended the Hamara Youth Centre in Beeston, where Mohammed Siddique Khan was a youth worker, and they undoubtedly must have come into regular contact with young people who may have faced difficulties in life relating to poverty and racism, for example.

At the same time, retrospective evidence shows that all of them seem to have been disaffected or frustrated in some way by what they saw as injustice – whether abroad, against fellow Muslims in the shape of the war on terror, or at home in the form of Islamophobia (real, direct experiences or internalised).<sup>356</sup> What this understanding points to is that the bombers were in dire need of an outlet through which they could vent their internal feelings of anger and frustration. In the absence of any positive channels, the appeal of terrorism was perhaps that it was a concrete action that they could take, which

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<sup>354</sup> Paul Vallely, ‘So what turned Sid Khan into a bomber?’ *The Independent* 18<sup>th</sup> November 2005.

<sup>355</sup> Gove, *Celsius 7/7* (2006).

<sup>356</sup> Milan Rai provides extensive profiles of each of the bombers, their backgrounds, family circumstances and childhoods in his *7/7, the London bombings, Islam and the Iraq war* (2006), pp.21-48.

they believed would go some way to rectifying the wrongs which so troubled them, coupled with the inestimable, otherworldly ‘promise’ of reward that they stood to gain from. Considering the relatively simple level of education that the bombers possessed, this second analysis seems more plausible, since it would be unlikely for them to be interested in digesting deep ideological or intellectually demanding debates.

Moreover, as much as they may seem to have been integrated in terms of appearance, language and lifestyle, the bombers evidently felt sufficiently detached from British society – not only to have been capable of carrying out the attacks themselves,<sup>357</sup> but to have (as did Mohammed Siddique Khan), addressed society as a separate/foreign entity: ‘*Your* democratically elected governments continuously perpetuate atrocities against *my* people’.<sup>358</sup>

This rather normal and perhaps familiar nature of the 7/7 bombers and their daily lives emphasised further that there was a real problem of radicalisation among sections of Britain’s Muslim youth, and that addressing this problem was a matter of urgency. The government recognised this urgency, but chose to view potential solutions overwhelmingly from the perspective of national security, a perspective which risks overlooking social, political and economic root causes of discontent which have regularly been cited as the main push factors towards radicalisation.<sup>359</sup> Hence it decided to embark with vigour on a range of different schemes to combat radicalisation with security at the top of the agenda. It utilised a two-pronged approach – firstly using ‘hard power’ through the introduction of new anti-terrorism legislation, and secondly, using ‘soft power’ through community centred initiatives aimed at using ideas to win over the loyalty of young British Muslims and defeat violent extremism, in a battle of ideas.

### **5.1.3 The Government’s reaction to terror at home: tackling radicalisation and the impact on freedom of expression:**

The British government straightaway adopted a forceful and direct tone in the language that was used to respond to 7/7. Tony Blair spoke on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2005, less than a month

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<sup>357</sup> Of course comparisons can be made with other instances where similar social detachment has been displayed – such as perpetrators of a number of school/workplace shooting sprees that have occurred in the USA in recent times, as well as most recently the Oslo/Utoeya massacres of July 2011 which were carried out by Anders Behring Breivik, a Norwegian far-right extremist. Such examples show how high levels of personal/emotional detachment from society can come about as a result of a feeling of being ‘under attack’.

<sup>358</sup> Mohammed Siddique Khan’s ‘martyrdom’ video, broadcast on *Al Jazeera Satellite Channel*, 1<sup>st</sup> September 2005.

<sup>359</sup> R Briggs, C Fieschi and L Lownsborough, ‘Bringing it home: community-based approaches to counterterrorism’ (London: Demos, 2006).

after the bombings, declaring that ‘the rules of the game have changed’,<sup>360</sup> and signalling firmly that a far more hard-line approach would be adopted towards the expression of radical and extremist ideas – specifically those that were deemed to ‘glorify terrorism’. The implication of this approach was a recognition that the root causes and processes by which young Britons were radicalised needed to be understood, analysed and stopped.

This in itself was a step forward from the approach of the preceding five years. While in the wake of 9/11, the government had concentrated its security efforts largely on Britons who were thought to be actively supporting terrorism abroad, the post-7/7 approach was characterised by a determination to root out the very causes and/or catalysts that set young people on the path of extremism. In this section, I will look at the government response via the two general channels through which it was developed.

Firstly, the ‘**harder**’ concrete legal changes that were introduced as a result of 7/7: I will look at aspects of the Terrorism Act 2006, specifically those concerned with classifying forms of expression and speech as illegal – such as the outlawing of the ‘encouragement’ and the ‘glorification of terrorism’. I will examine how these legal developments fared practically through looking at relevant case studies. Secondly, I will look at ‘**softer**’, community-based approaches to countering extremism and violence into which the government invested a great deal of resources post-7/7. These include the Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) working groups that were set up immediately after the attacks, as well as the CONTEST scheme itself – and specifically PREVENT, its most prominent strand – that lasted throughout the remainder of the Labour government, and beyond.

## **5.2 Legal changes and the Terrorism Act 2006: The ‘hard’ approach**

A new terrorism bill was swiftly put together and passed in February 2006 as the Terrorism Act 2006. It sought to emphatically bring home Blair’s earlier assertion that government would be tougher and more decisive than it had previously been in all matters relating to terrorism, and what was henceforth to be consistently referred to as ‘violent extremism’. The hallmark of this new legislation was its direct and deliberate entry into the realm of speech acts, sometimes referred to collectively as ‘encouragement offences’. These constituted clauses which made provisions to prosecute those who encouraged or glorified terrorist activity, as well as to allow for the proscription of organisations which glorified terrorism. Additionally, it introduced a penalty for the ‘dissemination of terrorist

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<sup>360</sup> Prime Minister Tony Blair’s Statement on Anti-Terror Measures. Full text available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2005/aug/05/uksecurity.terrorism1> [accessed on 17th February 2011].

publications’ and for the ‘training for’ or ‘attendance at a place used for terrorist training’<sup>361</sup> – designed to address bookshops stocking ‘extremist’ material, and terrorist training camps, respectively.

A major source of disquiet was that the descriptions included in these clauses were broadly defined and left a great deal open to subjective interpretation by the courts and the Home Secretary, thus potentially leaving the door open to huge miscarriages of justice.<sup>362</sup> Human rights advocates argued that such legal developments while perhaps well-intentioned, were not the most effective way of tackling radical views and preventing terrorism, since they stood to limit opportunities for vulnerable young people (those who were most at risk of being ‘lured’ towards violent extremism) to discuss or explore of issues and grievances that were troubling them in a safe and responsible environment. Indeed, Article 19, the campaign group for freedom of expression, argued that the new offence of ‘encouragement of terrorism’ would ‘discourage the peaceful expression of controversial opinion’,<sup>363</sup> a view that was backed by the UN Human Rights Committee as well as a number of other researchers, and legal and community practitioners.<sup>364</sup>

For their part, Muslim community groups expressed concerns that the outlawing of radical speech would have a ‘chilling effect’ and rather than rooting out extremist voices and curbing the spread of their influence, it would instead simply lead them to operate more covertly – behind closed doors, rather than in public through high street stalls or mosques for instance, or to use more secure and sophisticated communication techniques via the internet and telecommunications.<sup>365</sup> Additionally, the MCB argued that the new Act was ‘based on a number of false premises’, and that it rendered the entire Muslim community

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<sup>361</sup> Sections 2, 6 and 8 of the Terrorism Act 2006.

<sup>362</sup> Liberty, ‘New Anti-Terror Bill Published’, Press Release, 15<sup>th</sup> September 2005. Available at <http://www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk/media/press/2005/new-anti-terror-bill-published.php> [accessed on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2013].

<sup>363</sup> Article 19 ‘Submission to the 91<sup>st</sup> Session of the UN Human Rights Committee on Respect for Freedom of Expression in the UK and Northern Ireland’ (October 2007) p.8.

<sup>364</sup> Eric Barendt, ‘Incitement to, and glorification of, terrorism’ in *Extreme Speech and Democracy* ed. by Ivan Hare and James Weinstein (Oxford: OUP, 2009), pp.445-462, and Tufyal Choudhury, ‘The Terrorism Act 2006: discouraging terrorism’ in *Extreme Speech and Democracy* ed. by Hare and Weinstein (2009), pp.463-487. Also Arun Kundnani, *The End of Tolerance: Racism in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), p.179.

<sup>365</sup> Police and security working group feedback, Shaukat Warraich and Ifath Nawaz eds., *Preventing Extremism Together’ Working Groups Report* (Home Office, 2005). Also cf. Ruth Gledhill, ‘Muslim task force attacks Government anti-terror plans’, *The Times*, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2005; Alan Travis and Patrick Wintour, ‘Terror bill chilling for Muslims, Blair warned’, *The Guardian*, 11<sup>th</sup> November 2005.

'liable to suspicion, censorship and persecution',<sup>366</sup> urging the government to exercise 'maximum restraint' in utilising the new legal powers, and warning that it would 'consider legal intervention' if the law was used to ban Muslim groups.<sup>367</sup>

Whilst the concerted efforts of this broad-based opposition to the new raft of speech-related offences did not succeed in preventing the Act from materialising, it has been argued that the widespread criticism of this Act served to 'undermin(e) its chances of being an effective tool'.<sup>368</sup> Indeed, while there have been some attempts to prosecute using the Act, they have been few in number, and moreover, verdicts have often been overturned after appeal. The remainder of this section, will look at three high profile *hard* cases where the 2006 Terrorism Act was invoked, and ask whether the law can be judged to have fulfilled the government's aspirations of preventing terrorism through denying radical extremists and their organisations any form of public platform from which to preach, and in turn deterring others from being drawn to violent extremism through preventing the possibility of such ideas being expressed in the public domain.

*Case Study: Samina Malik – thought-criminal or potential terrorist?*

This was the first case to be successfully prosecuted where the new Terrorism Act 2006 which included the highly controversial clause that prohibited the encouragement or glorification of terrorist acts was invoked. However, in the end Malik was specifically convicted for 'possessing records likely to be useful in terrorism' (using Section 58 of the

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<sup>366</sup> 'Muslim Community Opposes New Anti Terror Legislation and Urges Government to Exercise Maximum Restraint and Caution' MCB Press Release, 13<sup>th</sup> April 2006. Available at: [http://www.mcb.org.uk/media/presstext.php?ann\\_id=199](http://www.mcb.org.uk/media/presstext.php?ann_id=199) [accessed on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2011].

<sup>367</sup> This moment represents an interesting point in the development of British Muslim political identities. The threat of proscription for UK Muslim groups was quite clearly aimed at the separatist, radical and increasingly violence-endorsing trend which included groups such as *Al Muhajiroun*, The Saviour Sect and *Al Ghurabaa* – all of whom openly praised acts of terrorism, and often spoke contemptibly and provocatively of Britain, its government and its population as well as of other religions. Tony Blair and many of his advisors became persuaded of the 'conveyor belt' theory – that groups like the (also separatist but avowedly non-violent) *Hizb-ut-Tabrir* was also eligible for proscription. (David Cameron and the Conservatives have also incorporated this thinking into their government's approach to national security – cf. Cameron's security speech at Munich in March 2011). Even though it was officially non-violent, HT was regarded as a 'breeding ground' from which many members 'graduated' on to violent extremism. Blair's admission that he wished to ban HT sparked off a number of heated defences from various quarters in the Muslim community who genuinely feared that with the criteria for 'radical' and 'extremist' firmly in the government's grip, it would only be a matter of time before a whole range of other UK Muslim groups could be criminalised – whether for loose/historic international links with Islamist groups abroad (as I demonstrate in Chapter 2, there are plenty of these!), or for favouring ultra-conservative religious views (for instance on homosexuality or the role of women in society), or indeed for simply differing with the government on major foreign policy issues (cf. previous chapter for discussion on the MCB's rift with government on the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan).

<sup>368</sup> Ellen Parker, 'Implementation of the UK Terrorism Act 2006 – the relationship between counterterrorism law, free speech and the Muslim community in the United Kingdom versus the United States' *Emory International Law Review* Vol.21: 2 (Fall 2007), p.756.

Terrorism Act 2000) and was handed a nine-month suspended sentence in December 2007. A shop assistant at a WH Smith outlet in Heathrow Airport, she had engaged in regular internet communications on *jibadi* websites and discussion forums. Using the screen-name 'Lyrical Terrorist' she fantasised through poetry, often graphically, her aspirations to engage in violent acts, including beheadings, '*jihad*' and to die as a martyr. In addition, she was found to have corresponded with Sohail Qureshi, a 30 year old dentist who had been arrested at Heathrow Airport as he attempted to board a flight to Pakistan carrying weapons, cash and terror handbooks.

Her trial found no evidence that she had undertaken any concrete physical criminal actions, yet she was nonetheless found guilty on the basis that she had in her possession 'records likely to be useful for terrorism' – these included *jibadi* literature that was found on her computer and at her home, as well as her own writings and poetry. Representing perhaps the first time that the new 'rules of the game' on terrorism were tested out through a real and hard case, the conviction provoked a great deal of public outrage. English PEN – the same group that had defended Salman Rushdie's publication of his *The Satanic Verses*, back in 1989, came out and spoke in defence of Samina Malik. Deputy President, Lisa Appignanesi declared that the criminalisation of Malik merely for 'dreaming and writing behind a bookshop counter would have Byron and Shelley turning in their graves'.<sup>369</sup> In addition, numerous petitions and collectives sprung up online, variously defending Malik's 'freedom of expression', there were calls for a 'World Samina Malik Day'<sup>370</sup> and countless public figures wrote to denounce the 'draconian' nature of the anti-terror laws which, it was argued, had effectively created thought crimes.<sup>371</sup> An interesting comparison was drawn between Section 58 of the Terrorism Act 2000 under which Malik was prosecuted, and the recent experience of Gillian Gibbons, a British teacher in the Sudan who had been imprisoned for acquiescing to her pupils' choice of the name 'Muhammad' for their teddy bear, and was only released after international uproar and mediation from a delegation of British (Muslim) politicians.

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<sup>369</sup> 'Don't jail 'lyrical terrorist', writers' group tells judges' *The Guardian* 6<sup>th</sup> December 2007.

<sup>370</sup> 'World Samina Malik Day December 6<sup>th</sup>' <http://clatterymachinery.wordpress.com/2007/11/18/world-samina-malik-day-december-6th/> [accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2013].

<sup>371</sup> Matthew Parris, 'Think no evil? Are you serious?' *The Times* 17<sup>th</sup> November 2007.

Rod Liddle, 'Free speech and the lyrical terrorist' *The Spectator* 21<sup>st</sup> November 2007, in which he pens a short poem mocking the situation.

Malik's conviction was later quashed in the wake of a successful (test case) appeal for the 'Bradford Five'<sup>372</sup> – in which a landmark ruling judged that Section 58 of the Terrorism Act 2000 could not reasonably be stretched to encompass 'propagandist or theological material'. Upon re-examining her case, judges ruled that the documents in Malik's possession and upon which her conviction had relied could fall under this category.

*Case study - Abu Izzadeen: deterrence or the making of a martyr-figure?*

Abu Izzadeen, also known as Trevor Brooks, rose to public prominence in his role as a leader and spokesperson for *Al Ghurabaa*.<sup>373</sup> He made several outspoken media appearances between 2001-2006, where he brazenly flirted with anti-terror laws by praising specific acts of suicide bombing and even declaring his own aspiration to perform such actions.<sup>374</sup> In September 2006, he heckled and disrupted a meeting of the Muslim community in Leytonstone, east London, with the then home secretary John Reid. Abu Izzadeen accused Reid of being an 'enemy' of Islam and decrying the audience for listening to him, and 'let(ting) him come into a Muslim area' – declaring that it was shameful for them to listen to his call for Muslim parents to 'spy' on their children and report any concerns to the authorities, while 'over 1,000 Muslims had been arrested' (in anti-terror raids). His outburst received keen media attention, to the point of raising suspicions that the clash had even been staged,<sup>375</sup> as a way of bolstering the message that Reid was trying to put across. Whatever the facts behind the incident – this was just the most prominent of what had by this stage become a catalogue of numerous statements which were arguably falling foul of the new anti-terror restrictions on speech.<sup>376</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> The case of four Bradford University students and a school pupil from Ilford, Essex, who had engaged in internet conversations fantasising about *jihad*, including communicating with individuals in Pakistan and downloading propaganda materials. Their initial conviction was quashed in February 2008.

<sup>373</sup> *Al Ghurabaa* (Arabic for 'The Strangers') was a successor group to *Al Mubajiroun* that was proscribed in the wake of 7/7 with the Terrorism Act 2006. In January 2010, the then home secretary, Alan Johnson, issued a banning order: 'The Proscribed Organisations (name changes) Order 2010' (Home Office, January 2010), extending the proscription for *Al Mubajiroun* to *Al Ghurabaa*, Islam4UK, London School of Sharia and the eclectic host of other names that the group's members had taken to operating under.

<sup>374</sup> For examples, in an interview with BBC Newsnight in August 2005 he described the 7/7 attacks as 'completely praiseworthy', and refused to refer to them negatively as 'suicide attacks', preferring instead the term '*mujahideen* activity'. He also told Channel 4 News that: 'For Muslims there (referring to Iraq and Afghanistan), they have a duty to fight occupiers, whether they are American soldiers or British soldiers' quoted at 'Radicals warned of treason risk' *BBC News Website*: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4129502.stm> [accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2013] – prompting calls for him to be prosecuted for treason or incitement to treason.

<sup>375</sup> Allen, *Islamophobia* (2010), p.94; Darcus Howe, 'John Reid's dirty little one-act play' *New Statesman* 6<sup>th</sup> October 2006.

<sup>376</sup> Roya Nikkhah and Adam Lusher, 'Police accused of 'cowardly failure' to prosecute militant' *The Daily Telegraph* 24<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

Eventually, Abu Izzadeen *was* prosecuted and found guilty in April 2008 of inciting terrorism and of fundraising for terrorism. His case was considered by critics of the Terrorism Act 2006 to be politically motivated and part of a ‘knee-jerk reaction’,<sup>377</sup> particularly since the comments which he was prosecuted for were actually made in 2004, *before* the London bombings had even prompted the government to introduce further anti-terror legislation. Moreover, his conviction was ultimately secured under the Terrorism Act 2000, since initial attempts to secure a conviction for the ‘encouragement’ of terrorism using the Terrorism Act 2006 fell through after a jury failed to reach a verdict, thus further cementing existing expectations that the Act was far too broad to be effective in any tangible sense.

As to Abu Izzadeen himself, he served one year of his four and a half year sentence, and then was released early after an appeal – much to the joy of supporters who received him as a ‘modern day Muslim hero’.<sup>378</sup> He was recalled to prison only months later in July for breaking the conditions of his release by allegedly assaulting a police officer. Finally, he was released again in October 2010. Upon release, he appeared to show obvious signs of weight loss, but wasted no time in firing off strident and unrepentant accusations against the government and the judicial system for being biased and unduly harsh against Muslims.<sup>379</sup> If anything, the whole episode served to raise his profile and to cement his following, as evidenced by the warm and enthusiastic reception he received from his ‘followers’ upon his latest release from prison.<sup>380</sup> He was greeted at the gates of Pentonville Prison by a crowd of cheering supporters, saluting him as a ‘Lion of *Tawheed*’ (monotheism), and insisting that ‘The British government’s behaviour in silencing individuals whom oppose and expose the government’s economic, social or more importantly foreign policies... (will not) stop Muslim activists propagating the divine way of live (sic) of *Al-Islam*’.<sup>381</sup> Abu Izzadeen then proceeded to scale the prison walls and deliver a speech-cum-press statement to his assembled supporters and the media. Video recordings show that he was clearly relishing the moment, and when questioned about whether his spell in prison had made him reconsider his views or the nature of any future public statements, he responded with indignation: ‘we have a right to speak out the truth, we have a right to expose the

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<sup>377</sup> Letter from George Galloway MP, ‘Alarm bells over terror conviction’ *The Guardian* 24<sup>th</sup> April 2008.

<sup>378</sup> ‘Radical preacher Abu Izzadeen freed from jail early’ *The Daily Telegraph* 6<sup>th</sup> May 2009.

<sup>379</sup> *Press TV* interview with Abu Izzadeen on his release from prison, 28<sup>th</sup> October 2010.

<sup>380</sup> ‘Abu Izzadeen Released’ *Salafi Media* website at: <http://salafimedia.com/component/k2/item/1092-abu-izzadeen-released.html> [accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2013].

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*

corruption that's going on, and if we're going to go to prison for it, we're more than willing to'.<sup>382</sup>

This case study suggests that the efforts of anti-terror legislation in deterring Abu Izzadeen from making comments in support of violence against British troops abroad, and from speaking approvingly of terrorist acts at home were unsuccessful, and most probably even counterproductive. Abu Izzadeen's trial, imprisonment and the high-level press coverage afforded to his outspoken views (this point being especially pertinent if his confrontation with John Reid was indeed staged) – all contributed to maximising his audience. That the efforts to convict him under the 2006 Act fell through is in itself something of an indictment of the legislation. In addition, just as the entire situation must have swelled the ranks of his critics, it undoubtedly did the same for his admirers, for whom the efforts to silence Abu Izzadeen only made him and his rhetoric all the more appealing – particularly when considered in tandem with the negative impacts of other strands of the government's efforts in the areas of anti-terrorism and security, such as the Prevent programme, and high-profile blunders like the botched police raid in Forest Gate of June 2006.<sup>383</sup>

*Case Study – Ahmed Faraz and the perils of state-endorsed religious interpretations*

My final case study is the recent conviction of Ahmed Faraz, a Birmingham bookseller, under Sections 1 and 2 of the Terrorism Act 2006. Faraz ran *Al-Maktabah* – an Islamic bookshop which was found to stock a number of texts that were used by, or found in the possession of various convicted terrorists over the past decade. His conviction for possessing and disseminating information 'likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism'<sup>384</sup> bore some parallels with Samina Malik's case, in that the judge conceded that 'there is no indication that Mr Faraz ever intended to carry out a terrorist attack'.<sup>385</sup> It was also similar in that Section 58 of the Terrorism Act 2000 had to

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<sup>382</sup> 'Abu Izzadeen released from prison' video available at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUegJUROsBI&feature=related> [accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2013].

<sup>383</sup> A dawn raid carried out on a home in Forest Gate, east London, targeted two brothers – Abdul Kahar and Abul Koiyar – and was based on what turned out to be false intelligence. The raid was widely criticised for the apparently gung ho and heavy handed attitude of the officers. One of the brothers was shot in the shoulder and there was huge community outcry regarding why and how such an intensive raid could have been carried out on the basis of such weak intelligence – and of course how it was that the police officer in charge of the raid could have shot Abdul Kahar so readily, when he showed no signs of resistance.

<sup>384</sup> Section 58, Terrorism Act 2000.

<sup>385</sup> Justice Calvert-Smith, quoted in Victoria Brittain and Asim Qureshi, 'Banning books in Britain, fifty years after Lady Chatterly' *Open Democracy* 17<sup>th</sup> December 2011. Available at:

<http://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/victoria-brittain-asim-qureshi/banning-books-in-britain-fifty-years-after-lady-chatterly> [accessed on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2012].

be relied upon to secure the conviction. The books in question were annotated editions of classical volumes, or modern texts based on classical works. The majority of the books were written by three authors: Ibn Taymiyyah, a 13<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> Century scholar, whose writings have been associated with modern puritanical Islamic thought, including Wahhabism; and two 20<sup>th</sup> Century authors: Sayyid Qutb, member and ideologue of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood; and Abdullah Azzam, a leader of the Afghan jihad against the Soviet Union. Both of the latter have been credited with inspiring Al Qaeda and modern jihadist thinking in general. Additionally, both have been hailed as martyrs to their causes – Qutb was executed by the Egyptian government and Azzam was assassinated, allegedly by rival jihadists in Afghanistan, after the withdrawal of the Soviet Union.

The trial decided that by stocking editions of these books that were accompanied by extensive commentary and appendices of the sort that ‘goaded’ readers to engage in fighting, spoke of Christians and Jews in highly derogatory terms, and provided footage of ‘martyrdom’ attacks, Faraz was guilty of incitement to terrorism.<sup>386</sup> Yet critics of the verdict pointed to the fact that most of the audio-visual footage of attacks that was relied upon by the prosecution was seized from a personal computer folder entitled ‘PhD’, and that Faraz had spoken of correspondence he had engaged in with a potential research supervisor, copies of which were also contained in the same folder.<sup>387</sup> They argued that the conviction of Faraz on the basis that the court deemed the books he stocked to be dangerous, was more or less equivalent to the books themselves being banned. By sending a signal that these books were considered to be unacceptable, the courts were effectively criminalising other stockists/owners, as well as creating a ‘chilling effect’, whereby potential stockists would engage in self-censorship in order to avoid prosecution.

Yet perhaps the most worrying aspect of Faraz’s conviction was the basis upon which the texts in question were classified by the court to be dangerous. This relied heavily on the account of an expert witness to the trial, whose arguments were built predominantly upon theological debates and differences.<sup>388</sup> Essentially what this meant was that the justice

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<sup>386</sup> Cf. the account of the prosecution’s expert witness: Matthew Tariq Wilkinson, ‘This bookseller deserved his incitement to terrorism conviction’ *The Guardian* 18<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

<sup>387</sup> Brittain and Qureshi, ‘Banning books in Britain, fifty years after Lady Chatterley’ (2011). Also Asim Qureshi, ‘Conviction of thought: How Islamic Concepts are ruled on in UK Courts’ *Arches Quarterly* Vol. 5:9 (Spring 2012), pp. 171-176.

<sup>388</sup> Cf. The full transcript of the testimony: *R v Faraz - Testimony of Matthew 'Tariq' Wilkinson for the prosecution* available at: <http://www.cageprisoners.com/learn-more/legal-issues/item/2922-r-v-faraz-testimony-of-matthew-tariq-wilkinson-for-the-prosecution-day-1> [accessed on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2012].

system, through this conviction, offered official legal approval and privilege to one religious interpretation over another. Naturally this outcome is deeply problematic from the perspective of freedom of expression and freedom of conscience, since it gives succour to the notion that the state can legitimately play a role in endorsing ‘acceptable’ schools of religious thought and conversely, that it can legitimately reject ‘unacceptable’ schools of thought and religious interpretations. Britain is a nation whose constitutional history tells a story of struggle for freedom of conscience and, crucially, freedom of belief. Indeed it has sheltered refugees from religious persecution abroad, notably the Huguenots and the Jews; and dissenters fought for, and won, the right to differ freely from the Church of England. For these reasons, the idea that the courts could indict a defendant using evidence based on theological interpretations is one that gives rise to deep misgivings about the potential extent to which these laws can be used to outlaw certain religious interpretations, or to criminalise those who are merely interested in reading about them, let alone actually being convinced of them.

This difficulty is especially potent when considered in conjunction with concurrent misgivings around the Prevent programme, and the Department for Communities and Local Government’s proactive efforts in promoting an ‘acceptable’ Islam to defeat a more ‘radical’ or ‘extremist’ Islam in the battle for hearts and minds. These have all been important and ongoing security concerns which I discuss in further detail in the following section.<sup>389</sup>

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<sup>389</sup> It must be noted here that as I prepared to submit this thesis, news emerged that Ahmed Faraz’s conviction had been overturned by the Court of Appeal on 21<sup>st</sup> December 2012. The court took the view that Faraz’s earlier conviction had relied on a jury that was insufficiently informed about the complexities of the relevant aspects of Islamic theology, and that the controversial literature stocked at *Maktabah* could not be assumed to have necessarily been responsible for encouraging terrorist activity. This development is yet further evidence of the confusing nature and ineffectiveness of the encouragement offences in the 2006 anti-terror legislation. The full text of the judgement is available at: [http://www.tooks.co.uk/library/court\\_of\\_appeal\\_judgment.pdf](http://www.tooks.co.uk/library/court_of_appeal_judgment.pdf) [accessed on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2013].

### 5.3 State-initiated community-centred responses: the ‘soft’ approach

In addition to the use of forceful rhetoric, the government set about putting initiatives into place with the aim of engaging with Britain’s Muslim communities in a deeper and more meaningful manner, and thus providing genuine and authentic deterrents to what was increasingly termed ‘violent extremism’, based on the foundations of comprehensive community networks and supported by key individuals and institutions from within the communities themselves. This approach has often been referred to as ‘community-policing’<sup>390</sup> – a technique which sought both legitimacy *and* authenticity through actively seeking out and engaging with Muslim community representatives on a broader and deeper level than had been done in recent history. To this end, a ‘Preventing Extremism Together’ taskforce appeared in August 2005, consisting of seven ‘working groups’, comprising handpicked ‘experts’ who were briefed to meet and discuss pertinent issues surrounding each of: Engaging with young people, Education, Engaging with Muslim women, Supporting regional and local initiatives and community actions, Imams training and accreditation and the role of mosques, Community security, and Tackling extremism and radicalisation. These groups met regularly over a period of two months, at the end of which a summary of their discussions and subsequent recommendations were collated and presented to the government via the Home Office.<sup>391</sup>

The taskforce recommendations were extensive and ambitious. Yet they drew sharp criticism in the ensuing period as something of a superficial exercise, since the follow-up on their recommendations was remarkably sparse, giving rise to warnings of rising disillusionment among Muslims,<sup>392</sup> and to suggestions that they were conveniently shelved for the discomfort that their contents may have posed to government narratives and objectives on the causes of extremism and how to combat it.<sup>393</sup> It is interesting to note that the single recommendation (out of a list of sixty-four) from the PET working groups that *was* promptly followed through by government was the facilitation of a ‘scholars’ road-show’.<sup>394</sup> This eventually materialised into the Radical Middle Way (RMW) project, which started off as a joint collaboration between *Q News* magazine, the Federation of Student

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<sup>390</sup> Jytte Klausen, ‘British Counter-Terrorism After 7/7: Adapting Community Policing to the Fight Against Domestic Terrorism’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 35: 3, (2009), pp.403-420.

<sup>391</sup> Warraich and Nawaz eds., *Preventing Extremism Together Working Groups* (2005).

<sup>392</sup> Sadiq Khan MP in his speech ‘Being a British Muslim’ to the Fabian Society, in London, on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2006. Full Text available at: <http://www.fabians.org.uk/events/event-reports/missing-a-positive-vision-for-british-muslims> [accessed on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2013].

<sup>393</sup> Sadiq Khan MP quoted in Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad* (2009), p.120.

<sup>394</sup> Warraich and Nawaz eds., *Preventing Extremism Together Working Groups* (2005), pp.12-14.

Islamic Societies (FOSIS), the Young Muslim Organisation (YMO) and a new body by the name of Mahabba Unlimited.

According to the recommendation in the PET report, the thinking behind such a roadshow was to make accessible to young British Muslims ‘a group of international and national mainstream scholars... with credibility and influence... to disseminate effective intellectual and theological counter-arguments against extremist interpretations of Islam’.<sup>395</sup> This aspiration was fair enough, but the government’s zeal in implementing this particular recommendation cannot be disconnected from its pre-existing plans to launch a very similar campaign, exposing ‘moderate’ Muslim voices to young British Muslims, which were first mooted in 2004.

In May 2004, the *Sunday Times* published leaked details of the initial blueprint for what was to become widely known as the Contest strategy.<sup>396</sup> Contest picked up with great energy in the wake of the 7/7 attacks, but according to the document leaked to the *Sunday Times*, it was since 9/11 that plans had already begun to be discussed on how the government could ‘win over’ ‘disaffected’ young Muslims – specifically seeking ways to ‘strengthen the hand of moderate Muslim leaders’.<sup>397</sup> In the light of this, government enthusiasm in backing the RMW is not surprising. Indeed it appears to suggest that the channelling of Foreign Office and Prevent (see below) funding towards the project was not much more than a convenient way of letting vetted Muslim groups execute (and thus be the public faces for) a pre-conceived government strategy.<sup>398</sup> The roadshows were resented in some quarters as having ‘an air of the colonial era about them’ since the government’s preference for its pre-approved scholars from overseas was made clear, sidestepping ‘the talented expertise of home grown scholars’.<sup>399</sup> This in turn raised questions as to the level of independence that the RMW project had, and the extent to which it was a government tool – to channel community debates in the desired direction and/or to keep fairly close tabs on community

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<sup>395</sup> Ibid., p.14.

<sup>396</sup> ‘Draft report on young Muslims and extremism’ UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office/Home Office April 2004. Available at:

<http://www.alghurabaa.org/books/reports/young%20muslims%20and%20extremism.pdf> [accessed on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2013]. Also Cf.: ‘Britain’s secret plan to win Muslim hearts and minds’ *The Sunday Times*, 30<sup>th</sup> May 2004.

<sup>397</sup> The document made particular mention of Amr Khaled, an Egyptian ‘televangelist’ who had recently moved to the UK, Hamza Yusuf and Suhaib Webb – both US imams with widespread international followings, and Tariq Ramadan – a Swiss/Egyptian academic who’s appeal to English speaking audiences was rising substantially at this time, also coinciding with his move to settle in the UK.

<sup>398</sup> Briggs *et al*, ‘Bringing it home: community-based approaches to counterterrorism’ (2006).

<sup>399</sup> Iqbal Sacranie’s valedictory speech to the MCB Annual General Meeting, London, 4<sup>th</sup> June 2006, available at: <http://www.mcb.org.uk/uploads/SECGEN.pdf> [accessed on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2012].

groups and individuals as a way of gathering information. This theme is an important one, since as I shall go on to show, it was to regularly recur with respect to government-led or government-sponsored initiatives under the Prevent umbrella – this often with good grounds for suspicion.

*The Prevent Strategy and its use and abuse of Muslim communities' freedom of expression:*

A key ambition of the new community-based approach that was favoured by the Contest scheme was to engender 'collaborative partnerships' of trust and good channels of communication between communities and the authorities. In this spirit, April 2007 saw the official launch of Prevent – a scheme claiming to embody many of the ideas put forward by the PET exercise. It was one of four 'workstreams' that together formed the Contest strategy – a multi-pronged approach to effectively deliver the government's counter-terrorism work. The four workstreams were described by the Home Office as:

- **Pursue:** to stop terrorist attacks
- **Prevent:** to stop people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism
- **Protect:** to strengthen our protection against terrorist attack
- **Prepare:** where an attack cannot be stopped, to mitigate its impact.<sup>400</sup>

The Prevent workstream is of particular interest to this study because it was designed specifically to develop and promote ideological challenges to 'extremist ideas that are conducive to terrorism or are shared by terrorist groups'.<sup>401</sup> This aim was posited on the notion that extremism stemmed from a 'religio-cultural rejection of western modernity'<sup>402</sup> and that in order to prevent extremism from gaining any credence, the government had to spearhead a 'battle of ideas' – to 'win the hearts and minds' of those (mainly young, mainly Muslims) who were potential recruits to, or sympathisers with extremist ideology. This preoccupation with ideology meant that the strategy would necessarily operate around the realm of speech acts (inasmuch as they were the expression of ideas) and as such, it is of important relevance to this study as not only did it mark a new development in Muslim identity politics and government-Muslim relations, but it also presented a scenario where speech and expression issues were intricately intertwined with securitisation and

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<sup>400</sup> 'The Counter-terrorism strategy' <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/counter-terrorism/uk-counter-terrorism-strat/> [accessed on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2011].

<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

<sup>402</sup> Arun Kundnani, 'Spooked: how not to prevent violent extremism' (London: Institute of Race Relations, 2009), p.39.

community cohesion concerns in such a way that proved problematic from both a liberal (theoretical) perspective and that of the practical implementation of policy.

I will attempt to analyse these problems under three sub-headings: funding, intelligence-gathering and public relations. I will argue that the government proved unable to build a sufficiently genuine partnership of trust with Muslim communities through Prevent because of the approach that it adopted with respect of these three issues lacked transparency, openness to real dialogue and consultation, and relied on the imposition of its own agenda – one that was frequently rigid and pre-engineered. While the Prevent scheme did represent an unprecedented level of official recognition for Muslim communities this was combined with an often patronising and instrumentalist attitude towards them in the way that the strategy was formulated. In addition, government displayed a remarkable intolerance, almost an allergy, towards the idea of giving space for feedback and the uninhibited airing of ideas – something which would seem to be a basic need for an endeavour which sought to win over the hearts and minds of troubled communities, and particularly young people.

*i. Funding:*

An important aspect of Prevent was the funding of community based/run initiatives in such a way that government provided the material support for them, but the community retained ownership. To this end, central government made available a generous fund,<sup>403</sup> to which applications could be made by groups and agencies for ‘community-led’ projects. While the idea was that Prevent’s aims could be achieved through government-funded capacity-building projects, anecdotal evidence and recent research has found that a large number of community organisers felt disengaged and bypassed when it came to decision-making and maintained that major decisions were always made in advance, ‘behind closed doors’ and only later presented to them as a *‘fait accompli’*.<sup>404</sup> This inconsistency was allegedly exacerbated by the poor grasp that central government decision-makers had of local issues and needs.<sup>405</sup> Other problems identified with this funding have included an expectation – often understated but sometimes openly expressed – by police and/or other official representatives that community workers ‘toe the (central) government line’ when it came to

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<sup>403</sup> Between 2007-2010 various Prevent budgets totalled up to several hundred millions cf. HM Government ‘Pursue, Prevent, Protect, Prepare: the UK strategy for countering international terrorism’ *Annual Report* (March 2010) p.13; Kundnani, ‘Spooked: how not to prevent violent extremism’ (2009), p.11-12.

<sup>404</sup> Kundnani, ‘Spooked: how not to prevent violent extremism’ (2009), p.15.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

exploring opinions – from deeply emotive and controversial topics including foreign policy, to day-to-day differences on what the priorities for local work and projects should be and how they should be implemented.<sup>406</sup> The message that many came away with was that government funding was being offered with one hand, and that central government was expecting to receive on the other hand loyalty and tacit obedience to a preconceived agenda of priorities that was put together by Whitehall mandarins and their think-tanks of preference.<sup>407</sup> Many community workers saw this funding arrangement to be especially manipulative since at a time when money for voluntary sector work was becoming increasingly difficult to secure, it was felt by some that they had little choice but to accept Prevent funding, and that if it was necessary to do so on government terms, then so be it.<sup>408</sup>

*ii. Allegations of surveillance and intelligence-gathering:*

Throughout the period of its operation, the Contest scheme, and specifically Prevent have regularly been the subject of shocking allegations. Among these are that rather than being simply an empowering community education and development scheme, it was utilised as an intelligence gathering tool used by the secret services to keep a ‘close eye’ on Muslim communities, including the surveillance of innocent Muslims and for information such as religious and political views as well as information on mental health and sexual activity and associates.<sup>409</sup> Whilst such allegations have been strenuously denied by the government<sup>410</sup> a number of community and youth workers have given detailed reports of instances where they were explicitly asked to provide information about the individuals with whom they worked to the police and/or local authority with which they liaised.<sup>411</sup> Such allegations proved to be deeply problematic for government-community engagement, for two major reasons.

Firstly, even the smallest indication that Prevent was being used for information gathering, profiling and mapping of the Muslim community shook the already damaged trust between

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<sup>406</sup> Ibid., p.17.

<sup>407</sup> Paul Thomas, ‘Failed and Friendless: The UK’s ‘Preventing Violent Extremism’ Programme’ *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* Vol. 12:3 (August 2010), pp.442-458.

<sup>408</sup> Op. cit., pp.26-27.

<sup>409</sup> Vikram Dodd, ‘MPs investigate anti-extremism programme after spying claims’ *The Guardian* 18<sup>th</sup> October 2009.

<sup>410</sup> Stephen Rimmer, ‘Allegations made in the *Panorama* programme “Muslim First – British Second” on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> February’, statement from the Office for Security and Counter Terrorism, 17<sup>th</sup> February 2009. In response to the Guardian investigation of October 2009, a Home Office spokesman said: ‘Any suggestion that Prevent is about spying is simply wrong. Prevent is about working with communities to protect vulnerable individuals and address the root causes of radicalisation.’, quoted in Andrew Hough, ‘Anti-extremism scheme ‘spying on Muslims’, *The Daily Telegraph* 17<sup>th</sup> October 2009.

<sup>411</sup> Kundnani, ‘Spooked: How not to Prevent Violent Extremism’ (2009), p.28.

government and its partners within the community. At a stage where recent milestones in official recognition and respect for Britain's Muslim communities had been reached,<sup>412</sup> this proved to be a tremendous setback to the development of understanding and rapport between government and Muslim community groups, as well as the grassroots. Unease about surveillance within Prevent was exacerbated by a range of similar concerns. There were complaints that young Muslim men were being accosted by members of the security services and attempts were being made to recruit them as informers. A high-profile case reported by *The Independent* involved a group of five young Muslim men in Camden, North London, who had each been individually approached by members of the security services or undercover police officers, and 'intimidated' or 'blackmailed' to provide them with information and assistance, and that their refusal was met with specific threats against them and even their families.<sup>413</sup> The imposition of Information Sharing Agreements (ISAs) as a requirement for all Prevent funded projects and furthermore, suggestions by prominent politicians that individuals in positions of responsibility – such as teachers, youth workers and university lecturers keep a vigilant eye (widely understood to be code for 'spy') on the young people in their charge for any signs of 'radicalisation' and to report concerns to the authorities – all of these together fed into a growing unease among the community about any kind of community work that was linked with Prevent in particular – and often even with government in general. Indeed some project leaders spoke of how they would deliberately avoid mentioning that they were using Prevent funding, or consciously rebrand the names of their projects, due to the increasingly negative connotations that the scheme began to carry.<sup>414</sup>

Secondly, repeated suggestions that responsible adults should report on signs of extremism and radicalisation among the young people in their charge presented a major blow not only

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<sup>412</sup> For instance through legislation against discrimination in employment and against incitement to religious hatred, and long-fought-for victories in equal recognition such as the funding for Muslim faith schools and the inclusion of a religion question in the national census. Cf. previous chapters.

<sup>413</sup> Robert Verkaik, 'Exclusive: How the MI5 blackmails British Muslims' *The Independent* 21<sup>st</sup> May 2009. One of these men has since been identified as Mahdi Hashi, a British Somali who claims to have been regularly harassed when travelling. He was deported from Somalia on the instructions of British authorities, and is reported to have later been transferred to a US military base in Djibouti with the acquiescence of the British authorities. In 2012, his family was informed that he had been stripped of his British citizenship on the grounds of alleged extremism, making him one of only a handful of Britons to have had his citizenship revoked in modern times.

<sup>414</sup> Kundnani, 'Spooked: how not to prevent violent extremism' (2009), p.17; Therese O'Toole, Stephen H. Jones and Daniel Nilsson Dehanas, 'The New Prevent: Will it work? Can it work?' *Arches Quarterly* Vol. 5:9 (Spring 2012), pp.56-62.

to trust between the community and the authorities, but between Muslim organisations,<sup>415</sup> and also more generally within institutions which traditionally have come to be regarded as safe havens for free expression and experimentation with new, contrasting and often radical ideas. Universities, schools, youth-clubs, and even (perhaps idealistically!) mosques should all be spaces where debates are conducted and ideas are explored. Yet for many young people this avenue for safe and supervised self-discovery fell into jeopardy, as they could never be sure whether confiding in their teachers or youth workers would result in their being referred to the authorities as potential extremists.<sup>416</sup> Furthermore, a motion passed at the National Union of Students conference in May 2008 affirmed that the MI5 and Special Branch had not only been ‘actively spying, harassing and intimidating students on campus’, but that they had even ‘sought to recruit numerous members of Islamic societies on campus’. The motion expressed grave concerns that such activities were creating a climate of suspicion and distrust where ‘fewer Muslims (would become) involved in Islamic societies, Students’ Unions or any political societies’.<sup>417</sup> For the motion to have passed as it did, it is clear that the concerns around spying and recruitment were very real and were restricting Muslim youth and students’ sense of freedom of expression, and even affecting the kinds of circles that they mixed in and the choices that they made.

*iii. Targeted consultations and public relations:*

Another venture which attracted a great deal of Prevent funding and publicity interest was the idea of targeted focus groups and slick promotional campaigns on issues that were identified as critical to the battle for hearts and minds. On a domestic level, this included the launch of two government advisory groups focusing on Muslim women and young people – the National Muslim Women’s Advisory Group (NMWAG) and the Young Muslim Advisory Group (YMAG).<sup>418</sup> In addition, there was the establishment of a mosques

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<sup>415</sup> To mention one such controversy: Ed Husain of the Quilliam Foundation was roundly opposed by other Muslim groups when he insisted that ‘it is good and it is right’ for Prevent to conduct intelligence-gathering amongst Muslims, even if they were not suspected of committing any crimes. Husain argued that intelligence gathering should trump concerns around civil liberties, since: ‘It’s not about doing the right thing by Islamists or by liberal do-gooders, it’s about creating a society where liberal do-gooders survive freely.’ Condemnation of his comments was so strong that Quilliam later issued a rather vague statement to moderate the tone of Husain’s earlier comments: ‘Allegations of Government Spying on UK Muslims – a statement from Quilliam directors’ 20<sup>th</sup> October 2009, available at: <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/press-releases/allegations-of-government-spying-on-uk-muslims-a-statement-from-quilliam-directors/> [accessed on 11<sup>th</sup> June 2013].

<sup>416</sup> O’Toole, Jones and Dehanas, ‘The New Prevent: Will it work? Can it work?’ (2012).

<sup>417</sup> Full text of the motion ‘Spying on Campus’ available at: <http://fosis.org.uk/images/stories/blogs/spyingoncampusmotion.pdf> [accessed on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2013].

For some anecdotal background cf. Zin Derfoufi, ‘MI5: leave young Muslims alone’ *The Guardian* 26<sup>th</sup> May 2009.

<sup>418</sup> Launched in 2007 and 2008, respectively.

advisory board (MINAB). Although these were set up to be officially independent bodies, their reliance on funding from Prevent meant that in effect they were obliged to function within the parameters set by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).<sup>419</sup>

For the former two, their purported role was to advise ministers on issues pertinent to their respective groups on matters relating to integration, community cohesion as well as to act as positive role models for women and young people in the Muslim communities. With NMWAG, as with other aspects of Prevent, high-minded intentions ended up translating into less than agreeable realities. As the groups were basically hand-picked by civil servants,<sup>420</sup> their only mandate to act came from the Communities Minister Hazel Blears and her team. This was hardly sufficient if they were to make real headway in winning over hearts and minds for the cause against radicalisation. In fact this led many to question just how effective these groups could ever be – including a member of NMWAG, claiming to be the group’s co-ordinator, who resigned in 2010 citing a refusal to be used as a ‘political pawn’<sup>421</sup> and an emphatic complaint that the linking of the initiative with the Prevent agenda was ‘disempowering’ and merely a ‘political fad’. Other members of NMWAG also echoed her complaints, ‘we thought we were going to be advisors, but found that (instead) we were project managers’, complained one participant.<sup>422</sup>

YMAG seems to have been comparatively more successful than NMWAG. Members of the group have described how their relationship with government was honest and frank, and that they regularly gave advice and recommendations on sensitive issues such as extremism on university and college campuses. In fact, it was felt that the ministers with

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<sup>419</sup> Shaista Gohir’s open resignation letter to Home Secretary John Denham, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2010, available at: <http://wallscometumblingdown.wordpress.com/2010/04/08/founder-quits-national-muslim-womens-advisory-group-in-protest/> [accessed on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2013].

Author’s interview with a member of YMAG, 2008-present, wishing to remain anonymous, 30<sup>th</sup> November 2011.

<sup>420</sup> While NMWAG members were handpicked from the start, there was an applications process for YMAG membership, but applicants were short-listed and eventual group members were then selected by the government. After it became apparent that the initial intake of NMWAG members ‘didn’t have a good enough cross-section of ages, ethnicities and backgrounds’, a competition round was held for a second intake of members to apply for positions on the group. Source: Author’s interview with Julie Siddiqi, 2<sup>nd</sup> round entrant to NMWAG, 20<sup>th</sup> June 2012.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid. Also cf. Shaista Gohir ‘Muslim women are not political pawns’ *The Guardian Comment is Free* 9<sup>th</sup> April 2009, available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/apr/09/government-failed-muslim-women?INTCMP=ILCNETTXT3487> [accessed on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2013]. Shaista Gohir’s position as co-ordinator of NMWAG has been disputed by two other former members in their conversations with me. Both recall that there was no position of co-ordinator in the group. The existence of this dispute demonstrates that there were tensions between the group members which contributed towards hindering its potential.

<sup>422</sup> Author’s interview with former NMWAG member, wishing to remain anonymous, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2012.

whom they met displayed a greater readiness to listen to blunt criticism *because* it was coming from young people, and it was almost expected that young people would adopt a more direct tone and ‘tell it how it is’.<sup>423</sup> For example one member related how group members had no qualms about telling ministers that they felt that such an advisory group under Prevent was ‘pointless’, and that ‘we’re only here to tell you that’.<sup>424</sup> YMAG was given a list of tasks to fulfil – a website, a national youth conference and civic participation projects – all of which were carried out. Yet while there was scope for the group to run the projects themselves, they were nonetheless made aware of set parameters within which they could work, and there were instances where their proposals were vetoed or decisions reprimanded.

Fundamentally, for YMAG, as with NMWAG, although they were technically and officially independent, in practice, their reliance on government for funding meant that they were unavoidably compelled to operate in a manner that was acceptable to government strategy and to work on issues that government approved. Proof of the extent of this reliance is that when the General Election of 2010 brought in a new coalition government, funding for YMAG was ended, and government support for the group was withdrawn. Consequently the YMAG website, magazine and a yet-to-be-launched research paper were either completely withdrawn or left in limbo as the group was forced to disband despite the strong bonds that had grown between the members and their sense of common cause. This situation suggests strongly that ultimate control of this advisory group was not in the hands of its members, but in the hands of its funders, who could ‘pull the plug’ on it, so to speak, at will.<sup>425</sup>

MINAB:

The idea for a mosque regulatory body did initially emerge from the PET Working Groups discussions.<sup>426</sup> However, its formation became somewhat delayed as there was disagreement between the government and Muslim community groups over its design. The Labour peer, Lord Ahmed, was initially tasked to the role of assembling a mosques board, but ‘when he was unable to make any progress, it was entrusted to four community

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<sup>423</sup> Author’s interview with former YMAG member, wishing to remain anonymous, 30<sup>th</sup> November 2011.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

<sup>425</sup> YMAG has since re-launched as an independent social enterprise with the aim of ‘acting as a bridge between young people and policy makers’ cf. [www.ymag.org.uk](http://www.ymag.org.uk) [accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> June 2012].

<sup>426</sup> Warraich and Nawaz eds., *‘Preventing Extremism Together’ Working Groups* (2005), p.6.

organisations'.<sup>427</sup> At the earlier discussions it was consistently emphasised that such a body should retain full independence and should be controlled and answerable to the community rather than to any government department. The finished product was unveiled in 2007 as the Mosques and Imams Advisory Board (MINAB). It differed from NMWAG and YMAG in that it was set up under the joint aegis of the MCB, the Al Khoei Foundation, the Muslim Association of Britain and the British Muslim Forum, rather than being directly under the DCLG. Yet when it emerged that it was to be heavily Prevent-funded, the extent to which these community groups actually 'owned' MINAB was brought into question, especially since MINAB seemed reluctant to declare upfront the provenance of its main funding.<sup>428</sup> Disquiet was expressed among many imams and mosque officials in what comes across as something of a power struggle between the community and the government for control of the fledgling body, where MINAB's links with the government,<sup>429</sup> were described by Iqbal Sacranie as 'excessive Home Office involvement, insufficient consultation and (giving) the perception that there was an attempt to marginalise the MCB'.<sup>430</sup> Despite this, the four founding bodies decided to back the Board, perhaps seeing their continued involvement as the best way to keep government interference at bay. Yet these issues of funding and independence ultimately tainted MINAB's reputation in such a way that its actual ability to perform its declared functions was hampered.

Each of the founding bodies nominated representatives who then formed a board of trustees and sat in specialist committees within an organisational set-up that bore several close similarities to that of the MCB.<sup>431</sup> The Board was to fulfil the role of a self-regulatory body and concentrate on setting and raising standards for the UK's diverse and hitherto disaggregated mosques and Islamic centres. This would be achieved through sharing best practice, providing and facilitating training courses for imams and mosque staff as well as maintaining dialogue and communication links with government. These plans were broadly

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<sup>427</sup> Author's interview with MCB official wishing to remain anonymous, conducted on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2011.

<sup>428</sup> Inayat Bunglawala, 'MINAB: Community initiative, or quango?' *The Guardian Comment is Free* 15<sup>th</sup> May 2009: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2009/may/15/minab-mosques-imams-islam?INTCMP=ILCNETTXT3487> [accessed on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2011].

<sup>429</sup> Author's interview with Yousuf Bhailok, MCB Secretary General 2000-2002, conducted on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2011.

Also see: 'MINAB: autonomy or acquiescence?' *The Saga of Home Office Working Groups and its projects – Salaam.co.uk* [http://www.salaam.co.uk/themeofthemonth/september03\\_index.php?l=60#ccc2](http://www.salaam.co.uk/themeofthemonth/september03_index.php?l=60#ccc2) [accessed on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2012].

<sup>430</sup> Iqbal Sacranie's valedictory speech to the MCB Annual General Meeting, London, 4<sup>th</sup> June 2006, available at: <http://www.mcb.org.uk/uploads/SECGEN.pdf> [accessed on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2012].

<sup>431</sup> The main architect of MINAB's structure, Khurshid Drabu, was also a key figure in formulating the MCB's constitution.

accepted across Muslim communities as being timely and welcome steps forward in community and institutional development.

Senior figures from within MINAB's four founding organisations have expressed substantial scepticism about the Board's ability to have much impact.<sup>432</sup> Its election process has proven unwieldy and problematic, and far too heavily reliant upon the four founding organisations, leaving it open to charges of cronyism, and severely watering down its powers of mandate or implementation. As one interviewee put it, 'MINAB doesn't have any power, it is only advisory'<sup>433</sup> and herein lies its main problem.

The nature of a very diverse and un-hierarchical organisational landscape within Britain's Muslim communities (and of the Islamic faith itself) dictates that an advisory body (rather than an instructive one) would be the most appropriate format for self-regulation.<sup>434</sup> Here I must differentiate between the inevitable existence of an unofficial, organic hierarchy of relationships within and between *Muslim communities*, and the lack of structural, official or clergy-like hierarchy within the *Islamic faith*. While there do exist organic hierarchies in the form of the power, respect and patronage that are wielded by community leaders, elders, religious and spiritual figures within community networks, the faith of Islam does not endorse a hierarchy of clergy or religious institutions that is in any way comparable, say, to the hierarchies that are to be found in various denominations of the Christian faith. So, given this background, an advisory body seemed to be the best regulatory set-up for British mosques, and naturally, such a body could only hope to be successful if it was able to win over the willing support and engagement of as many mosques as possible. MINAB's close links with Prevent, and its subsequent lack of transparency and openness regarding its funding and procedures proved a serious blow to community confidence in it as an institution. This was reflected in the relatively low proportion of mosques and Islamic centres which joined MINAB. Although the 600-odd members did include among them the largest and most prominent mosque organisations in the UK, it was arguably the smaller, more obscure and perhaps far less well-resourced institutions which were more

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<sup>432</sup> Author's interview with Yousuf Bhailok, 10<sup>th</sup> October 2011. Also, author's conversation with senior MAB official wishing to remain anonymous, December 2011.

<sup>433</sup> Author's interview with former MCB official, wishing to remain anonymous, conducted on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2011.

<sup>434</sup> Laurence, *The Emancipation of Europe's Muslims* (2012), p.194.

urgently in need of guidance, training, support and general raising of standards. With a total of around 1,200-1,500 mosques in the UK,<sup>435</sup> this left up to 60% unattached to MINAB.

Ultimately, MINAB's role shifted to focus more on service-provision and training, and away from the notion of regulation, since a crucial pre-requisite for the latter was a strong, consensual and trust-based relationship with a sufficient proportion of the country's mosques and Islamic centres. Without this, what resulted was the Board's provision of training courses and consultation meetings on topical issues, with the participation of a limited range of institutions – largely those that were associated with the main groups at the centre of MINAB's administration. This is not to belittle the importance of the issues and skills that were addressed – transparency and democracy in mosque administration, the inclusion of women and young people in decision-making and providing them with training and leadership opportunities and engagement in interfaith and community initiatives were all laudable areas for MINAB to encourage mosques to focus on. However, with no significant outreach to the majority of smaller institutions without the benefit of basic infrastructure or the luxury of even the most preliminary of communication/networking capabilities which would have facilitated their participation in such initiatives, MINAB was left open to similar charges that NMWAG faced – that it was a tick-box exercise preaching to the converted. These are charges that were only bolstered by evidence of recent discord and difficulties among MINAB affiliates around the matter of elections and organisational processes.<sup>436</sup>

*iv. Public relations overseas:*

Efforts were also made to take the battle for hearts and minds beyond the shores of the UK. The Foreign Office ran a Prevent-funded campaign entitled 'Projecting British Muslims'.<sup>437</sup> Prominent British Muslims were selected to take part in whirlwind foreign visits to Muslim-majority countries where they would meet with government, civil society and community bodies and perform something of an ambassadorial role by extolling the positive aspects of life as a Muslim in Britain to their audiences. The FCO envisaged that the project would 'signal the UK's pride in its Muslim youth', and as well as providing the delegations with opportunities to 'challenge misconceptions about the reality of life for

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<sup>435</sup> Gilliat-Ray, *Muslims in Britain: an introduction* (2010), p.158.

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.*, p.171.

<sup>437</sup> A general archive of the project with details of visits to-date is available at: [www.projectingbritishmuslims.co.uk](http://www.projectingbritishmuslims.co.uk) [accessed on 19<sup>th</sup> June 2013], however the project itself appears to have been closed or at least paused by the Coalition Government (from June 2010).

Muslims in Britain’, also give them the chance to learn more about the British government’s work in these areas – leading to stronger ties between British Muslims and communities overseas in addition to ‘grassroots follow-up initiatives’.<sup>438</sup> Yet as genuine as the efforts of those who took part may have been, this was hardly a project of a grassroots nature. Since delegates were handpicked by the FCO, it is reasonable to deduce that they would hardly have included individuals with a propensity to take a line too disparaging of the government’s own policies. Moreover, with the itineraries for each visit set and managed by the FCO, encounters would have been at best too closely supervised and at worst too staged for participants to engage deeply in the kinds of frank and honest exchanges of the sort that a *real* battle of ideas would produce. The earlier discussion on how surveillance and profiling featured in the Prevent workstream serves to underline this analysis. While participants in the PBM project have spoken of beneficial and fruitful engagement at their visits, they have also criticised the project for being intensely and exhaustively covered by the media, to the extent that it felt like an ‘obvious propaganda campaign’, and leaving many participants wondering what the visit was *actually* doing to prevent violent extremism.<sup>439</sup>

Also funded with Prevent money through the FCO were a number of projects run by non-governmental bodies. For instance in 2009 ‘Deen International’, an organisation headed by Khurshid Ahmed, then of the British Muslim Forum, partnered with the FCO and was granted £500,000 to deliver a campaign entitled ‘I am Muslim, I am British’.<sup>440</sup> This was by its own admission ‘a major marketing and PR offensive’.<sup>441</sup> The project got as far as a pilot phase, which was based in Pakistan. It included a media campaign with advertisements on television, radio and in the print media as well as a website. There were debates, discussions and conferences and an extensive lecture tour of universities and colleges around Pakistan.<sup>442</sup> These efforts were aimed to utilise the services of prominent, successful British

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<sup>438</sup> Correspondence from Lucy Hughes, Head, Prevent Team CTD at the FCO to Graeme Breen, in response to the latter’s freedom of information request regarding FCO involvement with the Quilliam Foundation and the PBM project. 10<sup>th</sup> May 2010, Reference 0238-10. Available at: <http://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/30412/response/85454/attach/html/5/0238%2010Breen%20letter%20final.doc.html> [accessed on 19<sup>th</sup> June 2013].

<sup>439</sup> Author’s interview with past PBM delegate wishing to remain anonymous, 29<sup>th</sup> November 2011.

<sup>440</sup> Lords Hansard 30<sup>th</sup> March 2009

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200809/ldhansrd/text/90330w0002.htm> [accessed on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2011].

<sup>441</sup> ‘I am the West – project synopsis’ <http://www.deeninternational.co.uk/downloads/i-am-the-west.pdf> [accessed on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2011 – Site appears to have taken down as of 19<sup>th</sup> June 2013]. (‘I am the West’ was the initial title given to the project, before it was changed to ‘I am Muslim, I am British’ – cf. previous footnote).

<sup>442</sup> Ibid.

Pakistani Muslims to put across the message that ‘British society was not *‘anti-Islamic’*, to demonstrate the extent of British Muslim integration in the UK, and to ‘stimulate and facilitate constructive debate’ on liberal values and Islam.<sup>443</sup> In doing so, the hope was that the extremist narrative against Britain (and ‘The West’) as ‘enemies’ of Islam and Muslims would be robustly challenged, that allies might be won from amongst ‘ordinary’ Muslims abroad, and thus that some headway would be made towards combating the threat to UK security from ‘radical Islamism’.

v. *Don't mention the Foreign Policy:*

A final factor of great importance to the degeneration of trust between the government and Muslim communities in the period after 7/7 has been the dogged refusal of government to acknowledge any role that its foreign policy decisions have played in increasing radicalisation among young Muslims, and thus threatening the nation’s security. This was most acute during the Blair years. From the very first exercise in government-community engagement after 7/7, the PET Working Groups, UK foreign policy had been identified as a ‘root cause’ of terrorism which needed to be ‘interrogat(ed) and understood’, along with other root causes, if terrorism was to be effectively tackled.<sup>444</sup> However, despite the government’s declared intention to tackle the factors behind the appeal of violent extremism amongst young British Muslims, critics were quick and persistent in pointing out an almost pathological blindness to any sort of recognition that foreign policy might have played a role in this regard.<sup>445</sup> For these detractors, the idea that the road to violent extremism could be understood, and thus adequately tackled, without considering the discontent and anger that British involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq, not to mention historically in Palestine, was farcical at best, and deeply insulting at the very worst.<sup>446</sup> For the Blair government, admission that foreign policy played a role in increasing the terror threat was dismissed as giving in to the terrorists, or ‘making excuses’ for their horrific acts and thereby granting them the hope of some legitimacy, no matter how minimal.

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<sup>443</sup> Ibid., p.3. Emphasis in original.

<sup>444</sup> Warraich and Nawaz eds., *Preventing Extremism Together’ Working Groups* (2005), p.75.

<sup>445</sup> Rai, 7/7, *The London Bombings, Islam and the Iraq War* (2006), pp.145-152 compiles the perspectives of a range of figures from the worlds of policy, politics (both the Labour and Conservative parties) as well as from within Muslim communities who have all taken the view that the Iraq war in particular, and foreign policy in general, have played an important role in driving young Muslims to extremism and increasing the threat of terrorism.

<sup>446</sup> Salma Yaqoob, ‘Government’s PVE agenda is failing to tackle extremism’, *The Muslim News* 28<sup>th</sup> November 2008.

For many Muslims, such a stance smacked of arrogance and was hugely frustrating. For those working on the ground with young Muslims, it was crystal clear that the offensives in Afghanistan and Iraq were viewed with resentment. With details emerging steadily of civilian deaths in these countries, of destruction, the mis-treatment of prisoners in *Abu Ghraib* prison and others, it seemed remarkably myopic of government to accuse critics of trying to excuse the terrorists' actions, or even to explain them away. Moreover, perhaps the single consistently recurrent theme in the speeches or testimonies of so many of those who attempted to, or indeed did carry out terrorist acts, was their citation of foreign policy in 'Muslim lands' as a major motivating factor.<sup>447</sup>

A prime example of dissonance between the government and Muslim communities on this issue took place in August 2006. At the height of Israel-Hezbollah conflict, and in a rare gesture of unity bringing together otherwise disparate and rival sections of the Muslim community, an open letter to government was published urging Prime Minister Tony Blair to 'redouble his efforts to tackle terror and extremism and change our foreign policy to show the world that we value the lives of civilians wherever they live and whatever their religion.'<sup>448</sup> Signed by Sunni, Shi'a and Sufi groups from all areas of the UK as well as the majority of Muslim parliamentarians (Birmingham Perry Barr's Khalid Mahmood being the notable exception), it was a demonstration of unanimity in asserting to the government with one voice that engaging in 'policy risks' abroad 'not only increases the risk to ordinary people in that region (the Middle East), it is also ammunition to extremists who threaten us all'.<sup>449</sup> Despite the letter's broad-based support, and the painstaking efforts made by its signatories to condemn terrorism – a chorus of government figures roundly proceeded to write off the initiative as 'dangerous and foolish',<sup>450</sup> and 'the gravest possible error'.<sup>451</sup>

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<sup>447</sup> Mohammed Siddique Khan's 'martyrdom' video, Aljazeera, 2005; *Press TV* interview with Abu Izzadeen on his release from prison, 28<sup>th</sup> October 2010; and most recently expressed by Michael Adebolajo, one of two suspects in the murder in Woolwich of British serviceman Lee Rigby in May 2013. In an amateur video filmed at the scene of the murder and aired by ITV News on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2013, he said: 'The only reason we have killed this man today is because Muslims are dying daily by British soldiers. And this British soldier is one. It is an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' Full text at: 'Woolwich attack: the terrorist's rant' *The Telegraph website* <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/10075488/Woolwich-attack-the-terrorists-rant.html> [accessed on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2013]. Successive Labour and Conservative-led British Governments have continuously and consistently denied any connection between foreign policy and radicalisation.

<sup>448</sup> Full text of the letter, entitled 'Protect citizens, wherever they are', is reproduced at: Yahya Birt, 'An Unprecedented Letter', 13<sup>th</sup> August 2006, at: <http://www.yahyabirt.co.uk/?p=120> [accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2013].

<sup>449</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>450</sup> Transport Secretary, Douglas Alexander, speaking to Channel 4 News on 12<sup>th</sup> August 2006.

<sup>451</sup> Foreign Secretary, Margaret Beckett, to the BBC, quoted in Ned Temko, 'Beckett rejects link between foreign policy and terrorism' *The Observer* 13<sup>th</sup> August 2006.

Rather than a plea to understand the root causes of disillusionment and despair that might leave young people vulnerable to radicalisation, it was interpreted as an unacceptable attempt to allow terrorists to ‘dictate’ to the UK how to shape its foreign policy, and a call to engage in some kind of appeasement or concession.

Participants in YMAG and the PBM project have spoken of how they would be regularly sent ‘fact-sheets’ by the FCO whenever any aspect of foreign policy provoked controversy among Muslim communities. These documents would highlight ‘all the positive aspects of government involvement, say in Iraq or Afghanistan, and (they) were asked to ‘please share this with your communities’’.<sup>452</sup> This approach was seen to be patronising both in its tone and its expectations – after all, participants in these forums were chosen for their leadership and initiative, and were (at least officially) assured that they would be free to express their own independent views of government policy.

This sort of situation was to recur often, as Muslim groups became increasingly convinced of foreign policy’s role in making extremism appealing and the government maintained its refusal to even countenance that its foreign policy decisions could provide an explanation for the appeal of radicalisation as a resort for frustrated and disillusioned young Muslims. With neither side willing to shift its position on this matter, the issue of foreign policy proved to be a major source of disconnect between advocates from Muslim communities and the government.

To sum up, there was obviously a pressing need for an initiative such as Prevent. Its declared ambitions: empowerment, capacity building and educating so as to combat the spread of violent extremism, were fair enough, and in principle had a great deal of willing support. However, a preoccupation with securitisation tainted the venture, as it resulted in a ‘conflation between the security and counter-terrorism aspects, and community cohesion’<sup>453</sup>. Evidence of community profiling and the involvement of intelligence services, in addition to a (perhaps typical of government) bureaucratic preoccupation with meeting targets and the conducting of superficial consultations in order to tick boxes seriously damaged the level of trust between Muslim communities and government agencies. The extent to which the ‘soft’ approach to counter-terrorism, and specifically the Prevent

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<sup>452</sup> Author’s interview with YMAG member, wishing to remain anonymous, 30<sup>th</sup> November 2011.

<sup>453</sup> Dr Muhammad Abdul Bari, former Secretary General of the MCB, in an interview on BBC HARDtalk, *BBC News Channel* 13<sup>th</sup> December 2010.

programme succeeded in stopping extremism in its tracks or safeguarding the UK from terror threats is difficult to measure in concrete terms. However, what is certain is that Prevent caused acute and lasting damage to the level of trust between the government and Muslim communities, and that this was exacerbated by stubborn intransigence from the government on the issue of foreign policy as a root cause of radicalisation. Whether this scar can be healed is yet to be seen, but neither the Labour government, nor the coalition which succeeded it in 2010, have shown signs of abandoning the Prevent approach.<sup>454</sup>

#### **5.4 The MCB, the ‘Israel Test’ and the rise of ‘apolitical’ Islam – the media directly influencing political trends?**

##### **5.4.1 Challenging the MCB in the media:**

From around August 2005, there began to appear a steady stream of voices in the media challenging the working arrangement that the MCB and the government had been operating under for most of the preceding decade. Led by a handful of journalists who were broadly aligned with the ‘liberal left’, these voices were likened by some to a ‘campaign’, since their efforts sometimes appeared to be co-ordinated and sources were often mutually shared.<sup>455</sup> In August 2005, the BBC’s Panorama featured a programme presented by John Ware entitled ‘A Question of Leadership’. This documentary sought to argue the case that the Muslim community, and the MCB’s leadership in particular, were in ‘a state of denial’ about the presence of extreme views among its affiliates, and that they were out of touch, and subsequently failing to take seriously the need to combat radical views. These were views which, although they did not necessarily espouse violence, did nonetheless promote separatism, ‘contempt’ towards non-Muslims and acted as a ‘slippery slope’ towards extremism and eventually violence.<sup>456</sup> Central to Ware’s argument was his search for authenticity and un-equivocation in the MCB’s condemnation of violence and specifically suicide bombing.

The 7/7 attacks were the first time suicide bombing had taken place on UK soil, and as I have mentioned earlier, had shocked the nation and prompted much soul-searching amongst Muslim groups that had previously preferred to focus on conspiracy theories and

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<sup>454</sup> Although it should be mentioned that the Coalition government has given the Prevent programme less significance than its Labour predecessors, notably by cutting back funding.

<sup>455</sup> Madeleine Bunting, ‘Throwing Mud at Muslims’ *The Guardian* 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2005.

<sup>456</sup> John Ware, ‘A Question of Leadership’ Panorama, BBC1 Broadcast on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2005 at 22.20 BST. Transcript available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/panorama/4171950.stm> [accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2011].

victimisation as easy scapegoats for the rise of Islamist terrorism. Ware argued that in the post-7/7 era, it was simply unacceptable for those claiming to lead the Muslim community to sustain a position where on one hand they had vowed to root out extremism and come down harshly upon it<sup>457</sup>, and on the other, they were reluctant to denounce specific cases of sympathy for extremists or to distance themselves from affiliate organisations that held personalities with ‘radical views’ in high regard<sup>458</sup>.

To make his argument, Ware persistently challenged leading MCB figures, including Secretary General Sir Iqbal Sacranie and Deputy Secretary General, Muhammad Abdul Bari, to clearly and directly condemn the tactic of suicide bombing by Palestinians in Israel. Ware, by his own admission, had set this as a sort of litmus test:

The reason I focused on Israel ... is because I think the Israel-Palestine conflict presents the toughest test, in a way, for all the high-minded principles, including tolerance and peace, which political Islam claims to have,

[and, in response to accusations of bias in his questioning technique]

I appreciate the Middle East conflict has a dynamic of its own, but there were people on the MCB who felt it was justifiable to support the targeting of civilians in Israel on theological grounds but not in London. I think those two positions must be incompatible, I really do.<sup>459</sup>

Ware also challenged the MCB on its non-attendance of the UK’s Holocaust Memorial Day event,<sup>460</sup> as well as on Iqbal Sacranie’s presence at a memorial service for Shaykh Ahmed Yasin, the spiritual leader of Hamas who was assassinated in a targeted strike by the Israeli military. In the meantime, an investigative article was published in *The Observer* newspaper to coincide with Ware’s programme. Its findings overlapped with Ware’s claims of double standards towards extremism within the MCB – drawing attention to sympathies with Pakistan’s *Jamaat-e-Islami* (JI) among some of MCB’s larger and more influential affiliates and arguing that the JI and its founder, Maulana Abul A’la Maududi, subscribed to extremist, separatist views that were incompatible with the liberal, secular democracy of

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<sup>457</sup> The MCB organised a meeting of Muslim leaders and scholars on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2005 at which a declaration was issued condemning the 7/7 attacks and pronouncing that ‘It is incumbent upon all of us, Muslims and non-Muslims - to help the authorities with any information that may lead to the planners of last week’s atrocity being brought to justice.’ The full text of the statement is available at: ‘Muslim leaders’ declaration on bombs’ [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/4696969.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/4696969.stm) [accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2012].

<sup>458</sup> Op. cit. Also Mike Robinson, Editor, BBC Panorama ‘Response to MCB Complaints’ 30<sup>th</sup> September 2005 at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/panorama/4297490.stm> [accessed on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2011].

<sup>459</sup> James Silver, ‘Interview: John Ware. ‘It’s the last chance for Panorama’ *The Guardian* 21<sup>st</sup> August 2006.

<sup>460</sup> Echoed in an editorial in *The Observer*: ‘Muslim leaders in feud with BBC’ 14<sup>th</sup> August 2005.

modern Britain.<sup>461</sup> *The Observer* also suggested, as did Ware in his film, that the MCB was wielding its influence to stifle creativity and diversity in an upcoming Festival of Muslim Cultures, in the name of preserving religious orthodoxy.<sup>462</sup>

However, these efforts were received with suspicion, indignation and defensiveness by the MCB who accused the BBC of succumbing to pressures from the 'pro-Israeli' lobby. Sacranie declared that he refused to pass the 'Israel Test',<sup>463</sup> which he considered to be a disingenuous ploy to de-legitimise the MCB and to portray their principled political stances in a negative light, thus, undermining the entire notion of Muslim political engagement and therefore of Muslim identity politics itself. The MCB fired off furious press releases, and letters to the BBC and *The Observer*, charging them with poorly researched and agenda-driven journalism and arguing that the various journalists and commentators involved were engaged in a 'witch-hunt' against it aiming to 'purposefully sabotage' British Muslim efforts at political participation.<sup>464</sup>

The following year, similar accusations were levelled by Martin Bright, in a *Dispatches* documentary<sup>465</sup> and an accompanying pamphlet, in which he argued that the government, and especially the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, were engaged in a 'love affair with radical Islamism'.<sup>466</sup> This, he elaborated, was a gravely mistaken policy of engaging with non-violent, but 'reactionary' Muslim groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood abroad, and its counterpart organisations in the UK, as a strategy with which to combat the spread of violent extremist ideas in the Muslim community. Bright relied on a series of leaked documents from a civil servant<sup>467</sup> at the Foreign Office for his information, which related to a number of occasions where officials in the FCO's Engaging with the Islamic World

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<sup>461</sup> Martin Bright, 'Radical links of UK's 'moderate' Muslim group' *The Observer* 14<sup>th</sup> August 2005.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid., and Ware, 'A Question of Leadership' Panorama, BBC1 21<sup>st</sup> August 2005.

<sup>463</sup> Cf. 'MCB responds to The Observer's 'investigation'' MCB Press Release, 14<sup>th</sup> August 2005 [http://www.mcb.org.uk/media/presstext.php?ann\\_id=159](http://www.mcb.org.uk/media/presstext.php?ann_id=159) [accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2011], and Sir Iqbal Sacranie, 'British Muslims are judged by 'Israel test'', *The Observer* 21<sup>st</sup> August 2005.

<sup>464</sup> 'John Ware's Panorama programme – a witch-hunt against British Muslims', MCB Press Release, 20<sup>th</sup> August 2005 [http://www.mcb.org.uk/media/presstext.php?ann\\_id=160](http://www.mcb.org.uk/media/presstext.php?ann_id=160) [accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> July 2011].

It is worth noting here that what the MCB will have considered to be self defence on its own part, has led to charges of double standards on free speech. So attempts by the MCB to respond to what it perceived as attacks from the media have been rebutted as intolerance towards the exercise of free speech by those who would criticise the MCB, while at the same time demanding that they maintain the right to express offensive criticisms of those with whom they disagree. A prominent example would be Iqbal Sacranie's description of homosexuality as 'harmful', and 'not acceptable' on the PM Programme, BBC Radio 4, 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2006.

<sup>465</sup> Martin Bright 'Who speaks for Muslims?' *Dispatches*, Channel 4. Broadcast in July 2006

<sup>466</sup> Martin Bright 'When Progressives Treat with Reactionaries: The British state's flirtation with radical Islamism' *Policy Exchange* (London, July 2006).

<sup>467</sup> Later revealed to be a Mr Derek Pasquill, who subsequently faced a court case (eventually dropped) and suspension from his job at the FCO. Cf. Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad* (2009), pp.127-128.

Group (EIWG) positively pushed for dialogue with and even the promotion of groups and individuals who were ‘reactionary’ and ‘Islamist’. Bright contended that the EIWG’s preferred stance of leniency towards figures from abroad such as Shaykh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi and Delwar Hossain Sayeedi, as well as UK groups like FOSIS and YMO;<sup>468</sup> rather than acting as a desired ‘buffer’ for violent extremism, instead served only to legitimise intolerant and illiberal views towards religions other than Islam, towards women, homosexuals and towards democracy itself. He accused many of these groups and figures of having inconsistent positions on violence – denouncing it in front of western audiences and sanctioning it as an acceptable tactic in places such as Israel and Iraq. Furthermore, he concurred with John Ware’s argument, which was basically a version of the ‘conveyor belt’ thesis. This was that even if these non-violent groups were deemed to be ready partners from within Islamism who were willing to work with the government in tackling and isolating violent extremism, they nonetheless (even if unassumingly!) acted as stepping stones via which disaffected young Muslims could hop from ‘moderate radicalism’ to its more extreme, and violent versions of Islamism.

#### **5.4.2 The rise of ‘apolitical Islam’:**

This ‘conveyor belt’ understanding of the process of radicalisation was finding increasing favour within the liberal left. It insisted that truly moderate Islam did not concern itself with political ideologies or political affairs. The implication of this was that truly moderate Muslims needed to be either apolitical, or at least to be non-dissenting from the political status quo – since any dissent or vocal political activism from a Muslim would make them an *Islamist* – and thus place them at the start of the conveyor belt moving through radicalisation and towards violent extremism. In this context, a number of self-professed ‘apolitical Muslim’ groups were indeed appearing on the Muslim representation scene.

These groups included the British Muslim Forum (BMF) and the Sufi Muslim Council (SMC), both of whom were set up apparently to fulfil alternative roles to that of the MCB – that of bringing together Muslim groups across the country, and/or representing British Muslims to government, the media and other official arenas. The BMF, like the MCB, was an umbrella group, but its affiliates consisted mainly of Sufi/Barelwi mosques.<sup>469</sup> The SMC on the other hand did not appear to have an easily definable constituency as such, yet both

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<sup>468</sup> Cf. Table 1 ‘Glossary of UK Muslim representative/lobby groups’, pp.222-227.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid., for more information on these organisations.

of these groups claimed to be speaking for the silent, apolitical majority of British Muslims who apparently resented their religion being hijacked for political purposes by the likes of the MCB. These new groups contended that Islamism had kept a hold on British Muslim community leadership for too long; and in regularly and painstakingly arguing that there should be a clear and absolute demarcation between Islam and Islamism, they sought to present a somewhat polarised landscape of the Muslim community in which they were the bona fide representatives of adherents to the former (the majority, who were law abiding, everyday citizens) and in which the latter, the Islamists, were holding disproportionate sway, often with self-serving motives that were not aligned with the aspirations of the majority.

Also within this general trend were the more localised or specialist voices of new quasi-intellectual/academic groups and consultancies. These included Dr Taj Hargey of the Muslim Education Centre of Oxford (MECO), British Muslims for Secular Democracy (BMSD) founded by the columnist Yasmin Alibhai-Brown who acted as a trustee and prominent spokesperson, Ed Husain and his Quilliam Foundation, and Haras Rafiq (initially linked with the SMC) who set up CENTRI (Counter Extremism Consultancy, Training Research and Interventions). As specialist groups, these differed from the aforementioned representative bodies in that they did not seek to directly represent the grassroots in the same way that the BMF, SMC, MCB, or even radical voices such as HT and others did. Instead they chose to engage with government and the media on the basis of their expertise. This was largely derived from personal experience, with many of these groups employing or relying on former extremists who had denounced their pasts and embraced ‘moderate’ Islam. Again this was often a purportedly apolitical religiosity, and often centred around spirituality. Yet what was most peculiarly consistent about these individuals and the groups within which they worked was their near-obsessive opposition to the use of Muslim identity in the political sphere.<sup>470</sup> The paradox of this position was that on one hand, it was arguing that Muslims were apolitical, and that they should leave their religion out of politics, and on the other, these groups were engaging heavily in politics in contestation with the MCB and others, overwhelmingly on issues relating to Muslims. So while arguing that the ‘silent majority’ of authentic Muslims were apolitical, they were demonstrating themselves to be deeply engaged in politics, *as Muslims*, albeit extremist ones. This attitude put them at odds with the more long-lived Muslim groups,

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<sup>470</sup> Maajid Nawaz, ‘How the government should handle the ‘Muslim Question’” *New Statesman* (5<sup>th</sup> December 2011).

primarily the MCB, which, as I have demonstrated in earlier chapters, was founded on the very idea of Muslim political agency, with Muslim-ness as the primary marker of identity. Another notable consistency was a conspicuous acquiescence to the political status quo, or at the very least, silence, on foreign policy issues that were otherwise highly contentious among UK Muslims – namely Iraq and Afghanistan.

The official reception that such groups received from government was warm and encouraging. Communities Secretary Ruth Kelly, and her successor Hazel Blears each in turn made it clear that they were amenable to cooperation with newly formed bodies that better suited their agenda, and moreover, that they were willing to end, or freeze cordial relations with existing bodies that were not so readily enthusiastic about the direction of government policy.<sup>471</sup> For the MCB, this was seen as a direct threat,<sup>472</sup> and an affront to their right to differ with government on matters of principle.<sup>473</sup> The MCB and others responded by pointing out these new government interlocutors/advisors were by far lacking in the credibility due to their detachment from grassroots Muslim institutions<sup>474</sup>. This did not seem to halt their progress. These new bodies had the benefit of being led by individuals who were themselves very well connected in the media, government departments and quangos and thus were able to secure prominent exposure and highly placed support in a relatively short time.

Nonetheless, for some of these bodies, their heavy reliance on the sway of a handful of prominent individuals proved to be a cause for their swift descent into obscurity. Beyond sparse, intermittent activities centring around key personalities,<sup>475</sup> they have been largely absent from the day-to-day issues affecting ordinary Muslims. Activities have focused on

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<sup>471</sup> 'Minister Backs New Muslim Group' *BBC News*, 19<sup>th</sup> July 2006  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/5193402.stm> [accessed on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2011].

Ruth Kelly, 'Britain: our values, our responsibilities' speech to Muslim organisations on working together to tackle extremism, London, 10<sup>th</sup> October 2006.

<sup>472</sup> MCB 'MCB responds to Secretary of State Ruth Kelly MP' 15<sup>th</sup> October 2006. Full text of letter available at: [http://www.mcb.org.uk/features/features.php?ann\\_id=1537](http://www.mcb.org.uk/features/features.php?ann_id=1537) [accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2012].

<sup>473</sup> Author's interview with MCB official, wishing to remain anonymous, October 2011.

<sup>474</sup> Cf. 'Martin Bright's C4 Documentary: Part of a Campaign to Divide and Rule', MCB Press Release, 13<sup>th</sup> July 2006 available at [http://www.mcb.org.uk/media/presstext.php?ann\\_id=214](http://www.mcb.org.uk/media/presstext.php?ann_id=214) [accessed on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2011] in which an SMC representative is described as 'discredited' and it is queried 'what level of support – if any - he actually had within the Muslim communities across the UK which he is now claiming to represent.'

See also Shehla Khan, 'New Sufis for New Labour' *The Muslim News* 25<sup>th</sup> August 2006.

Additionally, former British Ambassador to Uzbekistan, Craig Murray, has claimed that the SMC was funded by the CIA, cf. Craig Murray, 'Sufi Muslim Council a CIA/Karimov Front' 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2009, available at: [http://www.craigmurray.org.uk/archives/2009/03/sufi\\_muslim\\_cou/](http://www.craigmurray.org.uk/archives/2009/03/sufi_muslim_cou/), [accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2013].

<sup>475</sup> The SMC's most recent project was a five-venue tour with Shaykh Hisham Kabbani in July 2010, their apparent spiritual leader who had also featured prominently in all their previous activities.

denouncing terrorism and ‘Islamism’, yet there is no evidence of any real efforts to engage with ‘bread and butter’ issues concerning Muslim communities such as education, employment, youth work, to mention a few. Indeed the BMF has since 2008 been virtually defunct after issuing a statement in support of the government’s highly controversial proposal to introduce 42-day detention without charge for terrorism suspects, which led to a split in its ranks.

Whilst the MCB has soldiered on, it has been weighed down by the complexity of its set-up, with committees and sub-committees galore, and no straightforward way for individuals to become involved except through membership of an affiliated organisation, or through personal connections.<sup>476</sup> Accusations that I have mentioned earlier regarding a lack of transparency, outreach and a broader representation of the UK’s Muslim communities are not without foundation, and suggestions for improvement have long been put forward by well-wishers.<sup>477</sup> Despite these structural difficulties, the MCB’s grassroots support level has gone up, as greater energy has been invested in community empowerment schemes, work with young people in schools, mentoring initiatives, leadership development programmes, joining civic partnerships and coalitions, and running health campaigns to mention just a few.<sup>478</sup> None of the newer advocacy bodies have offered this level of service to the community and certainly not with such consistency. In fact it is doubtful whether they enjoy the commensurate level of grassroots support in order to be able to implement such schemes. However, with the most active of these groups being consultancy/think-tank – type bodies rather than community organisations with a membership or institutional base, their level of community support is difficult to gauge. Yet, just as the MCB cannot claim to be fully representative of British Muslims, neither can it be said that the post-2005 ‘apolitical’ set of Muslim groups do not represent anyone at all.

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<sup>476</sup> Cf. MCB, ‘The Muslim Council of Britain – its structure, history and workings’ (2002), p.6, for an outline of the organisation’s structure, its various specialist committees and office-bearers.

<sup>477</sup> For examples cf.: Yahya Birt, ‘The Next Ten Years: an open letter to the MCB’ *emel magazine* issue 46, July 2008, and Mohammed Amin, ‘The Muslim Council of Britain’s need for constitutional reform’ 20<sup>th</sup> January 2011, available at his website: [http://www.mohammedamin.com/Community\\_issues/MCB-constitutional-reform.html](http://www.mohammedamin.com/Community_issues/MCB-constitutional-reform.html) [accessed on 6th December 2011].

<sup>478</sup> Some examples include: Footsteps – a mentoring scheme for young Muslim schoolchildren; the MCB Leadership Development Programme (run annually since 2004); the Young Muslim Beacon Awards (run annually since 2008); regular partnerships with Citizens UK, a grassroots campaigns alliance working to promote proactive political engagement in diverse communities; and a dedicated Muslim Spiritual Care project run in partnership with the National Health Service.

## 5.5 British Muslims – a changed identity politics in a changing political landscape

By 2006/7 it had become increasingly clear that the future of British Muslim identity politics was in considerable flux. If one thing was for certain, it was that securitisation and the terror threat from extremism had come to dominate the relationship between the government and Muslim community groups in an unprecedented manner. Naturally, this affected the way that identity politics developed – both in terms of priorities, dynamics, and their style of conduct.

The arrival of a multitude of representative groups and the growth of an ‘ex-extremist’ advisory sector meant that each Muslim representative organisation was now open to greater scrutiny, and comparisons were regularly conducted between them. A natural consequence was that introspection ensued within existing groups and steps were taken to become more relevant and engage with current issues and to deal with weaknesses in a productive manner. This was especially true of the MCB, which gradually became more reconciled with the presence of other (‘competitor’) umbrella and advocacy groups. For instance, it undertook to cooperate with the BMF on the matter of MINAB, where both groups sat on the Board’s steering committee.

Over time, the MCB has gradually shown itself to be more open to seeking common cause with others *despite* major differences. Whereas previously, it had made little effort to shake off the reputation of being the exclusive preserve of orthodox Muslims,<sup>479</sup> 2007 saw the MCB take steps to openly support the Equality Act, which included new laws against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.<sup>480</sup> Despite the inclusion of a firm addendum to its statement maintaining the Islamic theological opposition to homosexuality, this step was welcomed by gay rights campaigners and groups, some of

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<sup>479</sup> Accusations which have been regularly levelled at the MCB by the ‘liberal left’ – see Section 3, above.

<sup>480</sup> ‘MCB statement on SORs’ 30<sup>th</sup> April 2007 [http://www.mcb.org.uk/media/presstext.php?ann\\_id=250](http://www.mcb.org.uk/media/presstext.php?ann_id=250) [accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2011]. It is arguable that the MCB’s opposition, along with a host of other faith groups, to the introduction of same-sex marriage in 2013 was a regression from this. [see ‘Same-sex marriage bill – act now!’ MCB Press Release, 4<sup>th</sup> February 2010, available at: [http://www.mcb.org.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2268](http://www.mcb.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2268), accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2013]. However I would argue that it is unfair to make such a deduction based on such an emotive and sensitive issue to religions in general. Indeed all major faiths made representations to some effect on this matter before the law was finally passed. Additionally, an important part of the MCB’s objection was its call for an exemption for mosques from being required to conduct same-sex marriages, on a par with the exemption granted to churches. See ‘MCB calls for equal gay marriage exemption for mosques’ *Engage website*, 18<sup>th</sup> December 2012, available at: <http://www.iengage.org.uk/news/2270-mcb-calls-for-equal-gay-marriage-exemption-for-mosques> [accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2013].

whom had earlier invited the MCB to join hands with them to eradicate the ‘twin hatreds of Islamophobia and Homophobia’.<sup>481</sup> Whilst the MCB didn’t go as far as taking this invitation further, their statement, as short and precise as it was, marked a small but potentially significant shift in thinking. In expressing support for the law, it demonstrated a new maturity in its political approach – one that appreciated that in campaigning for its own interests in a modern and pluralist Britain, it needed to understand and even empathise with the interests of other groups – even if they differed with them on fundamental issues. Therefore, that if it was to argue (as it regularly did) for a solution to the Equality Gap for Muslims – in terms of discrimination in employment for instance, then it had to equally appreciate that other minorities and historically disadvantaged groups deserved the same recognition from the state, and the same level of parity under the law, despite fundamental theological or value-based differences that it might have with them.

Further, in January 2008, the MCB finally took the decision to participate officially in the national Holocaust Memorial Day, dropping its previous stance of ‘staying away’<sup>482</sup> until the occasion became more generic and ‘more inclusive of other genocides’. This step had been the result of persistent and divisive deliberations within the organisation which pitted those who preferred not to participate until the condition of inclusivity had been met, against those who saw the MCB’s absence as a ‘self-inflicted wound’, providing opponents with a ‘stick with which to beat us’.<sup>483</sup> Again, this decision was a difficult one to make and still remains controversial among the MCB’s affiliates. Indeed, senior MCB figures stayed away again in 2009, perhaps in protest against the belligerence of Israel’s bombing campaign on Gaza during that time, and the UK government’s muted response.

Still, no matter how painful these controversial decisions were for those who made them, they were transformative, both for the MCB and for the Muslim communities. As much as the Council’s influence and leverage had diminished over the years, its so far unparalleled level of community support and its unmatched consistency of operation have served it well and have helped it to retain a (often wobbly) *primus inter pares* position. Subsequently, difficult decisions such as these made perceptible, if unassuming ripples further afield

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<sup>481</sup> Extract of a letter from Peter Tatchell of OutRage! to Sir Iqbal Sacranie, quoted in: ‘Muslim leader urged: drop homophobia. Gay group calls for solidarity against intolerance’ available at: <http://www.petertatchell.net/religion/muslimleader.htm> [accessed on 13th June 2013].

<sup>482</sup> Detractors of the MCB position preferred to call it a boycott.

<sup>483</sup> Vikram Dodd and Hugh Muir, ‘Senior Muslims tried to reverse Holocaust Memorial Day snub’ *The Guardian* 27<sup>th</sup> January 2007.

within Britain's Muslim communities and networks, and added legitimacy and weight to those in the community who were already pushing for a less insular and more open understanding of civic cooperation.<sup>484</sup>

Additionally, signals have been made that structural reappraisals are underway in the form of a constitutional review for the MCB,<sup>485</sup> though these have been a very long time coming – as of 2013, changes in structure and constitution have yet to be implemented. Efforts have been made to be more inclusive of diversity within the organisation's executive posts, with women and young people featuring in these positions regularly in recent years. However, with the results of its elections still being effectively pre-determined by the Council's main affiliates, the emergence of fresh blood, and the contribution of individuals who are not linked to any of the major affiliates remains virtually impossible.

The case of Mohammed Amin, a Manchester accountant who put himself forward for the post of MCB Secretary General at its 2010 elections is illustrative of this point. Here was an individual who had been involved in various sub-committees of the MCB for a good couple of years, had enjoyed a distinguished career and had been of service to his local community in various capacities. In putting himself forward for the post he went to great efforts to highlight his suitability and his goals and ambitions for the MCB by publishing a manifesto and acquiring endorsements from a handful of prominent Muslim figures. Yet the outcome of the election was a foregone conclusion – basically because the main affiliate organisations<sup>486</sup> of the MCB had, as per tradition, decided well in advance to instruct their delegates to back Farooq Murad for the post, (Chairman of Muslim Aid and a long-time community activist and leader). Murad was highly qualified too and I am by no means arguing that Amin was necessarily a better candidate. The salient point here is that Amin's campaign was not given a fighting chance because he was a relative newcomer to the MCB and because he lacked the heavyweight backing from the main MCB affiliates that Murad

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<sup>484</sup> For example, prominent Muslim figures have since (at least) 2006 been in occasional discussion with gay rights groups regarding the potential for cooperation in tackling homophobia among Muslims and in tackling Islamophobia together. Cf. minutes of Equality and Diversity Forum (EDF) meeting, 18<sup>th</sup> January 2006, which records such discussions between Mohammed Aziz and Alan Wardle of Stonewall. Mohammed Aziz is cited to have been representing the MCB at this meeting, although the MCB later disowned his comments, nonetheless, his approach is representative of a growing approach among leading British Muslim figures. Minutes available at: [www.edf.org.uk/publications/MinsJan06Mtg.doc](http://www.edf.org.uk/publications/MinsJan06Mtg.doc) [accessed on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2013].

<sup>485</sup> Author's interviews with Yousuf Bhailok (MCB Secretary General 2000-2002), and other (anonymous) MCB officials, 10<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> October 2011.

<sup>486</sup> Here I refer specifically to the main British Muslim organisations of the reformist strand (see Chapter 2 of this thesis), or of reformist heritage. Specifically the national bodies of the UKIM, *Dawatul Islam*, IFE, YMO, MAB, ISB, YMUK and all their local branches and affiliated mosques, the delegates of which, together, form a sizeable voting bloc within the MCB.

enjoyed. In a sense, the election was over before it began.<sup>487</sup> This incident reflected cogently how the MCB was still a long way away from demonstrating a capacity for true inclusivity beyond the handful of groups to which it owed so much of its patronage, manpower and indeed its very foundation. It was almost as though these groups had invested so much hope and effort into the MCB that they had become obsessed with retaining control of its steering. Yet without giving genuine room for others to come forward, and without a fairer voting system, it will be impossible to see what a much more representative MCB would look like, and how its policy priorities and decisions might be affected.

### **Conclusion**

In order to assess the point at which British Muslim identity politics had arrived by 2010, let us conduct a brief comparison between this and the previous phase I have examined in Chapter 4.

*Where are we now with respect to the previous phase?*

To sum up, the period between 9/11 and 7/7 which I have referred to as ‘Turning Point 1’, can be characterised by the following main features:

Firstly, there was a peak in rapport between the government and the MCB. Although there were difficult times, the MCB did enjoy a pre-eminent and quasi-official position, as it was endorsed and promoted by the government in the wake of 9/11 as the voice of British Muslims. The then MCB Secretary General Yousuf Bhailok talks of having daily phone conversations to co-ordinate with the Home Secretary in the months following the attacks.<sup>488</sup> Additionally, government ministers, and even the Prime Minister himself were regular fixtures at MCB events; and MCB officials were regular guests at Downing Street, Parliament and the various government departments. For example, the MCB were invited to send a delegation to Downing Street for consultation with the Prime Minister in the run up to the decision to send troops to Afghanistan in 2001.<sup>489</sup> This was a highly publicised event, and the MCB was the only Muslim representative organisation to be invited.

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<sup>487</sup> Madeleine Bunting, ‘The MCB’s wonderland election’ *The Guardian* 18<sup>th</sup> June 2010.

Inayat Bunglawala, ‘Mohammed Amin resigns from the MCB’ at:

<http://inayatcorner.wordpress.com/2010/06/22/mohammed-amin-resigns-from-the-mcb/> 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2010 [accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2011].

<sup>488</sup> Author’s interview with Yousuf Bhailok, 10<sup>th</sup> October 2011.

<sup>489</sup> ‘Muslim delegation meets with Prime Minister’ *The Muslim News* 28<sup>th</sup> September 2001.

Contrast this with the government consultation with Muslims in the aftermath of 7/7 – the net was cast much wider than the MCB, which was now only one of several groups to be consulted.

This conferment of an ‘official status’ to the MCB symbolised a ‘coming of age’ for Muslim identity politics. It was a mutually beneficial arrangement for both the government and the MCB. The direct benefit for the MCB was that it had the ear of the government if it ever needed to raise an issue, and the government for its part, was assured that it had direct lines of communication into the Muslim community. Of course this is not to ignore that the MCB did not represent all components of Britain’s diverse Muslim communities, but the channel of communication was there, it was prominent and ‘above board’, and those who wished to use it knew what they had to do.

The period between 2001 and 2005 also witnessed the Muslim community gradually adopting a far less insular attitude, and a new sense of being ‘at ease’ with aspects of wider society that shared values and ambitions. This was manifested through greater participation in civic campaigns on shared issues and a huge diversification of self-expression, using an ever-broader range of media.

*By 2010, there had been regressions on a number of fronts:*

Since July 2005, we have seen that relations between government and Muslim groups have become progressively more strained, and more conditional, when it came to matters related to community cohesion and security. This was in spite of a far greater honesty and openness to introspection, self-criticism and difference between mainstream Muslim players. The main exception was that of new ‘government-friendly’ organisations, with whom the government established cordial, supportive relationships, but whose efficacy was questionable since they were less well established than the MCB and many of its affiliates. As we have seen, most of these organisations were either single-issue focused, had sporadic or short-lived activity, or eventually faded into some level of obscurity.

A major contributing factor to these strained relations was the Prevent strand of the Contest scheme, which contributed significantly to a loss of trust and rise in suspicion between local Muslim groups and communities, and the government. New and more stringent legal developments which sought to criminalise speech acts that were deemed harmful also fed into a growing atmosphere of distrust and resentment among Muslim

communities who felt that they were being unfairly targeted and that their highly cherished freedoms to criticise and speak openly on many aspects of politics and even religion were being unduly restricted. Many of the attempts that were made to implement these laws proved ultimately to be difficult to uphold in court and had the undesired attempt of creating martyr figures from among the outspoken, obnoxious and (perhaps!) dangerous individuals that they were targeted against.

Insofar as dialogue was concerned, the nature of government-community conversation had returned again to a far more abrupt nature. Engagement was now conditional and subject to prerequisites set by the government. Rather than the flexible, almost empathetic approach that had been used post-9/11, there was now a 'take-it-or-leave-it style' characterised by a fair amount of public grandstanding and ultimatums being issued by the government.

On the other hand, positive developments have included greater steps towards transparency and openness in Muslim community groups, as a result of the more intense and often hostile public scrutiny that they were faced with, notably from quarters within the media. While the conditions for these developments may have been hostile and high-pressured, they have yielded community groups that have become more willing to reform and embrace progress and change. In addition, many of those lobbying for 'Muslim' causes have invested greater efforts into putting their message across through the media and through civil society campaigning, recognising that government preoccupation with securitisation meant that non-governmental avenues were more effective options for their purposes.

Has this period been a case of 'two steps back' being taken, following the post-9/11 'one step forward'? Time will tell. With the arrival of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government in 2010, details of engagement with Muslim communities are emerging gradually. The Conservative Party is not known to be keen on the notion of identity politics, having regularly criticised it whilst in opposition. This stance marks it apart from Labour's long tradition of championing the causes of society's minority and disadvantaged groups. Indications are that the future of Muslim identity politics, if it is to survive past the coming phase, is necessarily at something of a crossroads. While some legal aspects of the Equality Gap have been substantively tackled, the religious hatred

legislation remains something of an open wound, facing charges of being something of a dud law – one that, at best, fills a gap in technicalities rather than in equalities.<sup>490</sup>

The nature of the gap itself has also experienced a shift. On one hand, it has been narrowed through the abolition of blasphemy legislation in 2008, but on the other hand, issues of Islamophobia still persist, and are arguably worsening. Recent times have seen the English Defence League (EDL) take on the mantle of the BNP, which in turn is ever more anxious to gain respectability, having enjoyed an (apparently short-lived) spurt of electoral successes at the local council and European parliament levels in 2008 and 2009. Education and awareness regarding Islamophobia is needed as much as ever, evidenced by uproar in reaction to the speech of Conservative Party Chairman, Baroness Warsi in 2011, which warned that Islamophobia was the last remaining socially acceptable prejudice among British polite society. She argued that it had ‘passed the dinner table test’, and was seen by many as ‘normal and uncontroversial’.<sup>491</sup> While her pronouncement could conceivably be criticised as ill-advised,<sup>492</sup> and is naturally open to question and debate, it was certainly not made without context. A whole host of public figures and commentators had recently taken issue with the very notion of Islamophobia, questioning the extent of its existence or arguing that it was disingenuously over-exaggerated. Others had indulged in casual anti-Muslim comments that were designed to positively test the boundaries of the acceptable, in ways that would have been roundly denounced if they had been made about other minority groups.<sup>493</sup> As Tariq Modood has noted:

Muslims are frequently criticised in the comment pages of the respectable press in a way that few, if any, other minority groups are. Muslims often remark that if, in such articles, the words ‘Jews’ or ‘blacks’ were substituted for ‘Muslims’, the newspapers in question would be attacked as racist and, indeed, be vulnerable to legal proceedings. Just as the hostility against Jews,

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<sup>490</sup> Goodall, ‘Incitement to religious hatred: all talk and no substance?’ *The Modern Law Review* (2007) Vol. 70:1, Simon Thompson, ‘Freedom of expression and hatred of religion’ *Ethnicities* January 2012 Vol.12:2, pp.215-232.

<sup>491</sup> Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, ‘My Faith’ *Sir Sigmund Sternberg Interfaith Lecture* delivered at Leicester University, 20<sup>th</sup> January 2011.

<sup>492</sup> Indeed it was criticised as exactly that, cf. Charles Moore, ‘It was selfish – and wrong – of Lady Warsi to give that speech’ *The Telegraph* 21<sup>st</sup> January 2011.

<sup>493</sup> Warsi cited Polly Toynbee, ‘I am an Islamophobe and proud of it’ *The Independent* 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1997, as well as Rod Liddle who delivered a speech entitled ‘Islamophobia? Count me in!’ [Warsi, ‘My Faith’, (2011)]. Other examples include Martin Amis who, commenting in an interview on the 2006 foiled transatlantic aircraft terror plot opined that: ‘The Muslim community will have to suffer until it gets its house in order.’ What sort of suffering? Not letting them travel. Deportation – further down the road. Curtailing of freedoms. Strip-searching people who look like they’re from the Middle East or from Pakistan... Discriminatory stuff, until it hurts the whole community and they start getting tough with their children.’ Ginny Dougary, interview with Amis in *The Times Magazine*, 9<sup>th</sup> September 2006. See also Peter Osborne, ‘The shameful Islamophobia at the heart of Britain’s press’ *The Independent* 7<sup>th</sup> July 2008.

in various times and places, has been a varying blend of anti-Judaism (hostility to a religion) and anti-Semitism (hostility to a racialised group), so it is difficult to gauge to what extent contemporary British Islamophobia is 'religious' and to what extent 'racial'.<sup>494</sup>

As for Muslim advocacy groups, they have learned a great deal during this period, and come out with increased confidence and greater resilience. On balance, the MCB's experience of 'detachment' from government, as painful as it may have been, was ultimately beneficial. It has opened up options for a serious reassessment of approach, but serious decisions need to be made as to whether civic partnerships and campaigns will be the way forward for Muslim political agency, or whether lobbying of the government will regain its position as the main preoccupation of Muslim organisations.

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<sup>494</sup> Tariq Modood, 'Muslims and the politics of difference' in *Muslims in Britain: race place and identities* ed. by Peter Hopkins and Richard Gale (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p.204.

### **Postscript:**

Although this thesis officially covers the period between the years 1960-2010, developments since 2010 have been both fast and significant. Therefore, before I move on to my concluding chapter, I take a look here at three important themes where such developments are being played out, both to enrich my final conclusions and to highlight areas for potential further research.

#### **The future of multiculturalism and of identity politics: a changing game**

##### *i- Multiculturalism in the balance:*

As we saw in Chapter 5, the aftermath of the 7/7 attacks ushered in much probing and reflection over the future of multiculturalism. Had multiculturalism as policy been a contributory factor to a divisive climate in Britain, within which citizens could bring themselves to launch a terror attack in their own country? Had we ‘focused far too much on the “multi” and not enough on the common culture’?<sup>495</sup> Was it time to now discard it and for the state to take the lead in calling for a more forthright national unity which demanded more outward signs of loyalty and assimilation to a shared British culture from minority communities, while making less allowances for their specific needs or claims? These were questions that were being asked increasingly by voices in the centre-Left of politics, and with the combined pressures of securitisation and the electoral threat from the rise of the far right, as well as anti-immigration parties such as the UK Independence Party (UKIP), these thoughts soon began to find their home in day-to-day politics.

This trend had an impact in the area of the government’s relations with community representative groups. In Chapter 5, we saw how the government began to shift its approach to identity politics by signalling that it would be open to engagement and co-operation with any group that fulfilled the requisite requirements in ‘tackling extremism and defending our shared values’.<sup>496</sup> The engagement of community representative organisations with the government was now firmly based upon conditionality. In addition to the veiled threat made by Ruth Kelly to the MCB on its history of absence from the Holocaust Memorial Day service,<sup>497</sup> another important example is the standoff that took place between the government and the MCB in 2009 over the position of its Deputy

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<sup>495</sup> Trevor Phillips, ‘Sleepwalking into Segregation’ (2005).

<sup>496</sup> Ruth Kelly, ‘Britain: Our values, our responsibilities’, speech delivered in London, October 2006.

<sup>497</sup> See Chapter 5 of this thesis.

Secretary General, Dr Daud Abdullah. Abdullah had signed a declaration at a ‘Global Anti Aggression Campaign’ conference in Istanbul regarding the Israeli offensive on Gaza in January 2009. The eighth point within the declaration took the view that it was:

The obligation of the Islamic Nation to regard the sending of foreign warships into Muslim waters, claiming to control the borders and prevent the smuggling of arms to Gaza, as a declaration of war, a new occupation, sinful aggression, and a clear violation of the sovereignty of the Nation. This must be rejected and fought by all means and ways.<sup>498</sup>

This point was interpreted by many observers, including the Communities Secretary Hazel Blears, as a call to arms against British troops, in view of the Prime Minister Gordon Brown’s recent suggestion that the Royal Navy could be sent to the region to help enforce an arms blockade on Gaza. Blears’ response was to ‘suspend’ engagement with the MCB pending the outcome of an investigation, while stating in no uncertain terms that it expected the outcome of this investigation to result in the resignation of Dr Abdullah from the MCB, ‘and for the MCB to confirm their opposition to acts of violent extremism’.<sup>499</sup> This suspension of engagement soon became long-term as the MCB rejected Blears’ correspondence as an ‘unacceptable... attempt to undermine the independence of the MCB’,<sup>500</sup> and intervening talks held with the MCB by Muslim parliamentarians,<sup>501</sup> as well as diverse other representations,<sup>502</sup> proved fruitless in moving matters forward.<sup>503</sup>

While this approach from the government can be criticised as meddling, interfering and even ‘dictatorial’, what we have also seen happening in recent times has been a sea-change within the structures of identity politics. This has partly been in response to governmental

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<sup>498</sup> Point 8, ‘A statement by the religious scholars and proselytisers (*du’a*) of the Islamic Nation (*ummah*) to all rulers and peoples concerning events in Gaza’ (commonly referred to as The Istanbul Declaration). Available at: <http://www.hurryupharry.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/istpdf.pdf> [accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2012].

<sup>499</sup> Hazel Blears’ letter to Dr Abdul Bari, MCB Secretary General, dated 13<sup>th</sup> March 2009. A copy is available at: [http://image.guardian.co.uk/sys-files/Guardian/documents/2009/03/23/blears\\_letter.pdf](http://image.guardian.co.uk/sys-files/Guardian/documents/2009/03/23/blears_letter.pdf) [accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2012].

<sup>500</sup> Inayat Bunglawala, then spokesman for the MCB, quoted in: Vikram Dodd, ‘Muslim Council accuses government of undermining independence’ *The Guardian* 26<sup>th</sup> March 2009.

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>502</sup> Two such examples are: Brian Whitaker, ‘Alienating British Muslims’ *The Guardian Comment is Free* 24<sup>th</sup> March 2009; and Geoffrey Alderman, ‘Hazel Blears must back down’ *The Guardian Comment is Free* 25<sup>th</sup> March 2009.

<sup>503</sup> The government later resumed relations with the MCB in January 2010, after more successful mediation between Muslim parliamentarians and the Council’s leadership, and a written assurance from Muhammad Abdul Bari to the new Communities Secretary, John Denham, undertaking that the attendances of MCB office bearers of international conferences would, in future, be subject to set protocols. However, a number of MCB officials I have interviewed (all requesting anonymity) have said that government-MCB relations have not returned to the same levels of familiarity and trust that they had enjoyed previously.

pressures, which ultimately forced the MCB into a position of complete self-reliance and self-sufficiency. Daud Abdullah himself argued that:

If anything good is to emerge from this saga it should be the affirmation of the independence of MCB. However much Hazel Blears may dislike or disagree with its views she should respect this independence and deal with its representatives as equal citizens, just as it deals with the representatives of other communities.<sup>504</sup>

Such a position placed the onus on the MCB to demonstrate its credibility and worthiness solely on its own merit, without relying on connections, networks or support from government departments or agencies, as it may have done in its earlier years.

Yet it is also fair to say that other circumstances have played a part. These include the growing involvement of the younger generations within communal organisational structures. For many of these individuals, the culturally-infused norms and traditions of the older generations simply do not hold much purchase. So the notion of community representation that is run almost exclusively by a rotation of older men with links to the same group of organisations, even if convenient or effective, has been challenged far too many times for it to feasibly continue as the MCB's system of operation. In addition to this, the proliferation and ease of mass communication techniques through new media over the past few years has meant that the policy positions, actions, and indeed the inactions, of the MCB have been open to swifter and more intense circulation, commentary and scrutiny. On one hand, this has meant a greater workload for the (administratively stretched) organisation in managing these added challenges. But it also has provided new channels for communication and accountability with sections of Muslim and wider communities that it may never have otherwise reached. It proved imperative for the MCB to adapt to these new realities.

These challenges have been encountered in other communities as well, and along with the changing approach of the government, look set to have a strong bearing on the shape of identity politics into the future. In the following section, I will revisit the comparisons that I considered between Muslim and Jewish experiences of communal representation in Chapter 3, and cast a glance some of the relevant developments that have taken place within the MCB and the Board of Deputies of British Jews.

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<sup>504</sup> Daud Abdullah, 'My reply to Hazel Blears' *The Guardian* 26<sup>th</sup> March 2009.

ii- *Community Representation: Recent changes in both Muslim and Jewish identity politics*

Today's largest British Jewish and Muslim representative organisations (the Board and the MCB) have a substantial amount of features in common. While both maintain that they expend substantial effort to bring together disparate sections of their respective communities, their procedures for election and other routes to participation have often been criticised as unwieldy and outdated. Both are also regularly criticised for being unrepresentative, and for an undue absence of women and young people from their leaderships.<sup>505</sup> Both are accused of being out of touch and controlled by cliques, and both regularly face charges of pandering to the government or the establishment at the expense of authentically conveying community concerns. Additionally, both the MCB and the Board of Deputies have had their virtual monopoly on communal representation challenged and weakened by the emergence of newer groups in recent times. In the Jewish community, Independent Jewish Voices (IJV) was launched in 2007, arguing that:

‘...the broad spectrum of opinion among the Jewish population of this country is not reflected by those institutions which claim authority to represent the Jewish community as a whole. (and) ... that individuals and groups ... should feel free to express their views on any issue of public concern without incurring accusations of disloyalty.’<sup>506</sup>

In another (perhaps pre-emptive) move, evidently in recognition of the waning influence of the Board, a Jewish Leadership Council (JLC) was established in 2003.<sup>507</sup> This brought together leading Jewish organisations such as the Board, charities and prominent and ‘well connected’ personalities<sup>508</sup> to ‘act as a coordinating body’.<sup>509</sup> The JLC has since been growing in leverage and influence, but also been facing increased criticism. A notable example is that of Jonathan Arkush, a vice-president of the Board of Deputies who recently severely criticised the JLC as ‘unelected, unaccountable, and ...therefore unacceptable’ (for it to lead the Jewish community).<sup>510</sup> Arkush proceeded to swiftly and unreservedly apologise for his words, thus giving succour to the impression that he was pressured into doing so by

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<sup>505</sup> Geoffrey Alderman, ‘Disband this body of (un)representatives’ *The Jewish Chronicle* 1<sup>st</sup> March 2002; Alibhai-Brown, ‘Muslims can learn from this new Jewish group’ (2007).

<sup>506</sup> Declaration, Independent Jewish Voices available at: <http://ijv.org.uk/declaration/> [accessed on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2012].

<sup>507</sup> Initially the Jewish Community Leadership Council, the word ‘community’ was soon dropped. Cf. <http://www.thejlc.org/about-us/history/> [accessed on 26<sup>th</sup> April 2012].

<sup>508</sup> Geoffrey Alderman has referred to individual members of the JLC as the ‘funding fathers’ of the Jewish community – in a nod to the considerable financial backing that they provide to various communal institutions. Cf. Geoffrey Alderman, *The Communal Gadfly* (Brighton: Academic Studies Press, 2009), Section 1.

<sup>509</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>510</sup> Simon Roker, ‘Board vice-president’s attack on JLC prompts open warfare’ *The Jewish Chronicle* 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2012.

the JLC chairman who had suggested a reconsideration of its financial support for the Board.

Other signals of the Jewish communal establishment's recognition of the changing times include the formation of a JLC Committee on Women in Jewish Leadership, which has recently conducted a survey, the results of which it hopes to use as a basis for 'firm recommendations so that the Jewish community can reach a situation where women are properly and appropriately represented at leadership level'.<sup>511</sup> Also, 'Changing the Board', a youth-initiated campaign to push for more young and female voices to be heard at the Board of Deputies – whether through facilitating the affiliation to the Board of young people's groups, or encouraging women and young people to stand for election as deputies to the Board.<sup>512</sup> An integral part of this campaign has been pressuring the Board to adopt greater transparency and communication with the wider Jewish community and young people in particular, for instance through organising pre-Board Election hustings events and engagement in online social networks such as Twitter and Facebook.

The MCB for its part has also been under fire for having a stagnant, 'retrogressive' leadership.<sup>513</sup> The post-7/7 period has seen an abundance of Muslim organisations of all shades and structures seeking to speak for various sections of the Muslim community. Some have been more successful than others, as my discussion of them in Chapter 5 of this thesis shows.<sup>514</sup> While the MCB leadership has come to acknowledge the shortcomings in its structure and composition,<sup>515</sup> it has been slow to take any steps in rectification. After protracted internal debate and review, motions were finally passed at its annual general meeting in 2012 to create a 20% quota for women in the organisation's National Council, and for the post of Secretary General to become directly elected by delegates to the AGM (rather than chosen by the newly-elected National Council from amongst themselves, as had been the previous arrangement).<sup>516</sup> While these are definitely welcome developments

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<sup>511</sup> Commission for Women in Jewish Leadership (CWJL) webpage:

<http://www.thejlc.org/portfolio/commission-for-women-in-jewish-leadership/> [accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2012].

Also cf. the initial report, CWJL 'Gender Imbalance – The Status Quo' (2011).

<sup>512</sup> Changing the Board 'Mission Statement' at: [www.changingtheboard.wordpress.com/about/](http://www.changingtheboard.wordpress.com/about/) [accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2012].

<sup>513</sup> Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, 'The cloak of darkness is no exercise of civil liberties' *The Independent* 25<sup>th</sup> January 2010.

<sup>514</sup> Muslim organisations in Britain are also profiled in Table 1, pp.222-227.

<sup>515</sup> Author's interviews with several MCB officials, all choosing to remain anonymous, October and November 2011.

<sup>516</sup> 'Muslim Council re-elects leader, promotes female quotas', MCB Press Release, 11<sup>th</sup> June 2012. Available at: [http://www.mcb.org.uk/media/presstext.php?ann\\_id=490](http://www.mcb.org.uk/media/presstext.php?ann_id=490) [accessed on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2012].

for the cause of greater representation, democracy and transparency, they will not be implemented until the 2014 elections for the Secretary General and National Council. This begs the question of why the voting on these motions was not scheduled *ahead* of the elections at the AGM rather than *after* them. This would have allowed for the motions to be implemented straightaway, and thus for MCB to send out a far stronger message demonstrating its willingness to include more diverse and varied voices. Nonetheless, these changes will mean that future elections for the MCB's Secretary General will be necessarily a more competitive affair than they have ever been, since it will be harder for the main organisations among the MCB's affiliates to nominate and collectively back a preferred candidate in the manner that has been customary thus far.<sup>517</sup> There have also been rumours of receptiveness in government circles towards the creation of a more pliant Muslim Leadership Panel, which would perhaps overshadow and effectively replace the MCB, perhaps in a similar way to which some argue that the JLC is gradually overshadowing the Jewish Board of Deputies.<sup>518</sup>

Importantly both Jewish and Muslim representative groups have to deal with the reality of the multiple challenges facing multiculturalism in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Britain. In the age of global terrorism and securitisation, and particularly after the 7/7 attacks in London, multiculturalism as state policy has come under immense scrutiny, as many have questioned whether it has been to blame for encouraging 'separateness' among Britain's minority communities, and thus undermining the scope for loyalty and ultimately creating fertile conditions for the growth of radicalisation and extremism.<sup>519</sup> As I have discussed in Chapter 5, successive government ministers have taken this thinking on board, and it was reflected more and more clearly in the communities policy of the Labour government in its later years, as conditionality for engagement with community groups became the norm, and greater emphasis was placed on promoting 'Britishness' and a shared national identity.<sup>520</sup>

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<sup>517</sup> See Chapter 5, Section 4 of this thesis.

<sup>518</sup> 'Pickles and Warsi wrestle for control of Government strategy on anti-Muslim hatred' *Islamophobia Watch* <http://www.islamophobia-watch.com/islamophobia-watch/2011/11/19/pickles-and-warsi-wrestle-for-control-of-government-strategy.html> [accessed on 14th June 2012].

Introductory correspondence between the MLP and Eric Pickles (Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government) states: 'The impetus for the formation of the MLP is the absence of a constituted body that the Government, the European Parliament and established organisations (for example, the Church of England) are able to constructively converse with on matters relating to the British Muslim community.' Letter from Iftikhar Awan, MLP Co-ordinator to Eric Pickles (3<sup>rd</sup> November 2011); available at: [http://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/remitmembership\\_of\\_the\\_muslim\\_le\\_2#incoming-336750](http://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/remitmembership_of_the_muslim_le_2#incoming-336750) [accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2013].

<sup>519</sup> For an example of this type of argument see: Munira Mirza, Abi Senthikumar and Zein Ja'far, 'Living apart together: British Muslims and the paradox of multiculturalism' *Policy Exchange* (2007).

<sup>520</sup> Cf. Chapter 5 of this thesis.

This line of thinking has been picked up even more strongly by the Conservative-led coalition government since 2010, as exemplified by Prime Minister David Cameron's speech to a Security Conference in Munich, where he declared that the 'doctrine of state multiculturalism' had 'failed'.<sup>521</sup> Practical implications of this attitude for Muslim organisations have been visible in the antagonistic approach that Cameron and his supporters in the cabinet (such as the Home and Education Secretaries, Theresa May and Michael Gove) have maintained towards 'Islamists', who they have defined very broadly.<sup>522</sup> Examples include David Cameron's directive in 2010 that no Conservative politicians should attend the Islam Channel's Global Peace and Unity event,<sup>523</sup> causing his party's Co-Chairman, Baroness Warsi to pull out after having already committed to attend.<sup>524</sup> Theresa May's issuing of an exclusion order in 2010 to prevent a visit to the UK of the Indian Muslim 'televangelist' Dr Zakir Naik, in response to concerted campaigns from right-wingers, while earlier that year granting a visa to the far-right Dutch politician, Geert Wilders (despite his exclusion the previous year),<sup>525</sup> suggested double standards and victimisation to many Muslims.<sup>526</sup>

What this has meant for organisations such as the Board and the MCB is that putting aside the similarities and the contrasts that have existed between them over the years; they both now face the shared challenge of adapting their terms of operation to a political landscape which is becoming increasingly uneasy with the notion of affording recognition to group identity. So, while these very groups developed – with active encouragement and endorsement from the government – to speak for and represent the identity politics of religious minority communities, if they wish to continue to play a representative role in

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<sup>521</sup> David Cameron, speech at Munich Security Conference, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2011. Full transcript available at: <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference/> [accessed on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2012].

<sup>522</sup> The contents of this speech resonated with thinking that had been present within the Conservative Party during its time in opposition. A policy report produced by the Conservative Party's Group on National and International Security for Dame Pauline Neville Jones took the line that almost all British Muslim organisations and trends had links with Islamism, and argued that the government had been 'mistaken.. (to) conduct business or take such organisations or members of them as dialogue partners, the effect of this being to give them status while diminishing that of organisations and individuals sharing our values'. Instead, it recommended that government 'patronage' should only be offered to those organisations conforming to 'our values'. Conservative Party, *Uniting the Country* (2007), p.37

<sup>523</sup> An annual Muslim gathering which had regularly been attended by politicians from all parties in the past.

<sup>524</sup> 'Cameron caves in to anti-GPU witch-hunt, instructs Warsi not to attend' *Islamophobia Watch* 24<sup>th</sup> October 2010, available at: <http://www.islamophobia-watch.com/islamophobia-watch/2010/10/24/cameron-caves-in-to-anti-gpu-witch-hunt-instructs-warsi-not.html> [accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2013].

<sup>525</sup> Humayun Ansari, 'The Multiculturalism Backlash and the mainstreaming of Islamophobia post-9/11' in *Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims: Irish 'Religious' Conflict in Comparative Perspective* ed. by J Wolffe (forthcoming).

<sup>526</sup> 'Zakir Naik Exclusion Order a Serious Error of Judgement' MCB Press Release, 18<sup>th</sup> June 2010, available at: [http://www.mcb.org.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1097&Itemid=93](http://www.mcb.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1097&Itemid=93) [accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2013].

politics, they will need to become far more accessible, open and streamlined in their structure and operation. They will also need to reassess the premises upon which they justify their existence – for the MCB and other Muslim representative groups, this involves a resetting of agenda priorities (the Equality Gap) and the techniques through which their causes are furthered.

*iii. Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia – Jews and Muslims as both victims and perpetrators:*

Recent times have witnessed a dramatic rise in the prominence of the EDL, not least encouraged by the murder in May 2013 of a member of the armed forces in Woolwich by two men claiming to be acting in the name of Islam and in retaliation against British foreign policy in Muslim lands.<sup>527</sup> Even though the EDL remains a fringe, and extremist group, and even though the BNP, and its electoral fortunes, continue to suffer from infighting,<sup>528</sup> all indicators seem to nonetheless suggest that Islamophobia from the far-right is set to persist into the future period. This is only exacerbated by aspects of the media, including sensationalist stories that imply that Islam and Muslims are inherently insidious,<sup>529</sup> as well as irresponsible programming that gives extremists a wider audience than they would ever have reached otherwise, and one entirely disproportionate to the segment of the wider population who may share their views.<sup>530</sup> Further aggravation has been caused by misguided ‘revenge’ attacks, by equally fringe and extremist Muslims.<sup>531</sup>

There have been a number of recent academic comparisons made between current experiences of Islamophobia, and the anti-Semitism that the Jewish communities of Britain and Europe suffered in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries.<sup>532</sup> It has been argued that there is

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<sup>527</sup> Michael Adebolajo, one of the alleged perpetrators of the attack is recorded to have said: ‘we must fight them as they fight us... I apologise that women had to witness this today, but in our lands our women have to see the same’. Mentioning women brought in a new dimension, as responses from EDL supporters on social media began to call for the targeting of Muslim schools and mosques, and attacks on women and children.

<sup>528</sup> Matthew Goodwin, ‘Forever a False Dawn? Explaining the Electoral Collapse of the British National Party’ *Parliamentary Affairs* Vol. 66:2, April 2013.

<sup>529</sup> Joseph Harker, ‘This is how racism takes root’ *The Guardian* 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2012.

<sup>530</sup> National media outlets have been widely criticised for providing the oxygen of publicity to extremists from Muslim communities as well as the far-right. For instance, Anjem Choudary (formerly of *Al Mubajiroun*) was a guest on BBC *Newsnight* the following day after the Woolwich incident (23<sup>rd</sup> May 2013), and EDL leader Tommy Robinson appeared on BBC Radio 4’s *Today* programme following a suspected arson attack on a mosque in Muswell Hill, London that is widely suspected to have been carried out as ‘revenge’ against the Woolwich killing (11<sup>th</sup> June 2013).

<sup>531</sup> Cf. the recent case of six Muslim men who were convicted of plotting to carry out a gun and bomb attack on an EDL rally in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire. Paul Peachey, ‘Islamist gang of six jailed for at least 18 years each for plotting bomb attack on EDL rally’ *The Independent* 10<sup>th</sup> June 2013.

<sup>532</sup> Matti Bunzl, *Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: Hatreds old and new in Europe* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2007); Nasar Meer and Tehseen Noorani, ‘A sociological comparison of anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim

substantial similarity and overlap between the racism that Jewish communities experienced in the past, and that which Muslim communities are currently experiencing.<sup>533</sup> This is evidenced by the invocation of ‘cultural and biological discourses’ to emphasise ‘otherness’, and to draw into question the suitability of the ‘other’ to adjusting or living peacefully in the UK. For instance, both Muslims and Jews have faced suggestions that they are culturally unfamiliar with democracy and democratic processes due to radical or fundamentalist tendencies.<sup>534</sup> And just as the loyalty of Jews to Britain was brought into question by sections of the press and politicians in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century,<sup>535</sup> so Muslims today are often at the receiving end of the same suspicious, polarising question: are you British *or* Muslim?

Yet while the task of tackling Islamophobia might technically stand to benefit from the past experiences of British Jews in combating anti-Semitism, it is further compounded by attitudes and instances of Jewish Islamophobia on one hand, and Muslim anti-Semitism on the other. On the official level, both the MCB and the Board of Deputies of British Jews have on separate occasions accused the other of engaging in or sanctioning prejudice against the communities that they represent.<sup>536</sup> Often these sentiments can be intertwined with the highly emotive ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and indeed such accusations have most commonly flared up in relation to moments of Israeli military aggression.<sup>537</sup> Yet expressions of prejudice are also wider and deeper than this, with instances of anti-Semitic discourse reported to have been expressed in mosques by religious leaders and publications<sup>538</sup> as well as by political figures.<sup>539</sup> Jewish figures, for their part, have regularly

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sentiment in Britain’ *The Sociological Review* Vol. 56:2 (May 2008), pp. 195-219; Reuven Firestone, ‘Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism: History and Possibility’ *Arches Quarterly* Vol.4:7 (Winter 2010), pp. 42-53; Maleiha Malik, ‘Muslims are now getting the same treatment Jews had a century ago’ *The Guardian* 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2007.

<sup>533</sup> Ansari and Hafez, ‘Islamophobia: an introduction’ in *From the Far Right to the Mainstream* (2012), pp.7-28.

<sup>534</sup> Meer and Noorani, ‘A sociological comparison of anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment in Britain’ (2008).

<sup>535</sup> Malik, ‘Muslims are now getting the same treatment Jews had a century ago’ (2007).

<sup>536</sup> See Chapter 5, Section 3 of this thesis, on the ‘Israel test’, which was not the first time that the MCB protested that it was being pressured to tone down its criticism of Israel on account of appearing to condone anti-Semitism. Also Simon Rucker, ‘Muslim Council of Britain must be boycotted until reform’ *The Jewish Chronicle* 24<sup>th</sup> September 2009, in reference to rapprochement between the government and MCB after the Daud Abdullah incident.

<sup>537</sup> See as an example the exchange of correspondence between the MCB and the Board regarding the Jenin Massacre in 2002: Iqbal Sacranie, ‘Critics of Israel not anti-Semitic’ Letter to the Editor, *The Times* 13<sup>th</sup> May 2002, and Jo Wagerman, ‘Impact of the Middle East on Britain’ Letter to the Editor, *The Times* 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2002.

<sup>538</sup> ‘Undercover Mosque’, *Dispatches*, Channel 4. Broadcast on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2007.

It is important to note here that anti-Semitism expressed by Muslims in a religious context is apparently far less ambiguous to detect than the Islamophobia by Jews for the simple reason that, chronologically, the Jewish faith preceded Islam, thus there are numerous historic references to Jews in the Qur’an, many of

conflated anti-Zionist political stances with anti-Semitism, and given succour to populist far-right discourses on an inherently illiberal and extremist Islam, whose followers, ‘unlike other minorities... expected their host culture to adapt to meet their requirements.’<sup>540</sup>

Having said this, away from political and theological conflicts between both communities, as influential as they might be, there are also signs that dialogue collaboration between Muslim and Jewish institutions are helping to address Islamophobia on a practical level. In the same way that Muslim communal organisations have looked to the prior experience of British Jews, there have also been cases where Muslim efforts in addressing Islamophobia have turned towards Jewish endeavours in the area of anti-Semitism. One prominent recent example is the Tell MAMA Islamophobia monitoring helpline, which received guidance and advice from the CST, ‘to establish and professionalise itself.’<sup>541</sup> Cases such as this can hold much promise of productive cooperation and solidarity, rather than a rivalry of victim mentalities that critics of identity politics have warned against.<sup>542</sup> Yet at the same time, they can also draw attention to important discrepancies. One case in point is the recent grant that has been allocated by the Department of Education to the CST, to cover the costs of hiring security services for government funded Jewish schools. Muslim institutions have never enjoyed similar government assistance, and indeed, the decision to deploy police protection to ‘vulnerable Islamic sites’ in response to a number of ‘Woolwich revenge attacks’, has been seen as ‘long overdue’.<sup>543</sup> This point simply brings us back to the Equality Gap, by highlighting differential treatment. As I shall go on to argue in my concluding chapter, such discrepancies are better dealt with by cross-community dialogues and

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which are disingenuously or ignorantly taken as commentary on a contemporary context. Jewish scriptures do not, of course contain references to Islam or Muslims, thus there is no possibility of the converse. However Jewish figures and groups have been accused of unduly victimising Muslims or Muslim causes on matters of political stance as well as calling into question or belittling their experiences of Islamophobia. See for example Anthony Julius, *Trials of the Diaspora: A History of anti-Semitism in England* (New York: OUP, 2010), p. 536, where he accuses the MCB of Holocaust denial.

<sup>539</sup> Cf. Lord Ahmed’s recent resignation from the Labour Party on account of alleged anti-Semitic comments he made in a Pakistani television interview. Kunal Dutta, ‘Labour peer Lord Ahmed resigns from party over alleged anti-Semitic comments’ *The Independent* 14<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

<sup>540</sup> Melanie Phillips, ‘My immigrant family were proud to assimilate. I despair that too many today expect Britain to adopt THEIR culture’ *The Daily Mail* 7<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

<sup>541</sup> This relationship has been referred to several times by the CST. For example: ‘Tell MAMA launched today’ *CST Blog* 21<sup>st</sup> February 2012, available at: <http://blog.thecst.org.uk/?p=3459>, and ‘Tell MAMA – first annual report’ *CST Blog* 11<sup>th</sup> March 2013, available at: <http://blog.thecst.org.uk/?p=4154> [both accessed on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2013].

<sup>542</sup> Maleiha Malik, ‘How can British Muslim groups better protect themselves?’ *The Guardian* 11<sup>th</sup> June 2013.

<sup>543</sup> ‘Muslim Council of Britain welcomes steps to increase police patrols for vulnerable Islamic sites’ MCB Press Release, 10<sup>th</sup> June 2013. Available at: [http://www.mcb.org.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2342](http://www.mcb.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2342) [accessed on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2013].

alliances which promote the shared interests of communities with a view to narrowing the Equality Gap in all its manifestations.

## Chapter Six – Conclusions:

This thesis has been an effort to study the development of Muslim identity politics in the UK between the years 1960-2010, utilising the vantage point of a specific angle – issues of freedom of expression. It has used recognition theory to explain the motivations and justifications behind the emergence of Muslim identity politics and claims-making over recent decades, and argued that the existence of an Equality Gap has been the main reason for the continuation of this type of identity politics. By examining case-studies related to the theme of freedom of expression, it has identified different chronological phases in the development of Muslim identity politics, and highlighted important themes that have contributed to the path that this identity politics has followed. It has also considered and assessed some of the most recent developments, and their anticipated impact on the future.

For this concluding chapter, I will use four main questions to summarise and bring together the findings of my research, as well as looking to the prospects for future work that it can lead to. The first question helps to provide a sense of chronology and summary of the time-period covered by the thesis, while the last three questions correspond to the themes that I introduced in my introductory chapter – namely free speech, equality and identity politics:

- 1- What were the main phases in the trajectory of Muslim identity politics over the past 50 years, including their defining features?
- 2- How has free speech fared and how does it help us to understand the trajectory of Muslim identity politics in the UK?
- 3- The Equality Gap – has it been filled?
- 4- What next for Muslim identity politics – has it had its day? Is there a better way?

Following this assessment, I will evaluate the thesis as a whole, highlighting the key points that I will have demonstrated, and how they have contributed to the current body of research as well as discussing the limitations and constraints that I came across in the course of my study. Finally I will end with proposals on how my contribution can be taken further, in future research.

**1- What were the main phases in the trajectory of Muslim identity politics over the past 50 years, including their defining features?**

During the 1960s, modern Muslim consciousness in Britain was only just beginning to lay down roots through the emergence of a range of organisations which were linked to trans-national Islamic movements. For these groups, Muslim identity was at the core of their mission and self-understanding. By the time that the first localised community campaigns and national unity initiatives were underway, there was already an express desire among many British Muslims for greater recognition from the government and official institutions. This was exemplified in many of the local and regional campaigns around education and schooling that I have discussed in Chapter 2, as well as the calls by the UMO for the official recognition of Muslim holidays, provision for time off without penalty for Muslim employees for Friday prayers, and the recognition of Muslim family law.

Freedom of expression issues can serve as a sort of prism during this period, through which differences in history as well as social, cultural and political heritage between Muslim immigrant communities and British public and political culture emerged to the forefront. The Rushdie Affair drew polarised responses from both sides as it dealt with subjects that each of them held in extremely high regard. Muslims could not countenance *such* perceived callous ridicule of their most revered personality going unchecked. They felt indescribable humiliation over the contents of a literary piece, one which portrayed the sources of their faith, and for many, their own self-worth, in terms so offensive that they could not even bring themselves to utter them. On the other hand the British government and many in wider British society *could not* accept the call for censorship of a literary piece on the basis of *merely* (in their eyes) the offence it had happened to cause. Rather, it seemed that these Muslims needed to make progress in coming to terms with liberal ideas on freedom of expression, a stance which only accentuated the deep hurt felt by Muslims who were then all the more frustrated at being misunderstood.

The Rushdie affair was the first time that a national issue came to such a head – providing conditions that demanded from the existing array of Muslim community leaders and groups that they recognise the crucial value that creating a united front would add to the furtherance of their cause. It also compelled them to seriously think about how they could articulate their claims-making in such a way that was both accessible and persuasive to the government, the media and wider British society. This is not to say that they were

successful at this stage, far from it, as I have shown in Chapter 3, the whole affair can be considered to have been more of a failure than a success in terms of dialogue between Muslim community representatives and the government. However, what did emerge from the legacy of the Rushdie affair was a resolve on the part of both Muslim organisations and the government that it was best for a repeat of this situation to be avoided. Consequently, the UKACIA maintained relations with the government through to the early 1990s, and the government, for its part, encouraged community leaders towards the formation of an official unified body to facilitate its engagement with British Muslim political claims-making.

From the mid-1990s up until 2001 we have seen what can be regarded as the heyday of British Muslim identity politics. With the MCB up and running, we saw a coming together of British Muslim organisations and activists on the broadest platform yet. While the MCB was more inclusive than any of its predecessors had been, it was still by this stage functioning very much within the very limited sphere of community activists, and still predominantly controlled by those hailing from a revivalist/reformist background. Positive encouragement and public promotion of the MCB by the Labour government went a long way, and it seemed as though the MCB was finally moving forward to gaining a much-coveted status and recognition that was on a par with that enjoyed by the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Conversely, the Labour government was benefiting by enjoying a direct and influential channel into the Muslim communities of Britain, including mosques and the largest national and regional organisations.

Two turning points then brought about changes that have seen Muslim identity politics take a path which could not have been envisaged during the early days. The terror attacks of 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001 threw the MCB into the limelight as never before. Its new found role as official ‘spokesman’ for British Muslims gave it a huge reach and exposure, but also brought with it the considerable challenges of balancing the demands of credibly representing its extremely diverse constituency on the one hand, and maintaining good relations with a government whose foreign policy ambitions were fast becoming a source of anger and dismay among British Muslims. In facing this impossible situation the MCB ultimately took the decision to oppose the government on matters relating to foreign policy and the war on terror. In doing so, it effectively had to forge out a new path for its future, since its opposition of the Blair government’s military engagement in Afghanistan and Iraq

meant that it could no longer count on the same level, or the same exclusivity of support from the government. The post-9/11 period saw Muslim identity politics diversify into seeking partnerships across other sections of civic society on common-interest issues, including opposition to the war and opposition to the rising Islamophobic tactics that were being employed by far-right groups such as the BNP. Additionally, with the coming of age of younger, British born generations, creative and less conventional forms of self-expression – for instance utilising arts, modern technology – were being explored as alternatives or complements to the traditional methods of formal political protest and representation that had been preferred by the older generations.

The second turning point came after the terror attacks on London's public transport system that took place on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005. These prompted serious introspection on the part of the government and Muslim community organisations alike, as they reconsidered their existing approaches towards radicalisation, extremism and security. A new raft of anti-terror legislation included 'encouragement clauses' which took terror offences into the realm of speech and expression by criminalising the encouragement or glorification of terrorism. The Prevent strand of the government's Contest scheme for tackling radicalisation at home also weighed heavily on themes of free expression, not only because of its self-declared mission to win the battle for 'hearts and minds', but also as it became associated in the eyes of many, and particularly many Muslims, with surveillance and intelligence gathering.<sup>544</sup>

At the same time, the increasingly anti-Muslim focus of the British far-right as well as the growing national debate on the viability or otherwise of multiculturalism both contributed towards feeding an increasingly vocal and often threatening Islamophobia. The support that this Islamophobia regularly received in public discourse, was too often met with

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<sup>544</sup> Parallels have been drawn between today's Muslim communities and Irish communities between the 1970s and 1990s, with both perceiving that they are viewed by the state and media, and thus segments of the public as 'suspect' communities. As such, they feel that they are being expected to 'prove' their loyalty and 'Britishness' in a way that is not expected of others. Cf. Mary J. Hickman, "'Suspect Populations': Irish communities, Muslim communities and the British justice system" in *Criminal Justice v. Racial Justice: minority ethnic overrepresentation in the criminal justice system* ed. by Kjartan Pal Sveinsson (London: Runnymede Trust, 2012), pp.27-29. Muslim responses to this have included the *Kafa* (Enough) Islamophobia campaign (2009), which was jointly led by the Stop the War Coalition and the BMI. Its launch statement said: 'We call for a broad-based campaign to confront the growth of racist attitudes towards Muslims and rising governmental and state harassment of Muslim citizens.' Source: 'Stop Attacks on the Muslim Community', available at: [http://stopwar.org.uk/images//kafa\\_statement.pdf](http://stopwar.org.uk/images//kafa_statement.pdf), [accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2013]. Also 'Schedule 7 Stories', a website run by the charity, CagePrisoners, to document and raise awareness around 'the experiences of suspect communities at UK ports', see: <http://schedule7stories.com/> [accessed 10<sup>th</sup> August 2013].

passive or lethargic responses from people in positions of power and influence, to the extent that its very existence was questioned by some, and derisively belittled by others. What was seen as a *laissez faire* approach to public discourse that was hostile to Islam and Muslims smacked of double standards when juxtaposed with the tough talk that was being employed by the government in relation to the encouragement and glorification of terrorism. This in turn fuelled further resentment among Muslims for the government's counter-radicalisation strategies – resentment which was only very marginally quelled, if at all, by the introduction of the largely inept Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006.

By the close of the decade, relations between the MCB and the government had suffered as a result of what had proved to be the toxic mix of securitisation with community cohesion. Multiculturalism became a scapegoat in many quarters for society's anxieties around security and immigration. This, combined with the far-right's focus on anti-Muslim discourse, pushed the government to revise the nature of its engagement with Muslim representative organisations. With the emergence of a host of new Muslim representative and advocacy bodies, each seeking to represent diverse voices from amongst British Muslim communities, the government realised it did not have to rely exclusively on the MCB to act as its interlocutor, and the MCB came to appreciate that it was in no position to command such an exclusivity. Conditionality became a new feature of engagement, as talk of loyalty and British values was a key feature of this latest phase of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century multiculturalism critique. Finally, voices within the Muslim community have been playing an important role in pushing for modernisation and greater transparency of structure and operations within the MCB, as has been the case with the communal representation of other minority communities, such as the Jewish Board of Deputies. These factors, combined, have meant that the future of identity politics is set to take a new turn in priority and focus.

## **2- How has free speech fared and how does it help us to understand the trajectory of Muslim identity politics in the UK?**

The fact that freedom of expression has cropped up so regularly as a point of contention over this period between the government, British Muslims, and wider society, is itself fascinating. The Rushdie affair helped to rally together previously disparate Muslim community initiatives around a common cause, at the centre of which was freedom of expression, and the debate over the legitimacy or otherwise of calls to restrict it. Following this, speech-related causes always featured prominently in the articulation of Muslim claims to the government, as my first summarisation of the Equality Gap showed.<sup>545</sup>

By the close of 2001, freedom of expression was beginning to feature through a new dimension – as a component of civil liberties which were felt to be under increasing threat from the recently enacted anti-terrorism legislation. This was in addition to the more nuanced freedom for Muslim community groups, specifically the MCB, to maintain their right to a free and independent stance on current affairs, irrespective of government policy. The realities of the modern terror threat, the drive towards securitisation through anti-terror laws and the government's participation in the War on Terror all had implications on the government-MCB relationship. While there were significant efforts made by both sides to coordinate responses to the attacks, there were also several points of sore disagreement and divergence. These included increasingly draconian aspects of the new anti-terror legislation, and the widespread opposition among British Muslims (as part of strong opposition in the wider public) to military involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Out of this scenario, there emerged increasingly confident voices from within Britain's Muslim communities that were keen to express themselves and communicate their experiences, perspectives and values by building partnerships with others and exploring more creative means of communication. This trend went some way in generating significant progress from the near-stalemate in inter-cultural dialogue and the sense of communicative dissonance which had been such a notable feature of the discourse around the Rushdie affair.

Yet elements of this dissonance have remained, and are exemplified by the attitudes of relative tolerance by the political establishment towards a regular appearance of anti-

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<sup>545</sup> See Chapter 3 of this thesis.

Muslim bigotry in mainstream press, despite pleas from Muslims and supporting anti-Islamophobia activists for acknowledgement of this problem, for restraint and for shows of solidarity.<sup>546</sup> From a legal perspective, consistent calls from Muslim organisations for legislative reform to criminalise incitement to religious hatred ignited heated debate around the future of free speech in the UK, and the role, if any, that the state had in limiting it to protect vulnerable groups. One consequence of this debate was that while a law was eventually passed in 2005, extensive objections and amendments in parliament it did not deliver the even-handedness (in relation to the Race Relations Act) that Muslim groups had so long called for.

On the other hand, in the area of security, the introduction of the controversial ‘encouragement clauses’ in the Terrorism Act 2006 – even if they proved largely unenforceable in the courts – had the consequence of feeding the perception that Muslims were being unduly singled out, regulated and suspected. This view was only bolstered by the impression that a similar suspicion was being planted upon any Muslim who had the gall to express misgivings or frustration, let alone opposition, to the UK’s foreign policy, lest this expression fall foul of the new laws. Additionally, the case of Ahmed Faraz gave rise to substantial fears that the courts would be prepared to criminalise certain extreme or archaic theological positions by prosecuting for the possession or distribution of the texts upon which they were based. Coupled with this, was the troubled reception of the Prevent scheme within Muslim communities, and its reputation varying from being an intelligence-gathering exercise at worst, and an extensive PR project at best. All of these factors combined served in one way or another to diminish freedom of expression within Muslim communities – whether in real terms, or in people’s perceptions of the extent of this freedom that they enjoyed. So whether it was self-censorship precipitated by a ‘chilling effect’, or actual experiences of harassment, surveillance or arrest; the general sense was that freedom of expression was being severely limited in the name of security, with far less qualms than had been expressed over calls to restrict incitement to religious hatred.

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<sup>546</sup> For example, see the Alternative Leveson Inquiry into the practise and reporting of Muslim and Islamic affairs. This was launched as a response to the ongoing Leveson Inquiry into the culture, practice and ethics of the press – which was initiated in the wake of the phone-hacking scandal of July 2011. The Alternative Leveson argues that ‘The Leveson Inquiry has failed to adequately address the negative media coverage relating to Muslims and Islam. The reason an alternative inquiry is necessary to investigate what many regard as widespread and systematic discriminatory practises in reporting on Muslims and Islam in the British media.’ [source: ‘Background’ *The Alternative Leveson* at: [http://www.alternativeleveson.org.uk/?page\\_id=13](http://www.alternativeleveson.org.uk/?page_id=13) accessed on 7<sup>th</sup> August 2012].

Or more recently: Mehdi Hasan, ‘We mustn’t allow Muslims in public life to be silenced’ *The Guardian* 8<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

To return to the 2005 Religious Hatred Act; with its introduction, and the abolishment of the long-defunct blasphemy laws in 2008, the Equality Gap, as described in Chapter 2, seems to have narrowed considerably. Indeed, with significant progress having been made in terms of background concerns relating to recognition and respect for Britain's Muslims, is it now time to take stock and ask if the Equality Gap still exists? I will address this, and related issues in the following section.

### 3- What next for Muslim identity politics – has it had its day? Is there a better way?

In order to answer this question, it is useful to revisit the early days when the notion of Muslim identity politics on a UK level was gathering momentum and the Equality Gap was beginning to be seriously articulated. During the Rushdie affair, this was happening for the first time, and as I have described in Chapter 3, the Equality Gap to which the UKACIA and others appealed consisted of a speech component and an action component. To recap, the **speech component** included the continued existence of blasphemy legislation in English law to which the Church of England had recourse, to the exclusion of other faiths, significantly Islam. It also included the shortcomings of current legislation in proscribing incitement to religious hatred. As for the **action component**, this related to the inadequacy of anti-discrimination legislation in appreciating the complexity of the British Muslim experience as an 'ethno-religious' group. The clearest way to illustrate this gap was to refer to the inclusion of Jews and Sikhs under race-discrimination legislation, but the exclusion of other faiths. Again, this anomaly was most significant with respect to Muslims, as the largest minority faith in Britain. Together, these components represented the central claims around which the UKACIA was framing its representations to the government by 1993, when it made a submission to the Home Secretary on this matter.<sup>547</sup>

By 2010, Muslim identity politics in Britain had weathered an intense and often complex course. Formal relations and lobbying combined with willingness from the government had yielded recognition on various levels; the religion question in the national census has helped to provide the best demographic snapshot of Britain's Muslim community so far, making coordination with local authorities on needs, services and the articulation of claims easier, more accurate and more credible. There were strides made in political representation both in parliament and on a local level. Government departments took greater steps to cater for

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<sup>547</sup> UKACIA, *Muslims and the Law in Multifaith Britain* (1993).

the specific needs of British Muslims in different areas of life, for example by establishing the British Hajj delegation, and instituting a Muslim advisor to work in Her Majesty's Prisons.

Society has also moved on. Global politics, terrorism at home, and the resurgence of the far-right have all played important parts in igniting fears around immigration and feeding into a 'crisis of multiculturalism'. This has witnessed introspection and speculation within government, policy-makers and public commentary about whether it is conducive for society to continue to recognise identity politics or whether the notion of minority group representation has had its day. Detractors will protest that Muslim identity politics is little more than a ploy used by self-important and self-appointed community leaders to cultivate a grievance culture and bask in the 'perks' of the victim-status that they feed with over-exaggerated claims of Islamophobia.<sup>548</sup> Yet there are others who refuse to 'see identity politics as antithetical to political perspectives focused on the good of society as a whole.'<sup>549</sup> Modood argues that there remains a place for identity politics, and that for many, the sense of Muslim identity that they feel, 'has nothing to do with religiosity'<sup>550</sup>. Rather, 'Muslimness' can, and does, mean different things to different people. Additionally, he notes that Muslim feelings of community, and especially affinity with the *ummah*, are ones that do not have the luxury of being supported or celebrated by the British government. Rather, these relationships are often the subject of suspicion and a questioning of loyalties. I would add to this that as long as significant elements within society continue to express hostility, distaste or hatred towards Muslims, there will be no end in sight for Muslim identity politics, since it is these experiences which often serve to make people far more deeply conscious, defensive, and even proud of their identities.

So rather than seeing an end to identity politics in the coming era, I would like to argue that Muslim identity politics faces new challenges, and that these challenges call for an adjustment in the way that identity politics is conducted. Modood argues that this is already happening.<sup>551</sup> On the other hand, Sir Iqbal Sacranie has called for the Muslim community

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<sup>548</sup> Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad* (2009). This is a view which has recently been given extensive airing in the press by Andrew Gilligan, e.g. Andrew Gilligan, 'The truth about the 'wave of attacks on Muslims' after Woolwich murder' *The Daily Telegraph* 1<sup>st</sup> June 2013, where he refers to an 'Islamophobia industry', for whom 'the narrative of British Muslims under attack, increasingly hated and feared by their fellow citizens, is essential for recruitment' (to Islamism).

<sup>549</sup> Modood, *Multiculturalism: a civic idea* (2007), p.136.

<sup>550</sup> Ibid.

<sup>543</sup> Ibid., pp.139-142.

to enter a new phase, one of ‘greater engagement as individuals in the civil society around us’, which would replace the age of identity politics, which, he argued, although it ‘has been psychologically satisfying, and allowed socio-economic inequalities to be addressed, it also nurtures community self-interest.’<sup>552</sup> Modood disagrees, and I have also discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis how new forms of creativity and expression are on the rise within British Muslim communities, and that conventional and traditional ways of organising and representation are being questioned, as calls to democratise these organisations further and make them more transparent and accessible are, slowly but surely, making gains. Indeed, as the discussion in the Post-script has shown, these developments are happening within other minority communities as well, specifically in Jewish identity politics.

I propose that we are at a stage, not where the Equality Gap has become less significant, but where we are in a position to revise its articulation. I submit that it can now be described as follows:

- 1- **Legal** – primarily this relates to the limitations of Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006 and the case for its potential strengthening.
  
- 2- **Applicative** – this relates to the application of security measures in post-9/11 and post-7/7 Britain, which has been shown to contribute to the victimisation of Muslims as a community. This feeds into the third and final category:
  
- 3- **Cultural** – this relates to the persistence, and growth of cultural anti-Muslim sentiment and Islamophobia. Modern concerns surrounding terrorism and security, the war against terrorism and debates on multiculturalism and immigration have all fed into the anti-Muslim rhetoric of the far-right. That anti-religious hatred legislation has been a weak weapon against Islamophobia has given room for its spread to go comparatively unchecked. While this is not a trend which emanates directly from any section of the government, official inaction or indifference towards Islamophobic discourse has contributed towards this trend. And although this problem is not one that can be appropriately solved by hard legislation, it nonetheless provides a strong reason for the continuation of Muslim identity politics into the future.

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<sup>552</sup> Sir Iqbal Sacranie’s valedictory speech to the MCB AGM in 2006.

These three categories, together, sum up the basis of the case from which Muslim representative organisations can continue to call for greater recognition and respect. The methods that they utilise to further this are clearly already under revision, as is the government's approach to engagement with representative groups. I want to suggest here that lobbying in the traditional sense does not have to be the primary role of representative groups. While it can and must surely still play a role, there are plenty of avenues for partnerships, networks and coalitions that can be explored within the paradigm of identity politics. These can involve cross-community ventures that campaign for matters of common interest, while at the same time breaking down cultural barriers and building bridges. Such partnerships have the advantage of drawing attention to the legal and applicative aspects of the Equality Gap, while also, in practice, targeting the cultural aspect. Additionally, they have the potential of allaying the concerns of critics about identity politics fostering attitudes of victimhood and competitiveness between minority communities, as well as reification hampering accurate and authentic understanding between communities, and between communities and the state. For example, civic partnerships that connect people across the lines of faith, culture, socio-economic factors in aid of issues of shared interest can provide ample opportunities for Muslim communities, and individuals, of all shades to come forward and make their voices heard, rather than simply leaving this role exclusively to representative organisations. Some of these have been already taken up, as I have shown in Chapter 5, but I believe that these have the potential to play a far more central role in raising awareness of the (revised) Equality Gap, and working to narrow it.

**Further research:**

This thesis has been necessarily constrained by space and focus, and therefore there are several avenues that can be pursued by further research. I have focused specifically on the development of Muslim identity politics within the UK. However, there has been a parallel development of Muslim identity politics across Europe and North America. There are of course similarities and differences, and these are contingent upon the constitutions and political structures and well as the public cultures of the respective states. In some countries, the state has been explicitly involved in establishing Muslim representative councils (France being an example), whereas in other countries, the development has been more organic. However, many of the countries in Europe and North America face similar challenges to those which British Muslim identity politics has experienced in recent

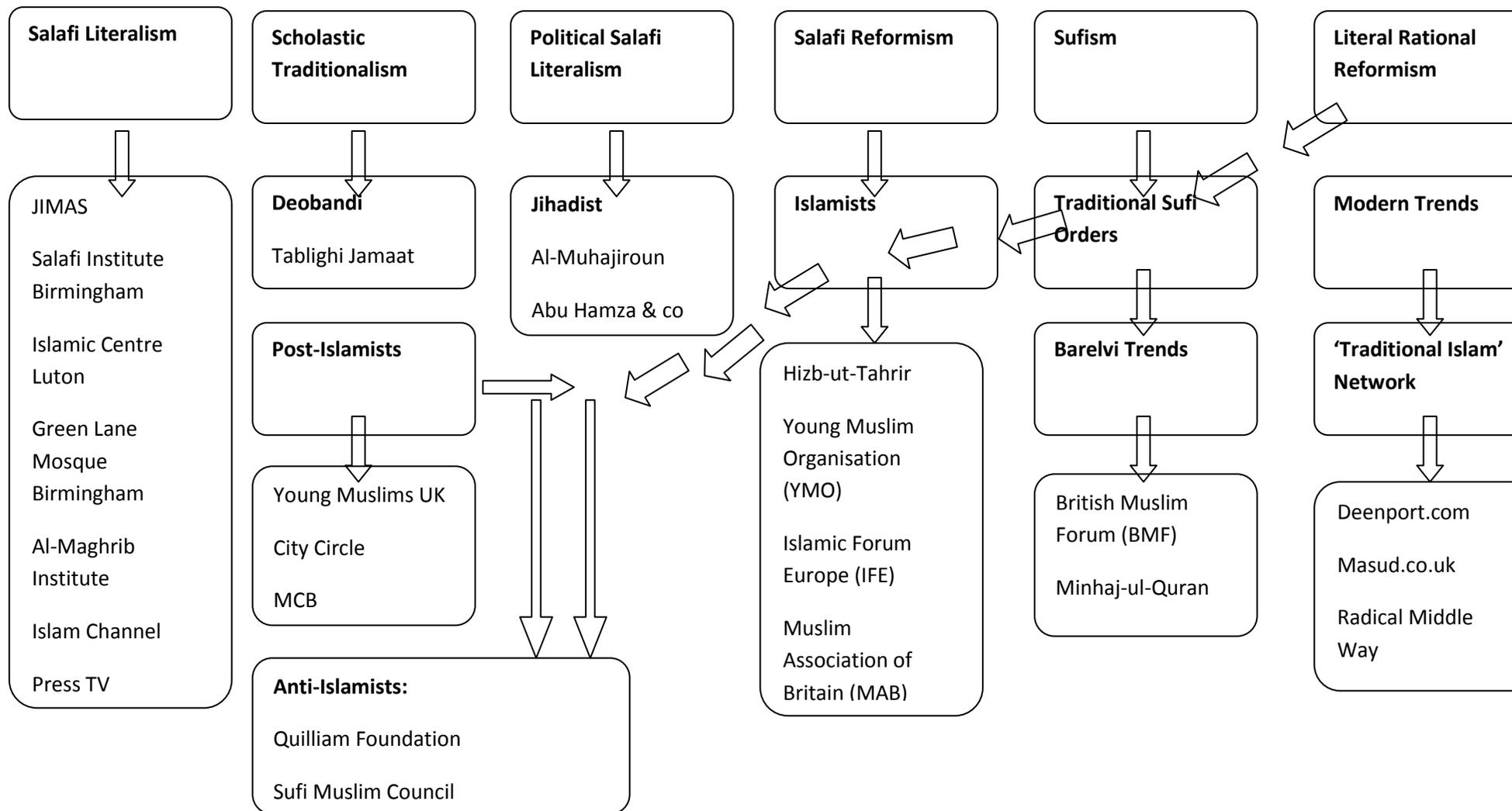
decades. The fallout from 9/11 was of course global, and many European countries have, sadly, experienced terrorism in the name of Islam at home as well. Thus one potential next step would be a comparison of one aspect of the development of Muslim identity politics across two or more nations, or indeed a comparison of aspects of British and American experience.

The concept of an Equality Gap which I have discussed at great length in this thesis could be explored with reference to inequalities *within* Britain's Muslim communities. So identity politics as experienced by Muslim women's organisations or female Muslim community leaders would be a good way of exploring the extent to which there might be a gender equality gap among British Muslims.

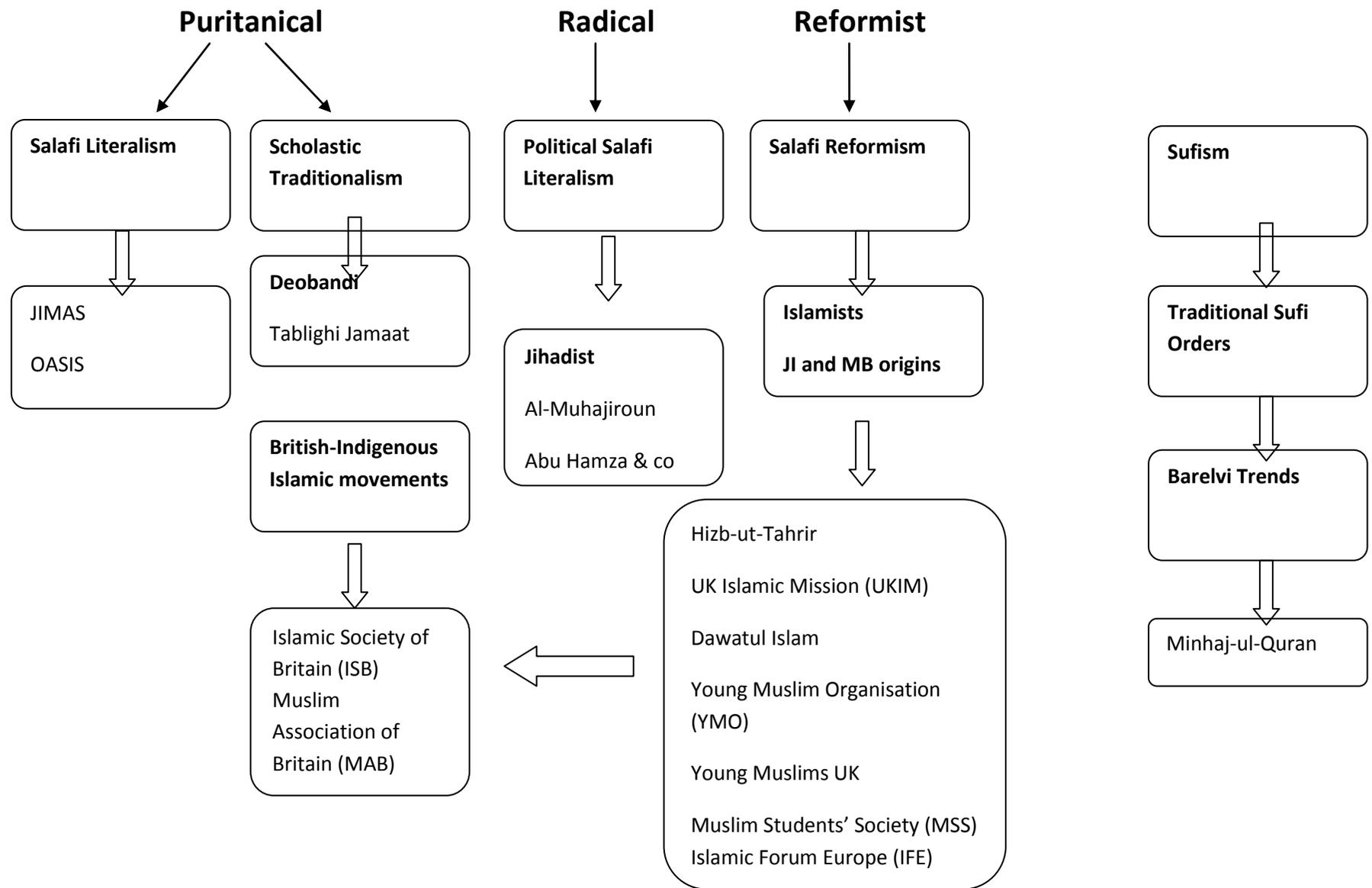
Another aspect of further research could be to hone in more closely on how the resurgence of the far-right has affected, and continues to affect the field of identity politics. There is ample material for such a study to focus on the UK – the recent (if short-lived) electoral successes of the BNP, the establishment of the EDL (and extremist responses from within Muslim communities such as the poppy-burning by 'Muslims Against the Crusades'), as well as the intermittent police operations that have uncovered 'bomb factories' in the homes of supporters of far-right groups have all contributed to a growing sense of alarm within Muslim communities on matters relating to Islamophobia. How this alarm is translating into the actions and dealings of Muslim representative groups (for instance, counter responses such as 'Muslims for the UK' and Muslim involvement with anti-racist alliances such as *Hope Not Hate*), and how the government and sections of wider society are responding to this is an area where there is much potential for further research. Additionally, such a study could also be taken to a European level, where, in some countries, the far-right has been considerably more successful at the ballot box than in the UK.

The comparisons and contrasts that I have drawn between British Muslim and British Jewish communal organisations can also provide avenues for further research. The role of both the MCB and the Board is under close scrutiny within their respective communities and it would be interesting to examine how they each respond and evolve in light of shared challenges, including calls for greater democratisation and transparency and the inevitability of younger leaders taking on greater leadership roles. Additionally, there is scope for

further research into British Muslim identity politics that takes into account the political engagement of communities of different Muslim theological denominations. Here I have focused on organisations with a (majority) *sunni* background as well as some *shi'a* organisations insofar as they have been involved with collective Muslim communal efforts (such as the Al-Khoei Foundation's involvement with the MCB and MINAB). Further studies could look more deeply at the range of diverse organisations within British *shi'a* communities and the differences between them and their approaches towards political engagement. Thus it is hoped that this study will prove to be a useful foundation for further lines of enquiry and research.



**Fig.1** Reproduction of Sadek Hamid's 'Applying Ramadan's six major Islamic tendencies to the British Muslim context' ref: Sadek Hamid 'British Muslim Young People: facts, features and religious trends' *Religion, State and Society* (2011) 39:2-3, p.253.



**Fig.2** Historical version of Sadek Hamid's 'Applying Ramadan's six major Islamic tendencies to the British Muslim context', based on landscape of Muslim organisations/trends between 1960-1990s.

**Table 1: Glossary of Muslim representative/advocacy groups in the UK:**

**Earliest Unity Initiatives:**

Name	Established	Constituency	Key figures	Notes
FOSIS – Federation of Student Islamic Societies	1963	Muslim students in the UK and Ireland – through affiliated student Islamic societies in universities and colleges.	High turnover of leaders/organisers as it is a student organisation.	Key alumni have gone on to lead other Muslim organisations including some of those profiled below and international alumni have also take up leadership roles in government, public policy, NGOs and international business. Some examples include: President Abdullah Gul of Turkey; Anwar Ibrahim, former Prime-Minister of Malaysia; and in the UK Dr Hany El-Banna, founder of Islamic Relief; and Farooq Murad, current Secretary General of the MCB.
UMO – Union of Muslim Organisations	1972	UK and Ireland. Works from the basis of a number of member organisations as well as individual volunteers.	Dr Syed Aziz Pasha (d.2011)	Was at its most active/prominent in the 70s and 80s. Now has extremely limited presence or impact. It is yet to be seen if it will survive beyond the recent death of Dr Pasha (November 2011).
<b>Post- Rushdie affair</b>				
Name	Established	Constituency	Key figures	Notes
Muslim Parliament UK	1989	Constituted of ‘Muslim Members of Parliament	Kalim Siddiqui (d. 1996), Ghayasuddin Siddiqui (1996-	Suffered from infighting and a split after the death of Kalim Siddiqi. Now largely dormant, bar irregular topical public statements from Ghayasuddin Siddiqui – although leanings have shifted markedly from Khomenite, heavy, confrontational and aggrieved rhetoric to conciliatory tones

		(MMPs)' and various committees, but no clear election procedure, or identifiable electorate.	present).	embracing of civic participation, secularism, democracy and opposing extremism and foreign-influenced Islam. Participated in the Stop the War Coalition in the early 2000's and also launched a 'model Muslim marriage contract' in 2008, for British Muslims wishing to marry under Muslim law, claiming to uniquely secure equality between men and women, while appreciating the realities of modern British Muslim family life, and remaining faithful to the Islamic tradition. Ghayasuddin Siddiqui has also been involved with British Muslims for Secular Democracy (see below).
UKACIA – UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs	1989	Representatives from a range of Muslim organisations.	Iqbal Sacranie	Now defunct with its mantle having been taken up by the MCB.
MCB – Muslim Council of Britain	1997	Affiliated local, regional and national Muslim organisations and mosques.	Secretary Generals: Iqbal Sacranie (1997-2000 and 2002-2006) Yousuf Bhailok (2000-2002) Muhammad Abdul Bari (2006-2010) Farooq Murad (2010-present)	Established to be the main Muslim representative body in 1997. Remained largely so through to 2005, after which the establishment of a range of alternative organisations coupled with a tense relationship with the government weakened the MCB's position as the primary community representative body. It has nonetheless continued to function and develop, and while it hasn't re-established the close rapport with government that it enjoyed during its 'honeymoon' years, it still does liaise with various government departments, run pan-community initiatives and speak on Muslim issues in the press.

Post- 2005 Representative Bodies				
Name	Established	Constituency	Key figures	Notes
MINAB – Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board	2006	Jointly founded by the Al-Khoei Foundation, British Muslim Forum, Muslim Association of Britain and the MCB. Each of these organisations is represented in the board and its various committees.	Positions rotate between representatives of the various founding bodies.	<p>There are signs that government made cautious forays into regulating mosques, through the publication of a consultation paper in 2005 entitled ‘Preventing extremism – places of worship’ which proposed potential powers for ‘controllers’ of mosques to exclude persons or groups, and for courts to have the power to close places of worship where deemed necessary. However, swift and adamant opposition was put forward both by the MCB and a large number of major mosques to any insinuation that there could be any sort of ‘state-control’ over mosques.<sup>553</sup></p> <p>There were numerous calls from politicians and in the media for greater regulation of imams and mosques, particularly in light of concerns that some mosques were effectively functioning as extremist headquarters. The most high profile case being the North London Central Mosque which was controlled by Abu Hamza and his supporters up until a police raid in 2003. The MCB commissioned a study, ‘Voices from the Minarets’<sup>554</sup> which interviewed imams and mosque committee members on a range of topics including mosque governance, structure, remit and the role of imams. This study then laid the foundations for the establishment of MINAB, however the degree to which MINAB can command legitimacy to regulate mosques is debatable.</p>
BMI – British Muslim Initiative	2005	Lobby group – no defined membership. Sought to	Mohammed Sawalha, Fida Alaeddin, Azzam Tamimi, Anas	An organisation spearheaded by members/previous associates of the Muslim Association of Britain. Came into being after a strategic decision was made by the MAB to divert its focus and resources away from the Stop the War Coalition alliance and international affairs, and towards more

<sup>553</sup> MCB Press Release ‘Muslim community rejects inference that mosques foment or encourage terrorism’ (22<sup>nd</sup> November 2005) available at [http://www.mcb.org.uk/media/presstext.php?ann\\_id=179](http://www.mcb.org.uk/media/presstext.php?ann_id=179) [accessed on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2013].

<sup>554</sup> C3ube Training and Consultancy, ‘Voices from the Minarets’ (MCB, London; 2006).

		represent the 'Muslim community' in general.	Altikriti	domestic British Muslim community issues such as community development and training, and youth work. Mainly motivated by a desire to put forward views on international issues, which they criticised the MCB for maintaining a passive/muted stance towards. They were also vocal on matters relating to security and counter-terrorism as well as Islamophobia. Also, twice organised an Islam Expo event in London in 2005 and 2008. Activity seems to have become rather intermittent and largely reactive since 2008, mainly due to funding shortages and leading figures' other commitments. <sup>555</sup> Website: <a href="http://www.bminitiative.net">www.bminitiative.net</a> [accessed on 12 <sup>th</sup> June 2012].
BMF – British Muslim Forum	March 2005	Largely sufi-oriented ( <i>barelvi</i> ) mosques and imams across the UK.	Khurshid Ahmed, Zareen Roohi Ahmed	Launched in 2005 with 500 affiliated mosques and support from parliamentarians. It sought to become 'a co-ordinating platform that aspires to provide a focus reflecting the hopes, fears and aspirations of the grassroots... to complement and enhance the work and achievement of other national platforms of the Muslim community.' <sup>556</sup> Between 2008-2010, the BMF apparently went through a period of reform, after its decision to come out in support of the government's 42 day detention plans for terror suspects caused major divisions in the organisation. It is said to have been re-launched in 2010 but appears to nonetheless be conspicuously invisible thus far.
SMC – Sufi Muslim Council	June 2006	No defined constituency.	Haras Rafiq, Azhar Ali, Sheikh Hisham Kabbani (inspirational/spiritual figure)	Apparent paradox of seeking to 'represent' (presumably politically?!) the 'silent majority' of 'apolitical' Muslims.

<sup>555</sup> Personal conversation with Mohammad Kozbar of the BMI, London, 6<sup>th</sup> August 2011.

<sup>556</sup> BMF Secretary-General Gul Muhammed speech, quoted in the official account of the BMF opening conference in Walthamstow, London, 11<sup>th</sup> March 2005: 'British Muslim Forum: Sufis Rise', – published on old BMF website <http://www.britishmuslimforum.org/index.php> (broken link) [accessed in June 2005]. Version saved at: [http://web.archive.org/web/20050427133635/http://www.britishmuslimforum.org/view\\_press\\_release.php?id=12](http://web.archive.org/web/20050427133635/http://www.britishmuslimforum.org/view_press_release.php?id=12) [accessed on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2011].

BMSD – British Muslims for Secular Democracy	April 2008	No defined constituency.	Founded by Yasmin Alibhai-Brown. Current director is Tehmina Kazi.	Aims to raise awareness within Muslims about secular democracy, and to encourage religious understanding, harmony, and a celebration of the ‘various Muslim cultures, values and traditions which are present in British society’. <sup>557</sup>
Progressive British Muslims	November 2005	No defined constituency.	Farmida Bi, (apparently the sole board member)	A group of self-described ‘liberal Muslims’, who emphasised ‘cultural identity’ and felt unrepresented by existing faith-based Muslim groups. <sup>558</sup>
<b>Post-2005 New Research and Consultancy Bodies</b>				
Name	Established	Constituency	Key figures	Notes
Quilliam Foundation	2006	Counter-extremism think-tank.	Ed Husain (Until 2009) and Maajid Nawaz	Founded by former Islamists providing research, training and consultation on counter-extremism and claiming unique expertise and insight drawn from the personal experiences of its staff inside various Islamist groups. Gained widespread interest and acclaim but also the subject of strong criticisms.
CENTRI – Counter Extremism Consultancy, Training, Research and Interventions	Circa. 2008	Counter-extremism consultancy.	Haras Rafiq, Rashad Ali	Offers commentary, training, consultancy and interventions on matters relating to extremism.
Muslim Institute	Dates back to the 1980’s but revived and relaunched in 2010	Research institute.	Merryl Wynne Davies	Aims to ‘promote and support the growth of thought, knowledge, research, creativity and open debate within the Muslim community and wider society.’ Activities include conferences, events, debates and a newsletter publication – ‘Critical Muslim’ as well as a dynamic website – <a href="http://www.musliminstitute.org">www.musliminstitute.org</a> [accessed 10 <sup>th</sup> June 2012].

<sup>557</sup> <http://www.bmsd.org.uk/pages.asp?id=2> [accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2011].

<sup>558</sup> <http://www.pbm.org.uk/about.htm> [accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2011].

	after a long spell of dormancy.			
Cordoba Foundation	2005	Research and public relations organisation.	Anas Altikriti	A research and public relations organisation ‘committed to dialogue and rapprochement between Islam and the west <sup>559</sup> – provides an opposing perspective to the ‘ex-extremist’ narrative which favours the promotion of ‘apolitical Islam’, by championing political and civic engagement on the basis of Islamic values.
MEMO – Middle East Monitor	Circa. 2008	Research organisation.	Daud Abdullah	Seeks to provide reporting on the Middle East, particularly the Palestinian question ‘opinion makers and decision makers in a deliberate, organized and sustained manner.’ While this body is clearly focused on foreign affairs, much of its interest centres on British foreign policy in the Middle East, and it has proved to be a useful forum for Dr Daud Abdullah (MCB Deputy Secretary General, 2006-10) to put forward perspectives in this field that proved too controversial for his former role at the MCB.
Inspire	2009	Women’s empowerment and counter-extremism consultancy	Sara Khan, Tahmina Saleem	Organises leadership training for Muslim women, runs campaigns for gender equality and human rights as well as consultancy work on ‘tackling extremism and the Prevent agenda’, community cohesion and integration. Website: <a href="http://www.wewillinspire.com">www.wewillinspire.com</a> [accessed on 12 <sup>th</sup> June 2012]

<sup>559</sup> [http://www.thecordobafoundation.com/about\\_us.php](http://www.thecordobafoundation.com/about_us.php) [accessed on 10th July 2011].

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## **Media Sources:**

### **Broadcast media:**

Al Jazeera Satellite Channel  
British Broadcasting Corporation  
Channel 4  
Press TV

### **Magazines, periodicals and newspapers:**

Arab News	The Guardian
British Muslims Monthly Survey	The Independent
Crescent International	The Islamic Review
emel	The Jewish Chronicle
Hansard	The Muslim
Islamic Review	The Muslim News
Newsweek	The New Republic
Q-News	The New Statesman
The Common Good	The Observer
The Daily Telegraph	The Spectator
The Daily Mail	The Times

### **Online media and websites:**

Abdullah Quilliam Society: [www.abdullahquilliamsociety.org.uk](http://www.abdullahquilliamsociety.org.uk)  
Alternative Leveson [www.alternativeleveson.org.uk](http://www.alternativeleveson.org.uk)  
BBC News Website [www.bbc.co.uk/news](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news)  
BNP [www.bnp.org.uk](http://www.bnp.org.uk)  
Cage Prisoners [www.cageprisoners.com](http://www.cageprisoners.com)  
Changing the Board [www.changingtheboard.wordpress.com](http://www.changingtheboard.wordpress.com)  
Commission for Women in Jewish Leadership  
<http://www.thejlc.org/portfolio/commission-for-women-in-jewish-leadership/>  
DeenPort [www.deenport.com](http://www.deenport.com)  
Engage [www.iengage.org.uk](http://www.iengage.org.uk)  
FOSIS [www.fosis.org.uk](http://www.fosis.org.uk)  
Huffington Post [www.huffingtonpost.co.uk](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk)  
Independent Jewish Voices [www.ijv.org.uk](http://www.ijv.org.uk)  
Institute of Contemporary Islamic Thought [www.islamicthought.org](http://www.islamicthought.org)  
Islam Awareness Week [www.iaw.org.uk](http://www.iaw.org.uk)  
Islamic Forum Europe [www.islamicforumeurope.com](http://www.islamicforumeurope.com)  
Islamic Party of Britain [www.islamicparty.com](http://www.islamicparty.com)  
Islamophobia Watch [www.islamophobia-watch.com](http://www.islamophobia-watch.com)  
Jewish Leadership Council [www.thejlc.org](http://www.thejlc.org)  
MCB website [www.mcb.org.uk](http://www.mcb.org.uk)  
The Muslim Institute [www.musliminstitute.org](http://www.musliminstitute.org)  
Liberty [www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk](http://www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk)  
Open Democracy [www.opendemocracy.net](http://www.opendemocracy.net)  
PBM [www.projectingbritishmuslims.co.uk](http://www.projectingbritishmuslims.co.uk)  
Peter Tatchell [www.petertatchell.net](http://www.petertatchell.net)  
Salafi Media [www.salafimedia.com](http://www.salafimedia.com)  
Salaam [www.salaam.co.uk](http://www.salaam.co.uk)  
Schedule 7 Stories [www.schedule7stories.com](http://www.schedule7stories.com)  
Stop the War Coalition [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk)

Woking Muslim Mission [www.wokingmuslim.org](http://www.wokingmuslim.org)  
YMAG [www.ymag.org.uk](http://www.ymag.org.uk)  
Youtube [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)