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## Islam, Politics and Security in the UK

### Introduction



In 2002 the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) launched the comprehensive five-year New Security Challenges Programme. Directed by Professor Stuart Croft at the University of Warwick, it now funds almost 40 projects involving over 120 researchers. Its expansive and multidisciplinary approach seeks to reach beyond war into other important areas of global security. NSC projects explore eight broad themes: (1) the role of military force; (2) the role of international law, international organizations and security regimes; (3) economically driven security challenges; (4) technological aspects of security; (5) gendered dimensions of security; (6) security and civil society; (7) the media and psychological dimensions; and (8) human security.

In a collaborative venture, a series of briefing papers written by project leaders within the NSC Programme is being published by Chatham House (and posted on its International Security Programme web pages) over a two-year period to summarize important research results and emerging discussion points. Previous briefing papers have focused on themes of *Security, Terrorism and the UK*, *The Globalization of Security*, *Human Security*, *Peacekeeping and Interventionism* and *Post-Conflict Security-Building*. This final briefing paper in the series focuses on *Islam, Politics and Security in the UK*. In the first contribution Jenny Pickerill, Frank Webster and Kevin Gillan explore Muslim anti-war activism as a form of positive political engagement and argue for a more complex understanding of Muslim political identities. In the second, Gurchathen Sanghera and Suruchi Thapar-Bjorkert discuss the changing nature of political radicalism in Bradford in the wake of the 'Rushdie Affair' in 1989 and the urban 'riots' of 1995 and 2001. They identify several social and political disjunctures which have emerged in this context and examine the impact of these on the mobility of young Pakistani Muslims. Finally, John Maule and colleagues innovatively draw on attributional analysis and an analysis of metaphors to examine whether (and if so how) UK Muslims and non-Muslims think about terrorist risk in different ways.

**Dr Christopher Browning, Assistant Professor, University of Warwick**

This Briefing Paper is published by the International Security Programme at Chatham House, in conjunction with the New Security Challenges Programme of the Economic and Social Research Council. This Paper, the last in the series, summarises recent work on contemporary security concerns, from a wide variety of perspectives. At Chatham House we seek to examine security policy in the round, and are thus pleased to be associated with the publication of imaginative and challenging research.

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## Muslim anti-war activism as positive political engagement

*Jenny Pickerill, Frank Webster and Kevin Gillan*

Concerns over the radicalization of Muslims in Britain and the links between certain Muslim organizations and terrorist activity have dominated public debate and government policy in recent years. These concerns have been further fuelled by the myth that there is a simple division between Muslim 'moderates' (those who reject terrorism) and 'fundamentalists' (often equated with terrorists). This kind of rhetoric is not only deeply inaccurate but also ignores the complexity of Muslim identity and many Muslims' ongoing political engagement.

A great deal of money has been spent on community integration programmes and research on the links between British foreign policy and terrorist responses. However, there has been little consideration of non-violent Muslim political activism, particularly the opportunities such activism provides for facilitating integration and as a peaceful alternative for Muslim youth to explore their religious and political questions. Rather, the British government has continued to seek to suppress many forms of dissent and political activism through protest exclusion zones (for example around Parliament) and the use of anti-terror legislation on peaceful non-violent activists.

### A complex Muslim identity

Through examining the anti-war movement in Britain, this paper explores the complexity and potential of Muslim activism and identifies several areas where further work needs to be done and actions taken.<sup>1</sup> We can use this example to understand better how improved dialogue and interaction through activism may strengthen cross-cultural ties. Muslim<sup>2</sup> identity is diffuse, complex, and fractious. There are multiple national origins, Islamic sects, languages, practices and beliefs.<sup>3</sup> Muslim identity in Britain has been conceived as a singular and static primary identifier, being what social scientists term *essentialized* as an unchangeable and fixed category. This results in a stereotype of what a Muslim is and should be, and hinders others in society who struggle to understand this complexity (but who have little difficulty distinguishing vastly different segments within Christianity).

As many Muslims in Britain have found, 'the intersection of religion and identity is complex',<sup>4</sup> where they have had to contend with what it is to be British while simultaneously being influenced by their ancestors' homeland, their local community, and their faith, with many constructing multiple identities such as being British/Pakistani/Muslim.<sup>5</sup> For many Muslim anti-war activists their politicization afforded an opportunity (and even a necessity) to create identities and to challenge the hierarchies established by their elders. Thus 'the making of a British Islam is

<sup>1</sup> This research is based upon interviews with Muslim and non-Muslim activists and material collected across seven case studies of anti-war groups in Britain during 2006 and 2007, funded under the ESRC New Securities Programme.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this piece the distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim is used. These terms are crude and ascribed categories, though they do identify a major cleavage inside the anti-war movement.

<sup>3</sup> L. Radcliffe, 'A Muslim lobby at Whitehall? Examining the Role of the Muslim Minority in British Foreign Policy Making', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 15, 3 (2004), pp. 365–86.

<sup>4</sup> S. Ismail, 'Being Muslim: Islam, Islamism and Identity Politics', *Government and Opposition* (2004), pp. 614–31, p. 614.

<sup>5</sup> P. Bagguley and Y. Hussain, 'Flying the Flag for England? Citizenship, Religion and Cultural Identity among British Pakistani Muslims', in T. Abbas (ed.), *Muslim Britain: Communities under Pressure* (London: Zed Books, 2005).

an ongoing, unfinished process of experimentation, diversity and debate'.<sup>6</sup> It is this conflict over how to be British *and* Muslim that is exacerbating the alienation felt by some Muslim youth and creating a space for 'fundamentalism'.

### A missed opportunity?

Within days of 9/11 an anti-war movement of unprecedented size and diversity developed in Britain. The increased audibility and volume of Muslim voices against war were notable partly because of their relative absence in previous mobilizations in Britain. The movement opposed the 'war on terror' at the same time as condemning terrorism; the Stop the War Coalition (StWC) made clear that 'We condemn the attacks on New York and we feel the greatest compassion for those who lost their life on 11th September 2001'.<sup>7</sup> It began with a positive evaluation of diversity and made efforts to reach out beyond the constituency of 'usual suspects' for demonstrations.

For many Muslims anti-war activism was empowering and contributed to the proliferation of Muslim groups that sought political change through activism outside the polity. Several grassroots and explicitly anti-war Muslim groups emerged, such as the *Muslim Public Affairs Committee* (MPAC) and *JustPeace*. *Cage Prisoner* and *Stop Political Terror* evolved to campaign for the release of Muslim detainees from Guantánamo Bay, and to prevent the 'the criminalisation of the Muslim community under the anti-terror laws'.<sup>8</sup> At the same time the plethora of organizations attempting to represent 'British Muslims' politically (through lobbying and involvement in protests) and to the media, such as the *Muslim Association of Britain* (MAB) and the *British Muslim Initiative* (BMI), also publicly opposed the war. Other Muslim organizations, such as *Friends of Al Aqsa*, which were established for other causes (in this case to support Palestine), also joined anti-Iraq war efforts and encouraged their supporters to join rallies and demonstrations.

Many activists saw such Muslim involvement in anti-war activism as a great opportunity for building cross-cultural ties. This incorporation of diversity has been celebrated by many in the anti-war movement as a sign of its strength and liberalism, and as an example of integration in action. Non-Muslims and Muslims benefited politically from the increased numbers and their arguments were strengthened by the inclusion of each other. The strongest Muslim connections in the anti-war movement in Britain have been with socialists, exemplified by the *Respect Party*, who sought to capitalize on the Muslim anti-war vote. In practice this has involved the StWC hosting key Muslim leader speakers at their events, and in the naming of a Muslim organization (originally the MAB, since 2006 the *British Muslim Initiative*) as co-sponsors of London rallies. Prayer spaces were also provided at several marches.

However, despite these joint mobilizations, these interactions were tenuous, transient and fraught with suspicion that groups were more interested in gaining political advantage than necessarily understanding and supporting Muslim concerns. Beyond the temporary interactions of marches, or jointly held meetings, conversations were often not continued. Many non-Muslim anti-war activists had few direct links to Muslims (those that did appear to be the exception), and spoke of their frustration that coalitions had not been built, dialogue had not continued and mutual understanding had not been fostered. In general, interaction between Muslim and non-Muslim anti-war

<sup>6</sup> P. Lewis, *Islamic Britain: Religion, Politics and Identity among British Muslims* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2nd edition, 2002), p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> StWC, 'Aims' on the *Stop the War Coalition* website, <http://www.stopwar.org.uk/about.asp>; accessed 27.03.07.

<sup>8</sup> Stop Political Terror website, <http://www.stoppoliticalterror.com>, accessed 12.12.06.

activists has been partial, superficial, at times tokenistic and overall rather temporary.

### **Reasons for limited collaboration**

There are four reasons for this limited engagement between Muslim and non-Muslim activists, from which we can learn about how to work across differences in finding areas of common concern.

1. There is a disjuncture between the priorities of Muslim and non-Muslim activists. Many non-Muslim anti-war groups have prioritized their activities around anti-war campaigning rather than defending civil liberties *per se*, and Muslim interviewees spoke of their disappointment that more non-Muslims had not acted in their defence after anti-terror raids or spoken out more assertively against their perceived persecution.

2. Muslim and non-Muslim anti-war groups respectively have had difficulty in identifying collaborative partners with whom they share a common approach in tactics and aims. Many of the non-Muslim groups are long-established political organizations that have particular strategies aimed at a clear target – mobilizing public opinion against the wars, and thus forcing the government to change its strategy of involvement. However, many of the Muslim groups have formed more recently, some have a very broad remit and others struggled to survive (*Just Peace* and *Stop Political Terror* have both now folded). As a result non-Muslim activists have had to engage with organizations which, although they may have expressed an opinion about the war, did not regard being anti-war as their core rationale. Rather, the majority of these organizations aim to make representation on behalf of Muslim communities *per se*, and often on a huge breadth of issues that affect their constituents – such as education, crime, and security.

3. Activists found establishing commonality around a religious identity challenging. The simplification of Muslim identity has served different purposes, not all of them negative. It has been used to mobilize Muslims against war, and by Muslims in defence of attacks on them; as Hannah Arendt noted, 'when one is attacked as a Jew, one must defend oneself as a Jew. Not as a German, not as a world-citizen, not as an upholder of the Rights of Man'.<sup>9</sup> However, in an attempt to project a united anti-war movement, debate about the differences between Muslims and non-Muslims, let alone within Muslim communities, was often studiously avoided. By not discussing the complexity of identity, anti-war activists actually helped proliferate the singular and inadequate notion that there was a homogeneous Muslim identity in Britain. Having embraced it, but still ignorant of its subtleties, many non-Muslim activists were then too scared of appearing exclusionary to question this homogenization. What could have been a moment of dialogue was in fact a period of polite silence under the guise of non-Muslims showing 'respect and tolerance' for Muslims. This superficiality of dialogue and embrace of 'Muslim' as an identifying category has led activists down a difficult path that has failed to result in lasting interactions.

If the distinction becomes between Muslim and non-Muslim, as it has in the anti-war movement, then religion becomes central to any discussion of commonality, and the categories readily become oppositional; 'Essentialisation thus reinforces the belief shared by many sectarians (both Muslims and non-Muslims) in the existence of two monolithic and antagonistic

blocs that either coexist in separatist isolation or ... assimilates itself into the other'.<sup>10</sup> Religion is a difficult entity through which to attempt to find compromise. Indeed, it quickly becomes a highly emotive, subjective and personal dialogue to have. Making religion the discursive focus easily forecloses potential areas of agreement. If anti-war activists had been able to embrace other aspects of identity, for instance place-based identities, there might have been more ground on which to find commonality beyond 'being anti-war'.

4. Finally, the superficiality of many Muslim/non-Muslim interactions is in part a result of a failure to understand the complexity of Muslim politics in Britain. If such complexity could be embraced by non-Muslim activists, this could help those Muslim activists seeking to articulate new forms of who they are and support a more informed dialogue between multiple voices as to what commonalities exist between different forms of Islam and non-Muslim activists. Activists would then be in a better position to understand why some Islamic practices are supported, contested or rejected by different Muslims and consequently more clearly support those with whom they felt most aligned.

### **Important steps forward**

Anti-war activism has been a common cause which has brought Muslim and non-Muslim activists together in a variety of positive, temporary and challenging ways. Exploring this interaction has highlighted several practical steps that need to be taken if we are to facilitate further positive political engagement in Britain.

First, we need to tolerate protest, dissent, and activism, and embrace it as an expression of a working democracy. This is an opportunity to redefine and reinvent what democracy is in Britain. Many anti-war activists have noted a democratic deficit in the way the Blair government took Britain to war. This concern about democracy is also reflected in debates within Muslim organizations. The relation between democracy and Islam is contested, though in recent years there have been an increasing number of Islamic scholars calling for Muslims in Britain to take part in political voting and to have 'greater engagement as individuals in the civil society around us'.<sup>11</sup> This plea is particularly salient for the young, who, struggling with defining their Muslim identity in Britain, are at risk of alienation – a state some Muslim interviewees fear leaves them prone to subversion by terrorist groups. Thus, stronger links between Muslim and non-Muslim activists facilitate a debate about the types of citizenship activists would like to encourage to contribute to a society where all voices are heard. Crucially, this activism needs to remain outside the formal polity, as many Muslim activists found government endorsement of their organizations destroyed their credibility with Muslims and thus hindered their attempts to engage with their constituents.

Second, we need to create spaces that facilitate interaction. Protest spaces fostered some initial interactions and were claimed and remade by those attending, enabling diverse groups to walk side by side. However, these spaces were temporary and transitory. Moreover, many anti-war meetings have taken place in meeting halls that are owned, claimed or shaped by particular groups and carry religious or anti-religious identities. More spaces of interaction are required, and these spaces need to be local and

<sup>10</sup> N. Bouteldja, 'Representing Islam', *Comment is Free ... The Guardian website*, [http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/naima\\_bouteldja/2007/03/the\\_burdens\\_of\\_representation.html](http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/naima_bouteldja/2007/03/the_burdens_of_representation.html), 2007, consulted 03.04.07.

<sup>11</sup> Sacranie quoted by E. Masood, 'British Muslims: ends and beginnings', *OpenDemocracy*, 31.10.06, [http://www.opendemocracy.net/globalization/british\\_muslims\\_4048.jsp](http://www.opendemocracy.net/globalization/british_muslims_4048.jsp).

<sup>9</sup> R.J. Bernstein, 'Hannah Arendt's Forgotten Jewish Soul', *Moment Magazine*, April 2007, <http://www.momentmag.com/Exclusive/2007/2007-04/200704-BookEssay.html>, consulted 13.04.07.

neutral. Such spaces are important for all activists but especially for young Muslims who were politicized by the early marches but are now left disillusioned. Without these spaces the possibilities for interaction and sustained dialogue across difference remain limited.

Third, the anti-war movement needs to be more assertive in welcoming a diverse range of participants. Although many have done this there are ongoing practices that, even subconsciously, serve to exclude others. Failure to make the most of the opportunity to engage with Muslim activists could have particular ramifications for Muslims' understanding of their place within British society.

Here is an opportunity to demonstrate interculturalism in practice through political activism. Such activism is a valuable aspect of our political system, but more than that it is a vital avenue through which Muslims and non-Muslims can express their political views in non-violent ways. Moreover, if we can build upon the fragile foundations of interaction that already exist, we can create a space for dialogue about how to build common links across difference and the place of religion in society, which in turn could enable complex identities of Britishness to be put into practice.

## Political radicalism in Bradford, UK

### *Gurchathen Sanghera and Suruchi Thapar-Bjorkert*

Political radicalism in Bradford, West Yorkshire, is not a new phenomenon. Since the 1970s the Pakistani Muslim community in the UK has become increasingly visible in public protest – especially during the 'Rushdie Affair' in 1989, and the 1995 and 2001 urban 'riots'. However, the nature of political activism and protest, which has principally involved young men, has changed from lawful protests to illegal and unlawful protests.<sup>1</sup> We contend that these 'public' controversies have accentuated three significant disjunctures in Bradford. The first disjuncture is between the Pakistani Muslim community and the White establishment – especially around the issue of 'trust' (or lack of it). The second is an intergenerational disjuncture within the Pakistani community, between elders and younger men and women. Finally, between Pakistani Muslims and other ethnic and religious groups, and the belief among some that they need to protect their own community from *outsiders*.

The aim of our research<sup>2</sup> was not to investigate the 2001 disturbances, but to analyse the question of *mobility* of similar migrant groups by engaging with the concept of *social capital*. We were interested in understanding *mobility* by exploring the educational and career aspirations of young Pakistani Muslim men and women in Bradford. As part of this research, in-depth interviews and fieldwork were conducted primarily with young men and women of Pakistani Muslim heritage living in inner-city Bradford. Interviews were also conducted with an array of stakeholders (such as workers in local education authority, youth workers, probation officers and representatives from the Council of Mosques), who also acted as the gatekeepers to the Pakistani Muslim community.

<sup>1</sup> G. Sanghera and S. Thapar-Bjorkert, "'Because I am Pakistani ... and I am Muslim ... I am Political'" – Gendering Political Radicalism: Young Femininities in Bradford', in Tahir Abbas (ed.), *Islamic Political Radicalism – A European Perspective* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 173–91; and G. Sanghera and S. Thapar-Bjorkert, 'Methodological Dilemmas: Gatekeepers and Positionality in Bradford, West Yorkshire, UK', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (forthcoming 2007).

<sup>2</sup> *Social Capital, Gender and Differential Outcomes among Young Men and Women of Pakistani Muslim Heritage*, Leverhulme Trust, 2003/05.

The research in Bradford was conducted against the backdrop of its turbulent political history, which also contributes to a heightening climate of fear and suspicion (involving both inter- and intra-ethnic communities). This is compounded by structural factors such as high rates of unemployment, racism, segregation and poverty.

National debates (on for example, immigration and asylum seekers, the apparent incompatibility between British and Muslim identities, faith schools, 'honour killings', integration and multiculturalism, 'home-grown extremists', and anti-terror legislation) sustain and at times exacerbate this climate of fear and suspicion and increase the visibility of Pakistani Muslims. As well as these local and national dimensions, the climate of fear and suspicion in Bradford also needs to be located in an international context, so as to consider how the impact of events such as 9/11, the 'war against terror', the second Iraq war, the French government's decision to ban headscarves from schools and the ensuing debates, and the London bomb attacks (7/7), have fuelled increasing Islamophobia and a sense of being besieged within the Pakistani Muslim community. For example, Nabila (17-year-old Pakistani Muslim female), talking about the impact of Islamophobia on young Muslims' lives post-9/11, stated that

*... It's not my fault I'm Muslim, it's just him [Osama Bin Laden], it's his own fault. It's not my fault he did it, he'll be probably shot dead tomorrow for something like that but it's going to affect us because we're the ones who're going to have to live here ....*

It is important to point out that the impact or consequences of Islamophobia are not felt just by Muslims; rather, it impacts on all communities. This can result – and in some cases has done – in the creation of inter-communal cleavages and tensions, which in turn feeds into the climate of fear and suspicion. For example, the Sikh community, since 2001 and 7/7, has been the target of 'race-hate crimes' for 'what many term[ed] ... mistaken identity'.<sup>3</sup>

In the interviews, respondents were asked about possible obstacles that they might face in achieving their educational and career aspirations. They talked about how these international events, national political debates and Bradford's past history have impacted – often negatively – on their everyday lives. Imran (21-year-old Pakistani Muslim male) talked about the appeal of Islamist groups and the growing significance of religion in peoples' lives. This could entail praying 'five times a day', a strong belief that 'Allah' could get people through all the challenges in life and the need to put faith at the centre of one's life. Similarly, Anwar (24-year-old Pakistani Muslim male) spoke about the impact of global events such as 9/11 and the 'war against terror', on the lives of Muslims in Bradford, and how he felt it affected the climate of fear and suspicion:

*I mean the influences ... like if you ... for example have a beard and stuff, you know like in ... [he names a predominantly white neighbourhood], if you've got a beard and you're Muslim, then you're a terrorist, it's as simple as that!*

Importantly, our research points out that while the impact of Islamophobia on Muslims is not gendered, the responses and reactions to Islamophobia are. Significantly, we found that young men and women are both turning to Islam but adopting different strategies for different ends. There is growing political radicalism among young women, which has been shaped by critical engagement with both religion and education. Our research

<sup>3</sup> BBC News, 'Sikhs demand race-hate protection', 12.09.05.

found that young women have come to develop their own strategies for utilizing faith to challenge cultural practices and the ideas of their parents and elders. Young women are increasingly turning to their faith at a time when it is coming under intense scrutiny, locally, nationally and internationally.

Faith is important for all the young female respondents, even in the face of adversity such as Islamophobia. Fear of Islamophobia created contradictory discourses and generational conflict concerning cultural-religious symbols, such as the hijab. Women saw their dress code as representative of their faith but also became the targets of Islamophobia because of this. Interestingly, the decision to adopt a particular dress code is at times also objected to by family members because of their fear of an Islamophobic attack. However, for many young women the headscarf/hijab was seen as a form of protection. Iffat (19 year-old Pakistani Muslim female) said:

*You know when I wear my hijab? What I feel is it's like identification, that ok I'm a Muslim, oh look, it's that kind of thing. It sometimes feels nice because you feel protected; do you know what I mean?*

At the same time women are aware that wearing the hijab makes them more suspicious to the general community. Laila (17-year-old Pakistani Muslim female) talked about how 'things have changed' over the last three to five years with respect to increasing hostility towards Muslims. She said being a Muslim made her 'feel at peace' and 'it shows me the way of life and a proper way of dealing with things'. Yet, at the same time, she highlighted how negative media attention towards, and portrayal of, Muslims had impacted on her:

*I'll get asked questions and funny looks that maybe I wouldn't have got asked three or five years back ... things are not working for Muslims in the media and in the politics ... now it's heightened [negatively towards Muslims], it's working more against Muslims..*

In many cases the parents were a lot less religious than their daughters and were considered to be more 'cultural' by the young women respondents. Despite parental concerns, reservations and, in some cases, outright opposition, young women still decided to wear the hijab. Young women distinguished or decoupled religion and culture, often understanding religion as more progressive than culture or cultural heritage. Young women used the term 'cultural' to make sense of traditions transported by parents and elders from Pakistan and what they considered to be un-Islamic practices such as arranged marriage and *purdah*.

Another important theme to come out of the interviews with young women is how they negotiate access to education by means of religion. Young women talked about how education was important in terms of being a 'proper Muslim' and therefore used this strategically. Indeed, education was considered to be an important means through which to understand their religion and faith and to use it to negotiate access to education. According to Sara (17-year-old Pakistani Muslim female), there was a clear correlation between 'spirituality' and achievements.

In many cases, more religiously conscious women talked about how they differentiated between their 'religious community' and the 'cultural community' in which they lived. The religious community was not their immediate community; rather, it comprises young women (and men) whom they meet at Islamic conferences, book readings, school/college and prayer sessions. Indeed, the 'religious community' was seen to be more progressive, in that education for all was considered to be very important. It is a source of both inspiration and support for

many of the young women in challenging cultural practices and bringing about positive social change in Bradford. Despite the commonly perceived perspective that Islam becomes a cultural resource in the construction of an assertive masculinity, for many of the young women interviewed it was a 'tool' both for personal betterment in terms of education and employment and also for challenging restrictive cultural practices and community pressures.

Growing political radicalism among women also enabled them to critically assess their co-ethnic male peers. Criminality, unemployment and the lack of positive role models for young men were seen as pivotal for certain types of masculinity being championed by young men in Bradford. Apathy towards education and the desire to 'fit in' informed the inter-generational interaction between young and older men within and outside the family network. Paradoxically, many older males were, according to young women, influenced by a negative peer culture that centred on 'illegal activities', and which is rapidly 'becoming the norm and a "life choice"'. Other female respondents associated the above issues with broader cultural and contextual issues specific to Bradford, such as 'son preference'. Many female respondents believed that 'boys can do whatever they want but they are still angels but girls, there's more pressure about ... your daughter is your *izzat*' [family honour]. Some young women felt that *izzat* was used to burden them and ultimately silence them. Faiza (17-year-old Pakistani Muslim female) said: 'The girls are just expected to be a no-show, do nothing, say nothing, in anything that might reflect badly ... and the guys take over everything, rule everything, do everything and say everything.' It would be wrong to assume, however, that all respondents were making generalizations about young Pakistani Muslim men. Some did acknowledge that there are young men in the community who work hard to get an education; it is a minority that often makes things difficult for the majority.

Many of the young women felt that the activities of their male counterparts often went either unchecked or were ignored by parents. There was a widespread perception that parents and young men were living in 'different worlds' – they were following disconnected, almost 'parallel lives'. A 36-year-old Pakistani Muslim male probation officer stated that young Pakistani Muslims inhabit a very different social world from their parents:

*... You go into a lot of households and you do a home visit and one of the things that the parent says is that their son is an absolute angel, 'he comes home and he presses [massages] my feet, and he does this for me and he does that for me' ... but do you know what he's doing the rest of the time, he is a drug dealer. The mother is not aware of it, she says 'no, my son he works all night, you know, he works six nights a week, he's working night shifts and he brings this money home', but the guy hasn't got a job, he's not working night shift, he's out all night simply because he's ... got another lifestyle, and the family are totally unaware of that.*

This excerpt highlights a number of interrelated issues that may provide important insights into the radicalization of young Muslim men. First, many young Pakistani Muslim men and their parents live very separate lives. This is almost an extension of Herman Ouseley's *parallel lives* discourse, but not between ethnic groups, rather intergenerationally within the Pakistani Muslim community. Young women, however, are under closer surveillance and their movements outside the home are restricted, while young men tend to spend a lot of unstructured free time outside the home. Local youth workers highlighted that poor standards of education, poor career advice and the

proliferation of what are considered to be inadequate vocational courses and qualifications that do not necessarily *guarantee* meaningful employment have added to the marginalization and disaffection of many young Muslims, particularly males. Talking about local training and vocational courses on offer to in the city, a local Asian youth worker described them as ‘useless qualifications ... just designed to keep the boys off the streets’.

Second, the excerpt challenges public policy perceptions that the Asian family is a close-knit, socially cohesive unit that reproduces and transmits norms, values and sanctions intergenerationally. We contend that the Asian family faces cleavages and internal challenges to its authority and cohesiveness. This was starkly illustrated by the 7/7 bombings in London, when questions were raised as to the role of the families of the ‘suicide bomber’, and whether the parents knew about the increasing radicalization of their sons, within their own homes. Linked to this is our third point – that often parents do not know how young men are spending their time, with whom and where – and this is also particularly pertinent to the issue of radicalization.

### **Conclusion and future directions for research**

In conclusion this project has the following findings:

1. There are new expressions of political radicalism among young men and women in Bradford, which need to be analysed against a backdrop of growing Islamophobia and a climate of fear and suspicion.<sup>4</sup> In particular:

- Women use religion as a resource and men use it as a marker of ‘difference’ and ‘exclusivity’.
- Women are engaged in ‘legal’ forms of political radicalism. What keeps them within these boundaries when globally Muslim women are increasingly adopting violent expressions of radicalism (e.g. female suicide bombers) is something that needs further investigation. Men, on the other hand are increasingly engaging in ‘illegal’ activities and live separate lives from their parents.

2. Unlike stereotypical accounts of ‘backward’ Asian families, Pakistani Muslim intra-familial dynamics generate a form of social capital that overrides the systemic disadvantage that this community suffers. The social capital is primarily being utilized by Pakistani Muslim women who are achieving a degree of social and economic mobility. This is reflected in terms of their narrowing the education gap with their male peers and other ethnic minority groups.

3. Women use religion and their faith to critically evaluate:

- The negative attitudes of co-ethnic peers to education and their involvement with ‘negative’ trends.
- Generational attitudes within the family and in the wider community.
- Stereotypes of religion as oppressive and exclusionary.

## **How UK Muslims and non-Muslims think about terrorist risk**

**John Maule, Peter Stratton, Lynne Cameron, Zazie Todd, Robert Maslen, Tracy Sandberg and Neil Stanley**

### **Introduction**

At present in the UK, the most common experience of terrorism is indirectly from media reports and conversations about attacks that have not happened or have happened elsewhere. However, these experiences are critical in determining attitudes to and beliefs about terrorism and provide the backdrop for determining how people respond when government and security agencies communicate about these threats and the actions they wish the public to take in response to them. Our research investigates how people conceptualize such ‘background’ terrorist threat and the implications of this for the communications about terrorism to the public.

The work is in two phases. The first used focus groups with members of the public, recruited by a professional agency. Groups were selected for socio-economic status, gender, place of residence (Leeds/London, UK) and religion. Some groups consisted solely of Muslims, whereas others contained a mix of religions (and atheists) typical of the general population, but with no Muslim participants. We therefore refer to these groups as Muslim and non-Muslim throughout this paper, since the characterizing feature of the latter was not they were ‘Christian’ or even ‘other religions’ but that they did not consider themselves to be Muslims. We also conducted a set of in-depth interviews with communications professionals in various fields: media, police, emergency planning, politics and security services. In both the focus groups and the interviews participants responded to questions about a range of issues, e.g. what they thought terrorism was, the threats involved, its effect on them and society at large, the role of government and security services and how information is and should be communicated to the public. The second phase builds on the outcomes of the first phase by developing and testing hypotheses about effective ways of communicating terrorist risk to the public.

A distinctive feature of our work is that it brings together two different analytical schemes – metaphor in discourse and attributional analysis – for capturing how people conceptualize background terrorist risk. Research indicates that people use metaphors to conceptualize and interpret situations, and in determining which actions to take (Cameron, 2007). They provide ‘discourse spaces’ for people to explore experiences, ideas and feelings, and ‘cognitive frames’ to describe and label the physical and social world around them. They are used particularly in discourse about difficult or contentious topics. In contrast, the attributional perspective draws on attribution theory research about how people’s actions are affected by their causal expectations. Causal attributions are one of the most intensively studied aspects of how people guide their feelings and actions. Consequently we have been able to use a sophisticated methodology to analyse attributions made during the focus groups and research interviews, and interpret them using a well-established theory (Munton et al., 1999). This approach has proved to be effective in understanding the actions of victims, how people react to threats and important ethno-cultural factors in responses to terrorism.

Our work recognizes that people have different ways of conceptualizing the world around them and that much of the previous research, which has focused on just one perspective, may provide only a partial understanding of how people think

<sup>4</sup> See note 1 above.

and act in the face of the threat of terrorism. We are bringing together two powerful methodologies, each with a very different focus, in order to provide a much richer account. In addition, research shows that the way people conceptualize and act in the face of risk is subject to a broad range of social and cultural factors. So one particularly interesting aspect of our work is that we can explore differences between Muslim and non-Muslim groups in terms of the metaphors and attributions they use. The primary purpose of this article is to present some preliminary findings outlining and commenting upon these differences.

### **Metaphor analysis**

Our analysis to date has explored how the Muslim and non-Muslim group talked about the impact of terrorism on their daily lives and about how they see the government response to terrorist events. Muslim participants tended to position terrorist activity within an international historico-political framework, whereas the non-Muslim groups spoke from a more domestic perspective. For example, Muslim respondents were more likely to see current terrorist activity as connected to US intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq, and UK support for that intervention. There was very little sympathy among Muslims for terrorist action, which was always spoken of as being against the values of Islam. Even though we did not ask about how people become terrorists, groups usually made reference at some point to people, usually young people, being brainwashed, and felt that more should be done to understand why some people may be led astray.

For some Muslim participants, life had not changed much at all since 9/11 or the attacks in London (7/7); terrorist risk was just one more aspect of life that was at the 'back of their minds'. The majority, however, did feel that their lives had been altered, very often through feeling a backlash against Muslim people in the UK. This backlash was partly felt through the response of government and police, but also as fear intersects with perceived racist attitudes across UK society.

Our analyses also indicated that social fragmentation was thought to be increasing, with groups labelled and defined in simplistic and inaccurate ways that resonate with racist attitudes. As compared with non-Muslims, Muslims made finer-grained and more informed distinctions between groups such as refugees and asylum seekers, and different religious groups. Across both Muslim and non-Muslim focus groups there was a tendency to exclude British Muslims in speaking of 'British' or 'English' people. Metaphors of containment were used to describe Muslims as 'separate' from other groups in society, e.g. 'I think there are invisible walls now, you know, being built'. Muslim participants felt that, despite being innocent UK citizens, they may be grouped with terrorists mainly because of their appearance. This ill-informed categorizing of people was seen in large part to be driven by the reporting of terrorist events in the media. We believe that social cohesion might be assisted, and would certainly be indicated, by the development of inclusive language to refer to all UK citizens (some way of saying 'us' and meaning everybody, rather than excluding 'them').

Some Muslims reported that their non-Muslim work colleagues, friends and others made explicit efforts to understand how they might be feeling when terrorism was in the news. These efforts were rare, but significant in maintaining empathy between Muslims and non-Muslims. There were also positive statements made about efforts at community and local authority level to maintain cohesion after 7/7. Together these findings suggest that it is important for government to prioritize the maintenance and renewal of social cohesion across groups through sponsoring bridge-building efforts between communities.

In their domestic arrangements, Muslim participants and non-Muslims alike worried more about the safety of family members after 7/7. There was a tendency for Muslim children to be more restricted in their movements than before 7/7, often for fear of racist attacks as much as of terrorist events, and wives who wear the hijab were more likely to be accompanied outside the home, for the same reason. Both Muslim and non-Muslim participants reported reacting to the sight of 'terrorist-like people', usually described as men with beards and rucksacks, but Muslims also experienced the converse of this – being looked at or responded to as if they themselves were suspicious. Government actions, and the effects of those actions on innocent Muslims, were described in physical terms, e.g. 'Psychologically, it's *mashed me up*'. The long-term effects of being treated as suspicious need to be investigated.

Most participants, regardless of faith allegiances, felt the government was not doing enough to combat the threat of terrorism. Paradoxically, many also felt that the threat was exaggerated by politicians and the media. Nonetheless, Muslim participants responded differently from non-Muslims to questions about the effect of government reactions to terrorism on human rights. Whereas non-Muslim participants tended to be more concerned about human rights legislation opening up too much freedom of movement, Muslim participants often felt that something important had been lost, and that human rights have disappeared or been suspended in response to terrorism.

### **Attributional analysis**

Attributional analysis focused on participants' causal expectations of background terrorist risk. The method involves identifying all statements that present a cause as leading to a specified outcome. The focus groups generated about 250 such statements per hour (4,408 attributions from the 12 groups). Each was coded for the stated cause and its outcome, and other standard dimensions such as who had some control over this outcome. For both Muslim and non-Muslim groups the most frequently stated 'cause' of an outcome was terrorism itself. Considering just the attributions offering terrorism as a 'cause', both groups reported many 'outcomes' affecting themselves (22% of Muslims' attributions and 25% of non-Muslims') and affecting people in general (29% for Muslims and 40% for non-Muslims). The Muslim groups spoke of terrorism affecting Muslims in general more than four times as often as did non-Muslims. The forms that this tendency is found to take, following more detailed analyses, will have clear implications for communications that attempt to empower the population to tackle terrorism – such as acting to reduce the risk of terrorist attacks or taking effective self-protection measures.

Our preliminary interpretations have focused on one particular tendency: that when terrorism was identified in the 'cause', both Muslims and non-Muslims most often saw the outcomes as affecting 'people and society'. It is worth noting that Muslims, as well as non-Muslims, readily spoke about the effects of terrorism on the whole of society, suggesting that communications focused in this way will have equal relevance to both communities. However, Muslims did talk less than non-Muslims about this general effect and instead talked extensively about the effects of terrorism on the Muslim community. We need to investigate further to judge the significance of these references to the consequences for Muslims. More detailed attributional analysis will identify what kinds of effects terrorism is reported to have, and which of these are mediated through the reactions of the non-Muslim community. There were also some references by non-Muslims to the effects of terrorism on Muslims, and these will be investigated in detail for indications of how such concerns could be mobilized more broadly to improve community relations.

Neither group devoted much discussion to the effects of terrorism on government or the security services (7%, or a total of 75 of those attributions in which terrorism was the cause, across all the focus groups), whereas the professionals made more than twice as many such attributions. This lack of interest in, or knowledge about, the effects of terrorism on the government and security services would seem to be a contributor to the cycle in which the state is not seen as responding adequately to terrorism. When constructing communications there may be a case for emphasizing common ground in the effects of terrorism on government and the people. This could usefully moderate the tendency shown in our data for talk to primarily be of government as another uncontrollable, even arbitrary influence. One participant said:

*I think a lot of their [the government's] decisions are also mixed up with political motives → I don't think a lot of their actions and their decisions are sort of genuine*

The analysis does pick out attributions that we might aspire to encourage:

*Imagining the secret service foiling plans and being clever  
→ You suddenly become very patriotic and proud*

Once the attributional and metaphor analyses of these aspects are combined we will be in a stronger position to make detailed recommendations.

It is notable that all participants saw themselves as experiencing outcomes about four times as often as they saw themselves as causal agents, suggesting a degree of perceived disempowerment in both groups. Further, we found that both groups mentioned a high proportion of outcomes over which they could not exert significant influence, with the non-Muslim groups seeing themselves as having slightly less control than the Muslims. In contrast to this, professionals spoke more often of outcomes over which they had some control. A degree of disempowerment is inevitable in the face of terrorist threats but our data suggest areas in which a greater sense of control is possible and useful.

Interestingly, Muslims talking about the effects of the security services and of the media most often mentioned the effects on themselves and their families. Non-Muslim participants, on the other hand, were more likely to see security services and the media as affecting society in general. So while there are some indications of Muslims speaking in ways that include them as part of the population as a whole, there are specific areas in which the differences in perception need to be taken into account and in some cases reduced.

The field of attributional analysis has paid particular attention to attributions that are in a form known to be associated with feelings of hopelessness and depression. These attributions refer to significant and lasting causes that are especially relevant to the

person, but that have negative outcomes which are not under the person's control. Typical verbatim examples of these drawn from our focus groups are (following a statement that 'being a Muslim, it's a trademark'):

*CAUSE: 'Just because you have got [...] trademark that you're a Muslim'; OUTCOME: 'However hard you try to do anything for the country it will never be highlighted.'*

*CAUSE: 'Because of the fact that you're a Muslim'; OUTCOME: 'It's hard to get to any very top level [in a job].'*

Such statements suggest both a wish to be more included in society and a frustration at the way the non-Muslim population's response to terrorism is perceived to be making this impossible.

Already these analyses offer suggestions for formulating communications that will be useful for the whole population and others that could usefully be specifically directed towards the Muslim community.

## Conclusion

Although the analyses of focus groups are still under way, they do provide insights about how people conceptualize background terrorist threat and possible implications for developing effective and sensitive communications. Potentially important similarities and differences between Muslim and non-Muslim groups are emerging. For example, all groups showed overriding concerns for the safety of their family and community; were able to identify ways in which their lives had been changed by terrorist threat; felt that the government was not doing enough to combat this threat; believed that the threat was exaggerated by politicians and the media; and felt generally disempowered. However, our Muslim groups tended to conceptualize terrorism in a broader historical context; feel excluded during discussions of 'British' and 'English' people; have a different view about the effects of terrorism on human rights; and focus less on the effects on the general population and more on the effects on their own community. In addition, our Muslim groups were more likely to indicate that they had been affected by the media and security services.

The nature and implications of these similarities and differences are currently being clarified and we are also exploring differences due to socio-economic status, gender and place of residence. We anticipate that extra value will come from combining the two independently powerful analyses founded on metaphors and attributions. Finally, we are using our findings to develop predictions about effective terrorist risk communication and testing these in a series of field experiments.

## References

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