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Muslim Minorities in Britain: Integration, Multiculturalism and Radicalism in the Post-7/7 Period

Tahir Abbas

This paper is a discussion of the experiences of British Muslim communities in the light of the events of 7/7. The social, economic and political positions of British Muslims have been important public policy and academic and popular discourse considerations since the focus on the Rushdie Affair of 1989 and the general rise of Islamophobia ever since. However, the events of 9/11, the impact of anti-terror legislation upon Muslim communities, and the subsequent discussion of questions in relation to multiculturalism and the experience of Islamic political radicalisation since 7/7 have led to the current research. The paper begins with an overview of the demographics of British Muslim communities and a focus on multiculturalism and Islamophobia in Britain. A discussion of the problem of the radicalisation of young Muslims is then followed by a concentration on anti-terrorism legislation and its impact on civil liberties. The example of the “foiled terror plot” of 10 August 2006 provides an analysis of the intersection of the current interest in radicalisation and its impact on multiculturalism in a climate of severe Islamophobia. In conclusion, it is argued that the many different parameters of Islamophobia are increasingly converging; further problematising already disadvantaged and disaffected religious minority groups. Solutions to problems remain in building inter-faith and inter-ethnic relations, ensuring equality of opportunity and outcome, but also recognising the important balance between integration and diversity.

Keywords: British Muslims; Islamophobia; Post-7/7 Period; Radicalism

Introduction

We live in the era of “war on terror”.¹ This has impacted on the lives of people everywhere in Western European societies but Muslims in particular and no less so

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than in Britain since 9/11 and 7/7.² The civil liberties of every citizen have been eroded. Already generally excluded, disadvantaged, alienated, misrepresented and vilified, in the current period Muslim minorities are further thrust into the limelight in negative terms. This is leading to four key issues of interest: changed Muslim and non-Muslim perceptions of “the other”, the problematising of multiculturalism (integration vs. diversity), Islamic political radicalisation of British-born Muslims: from “suicide-bombers” to the savvy modern Muslim “political animal”, and an increase in far right political hostilities towards Muslims. The overall argument of this paper is that “home-grown” radicalisation is a phenomenon that has emerged through reversion to a monocultural politico-ideological project that came as a response to the 2001 urban disturbances in the North of the UK and the events of 9/11 in the USA. This has significantly impacted on civil liberties as well as providing a blame-the-victim approach propagated by dominant media and political discourses. The paper begins with a brief historical narrative on Muslim migration to and settlement in Britain. The nature of Islamophobia is then defined and followed by a discussion of how it has impacted on the experience of multiculturalism. Particular attention is given to young British Muslims and the issues of radicalisation. A discussion of the decline of civil liberties further contextualises the problems Muslim minorities have been facing in the post-9/11 and 7/7 period. Finally, the recent example of the August 2006 “foiled terrorist plot” is elaborated to illustrate the nature of Islamophobia currently operating in British society.³ The conclusions suggest that the current status quo cannot be maintained. Refocusing on equality and a balance between integration and diversity, for both Muslims and non-Muslims, is fundamental to success.

Muslims in Britain

There has been a significant Muslim presence in Britain since the beginning of the nineteenth century, when Muslim seamen and traders from the Middle East began settling around the major British ports. Muslims from the British Raj also came to England to study or engage in commerce (Matar). However, according to Nielsen, the major growth of the Muslim population dates from the post-war immigration of Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Indians to fill specific labour demands in certain declining industrial cities in the South East, the Midlands and the North. In the 1970s, Arab communities began to settle in London, financed by increasing wealth in the sending economies. Since the late 1970s, a steady flow of Muslim political dissidents and economic migrants has entered and successfully settled into Britain. Since the 1990s, there has been an intake of Eastern European, African and Middle Eastern Muslim refugees, emanating from such places as Nigeria, Bosnia and Kosovo, to Afghanistan, Somalia and Iraq.

As stated by Peach, British discourse on racialised minorities has shifted its focus from “colour” in the 1950s and 1960s, “race” in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, “ethnicity” in the 1990s, to “religion” in the present climate. Here, Islam has had the

greatest profile. British popular discourse has expanded from seeing minorities as a homogenous entity, to discerning differences within and between these minority groups: separating “blacks” from Asians, differentiating between Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis and distinguishing between Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. Religion has emerged as a major social signifier. In Britain, the burgeoning interest in religion has come from both awareness within the ethnic minority population of Islam and from its heightened international profile. In 1951, the British Muslim population was approximately 21,000. By 2001, it had grown to 1.6 million. Two out of three Muslims in Britain are of South Asian origin, with around half of all British Muslims of Pakistani ethnicity. There is also considerable anecdotal evidence to suggest that two out of three Pakistanis are actually Azad Kashmiris.⁴ Well over half of all Muslims in Britain are British-born, which makes them indigenous Britons by definition.

Muslim communities, however, have largely remained concentrated in the inner city areas of older towns and cities in the North, the Midlands and in the South. This residential “stagnation” is an indicator of how Muslims have not benefited from the levels of mobility enjoyed by other migrant communities, and of their inability to move out of areas, which are facing high levels of social tension and economic deprivation through direct discrimination and racial hostility (Modood et al.). Birmingham is typical of many of the challenges faced by Muslims across the country. Roughly one in seven of the city’s inhabitants are Muslim and the male unemployment rate is three times that of overall city levels. The experience of Birmingham’s Muslims brings into focus the fact that economic opportunities have tended to bypass Muslim communities, even when other communities have prospered. While other cities with large Muslim populations, such as Bradford, are trapped in economic decline, Birmingham’s economic performance has been good, despite the decline of its manufacturing and engineering sectors. The city has undergone successful regeneration and this has begun to attract a thriving service (retail) and commercial sector. Nevertheless, these opportunities have largely evaded most Muslims and may have even entrenched some of the barriers that they face. While the indigenous population has moved out of inner city Birmingham through “white flight”, South Asian Muslims have largely failed to move beyond the inner city areas that they originally migrated to. Subsequently, these areas have become further disadvantaged with new employment created elsewhere (Abbas *Muslims in Birmingham*).

Multiculturalism and Islamophobia in Britain

As discussed by Anwar, Roach and Sondhi, since the 1960s, governments in Britain have shaped policy and practice in relation to ethnic minority groups based on various strategies of anti-immigration and anti-discrimination legislation on the one hand, and with a programme of assimilation, integration and, most recently, multiculturalism on the other. However, what permeates policy and practice is the underlying assumption concerning the inevitable assimilation of immigrant groups.

In relation to British Muslims, this has not occurred to the extent envisaged. Partly as a function of racist hostility diminishing the potential of individuals and groups to positively integrate into the dominant economy and society but also because of a lack of appreciation of the extent to which ethnic minorities have come to rely on class and ethnic community resources to mobilise what little economic and social development they can achieve. In effect, Muslims often have had little choice but to retreat into their communities. Even before the events of 9/11, British Muslims' "loyalty" to a cultural–national identity was in question. The Rushdie Affair placed the concerns of British South Asian Muslims firmly on the political and social map, with issues of civic engagement, blasphemy laws, multicultural philosophy, the nature and orientation of certain religio-cultural norms and values, and socio-economic exclusion and marginalisation dominating rhetoric, policy and practice throughout the 1990s (Modood "Multicultural Politics"; Werbner). Combined with matters in relation to cultural hybridisation and the recognition of minority religions, the experience of and dominant attitudes towards British Muslims throughout the 1990s were reflective of the entire range of debates and discussions in this field (Modood "Anti-essentialism").

In Britain, assimilation began, in part, as a policy to assuage indigenous white groups that the arrival of immigrant groups would not mean the loss of the social, cultural and political identity of the existing nation state and the importance of maintaining the status quo. In the current climate, matters are significantly more complex because the nation state has developed into a culturally heterogeneous entity, constantly in a state of flux as a result of population movements that represent a combination of ethno-religious tensions and the internationalisation of capital and labour. Nations now have to manage the needs and aspirations of diverse immigrant populations as well as more established ethnic minority citizens. All attempts to make multiculturalism work in the British case have been fraught with ambiguities, inconsistencies, challenges and political leanings, all impacted by present politics and collective memory. The New Labour experiment has had both successes and failures. However, as a result of 9/11 and the Northern "riots", public policy focus has been on domestic security, the war against international terrorism and improving community cohesion.

Issues in relation to the experience of British Muslims allow the debates in multiculturalism to be conceptualised in their fullest form. Given the ways in which multiculturalism is seen, understood, accepted and applied it is clear that no other group provides a better insight into its effectiveness than British Muslims. Indeed, there were both international and national forces affecting the positions of British Muslims before 9/11, resulting in a tightening of security and anti-terrorist measures, and the introduction of citizenship tests for new immigrants. Important to consider too are the disturbances in the North in 2001, as government reaction has had direct and lingering implications for British South Asian Muslims. Young British Muslims are increasingly found to be in the precarious position of experiencing competing challenges: at the extremes, they are influenced by radical Islamic politics emanating

from outside the UK on the one hand and negative developments to British multicultural citizenship at home on the other. As a consequence, there is a contestation between the forces of radicalisation, secularisation and liberalisation impacting on the lives of young British Muslims. In the post-9/11 climate, British Muslims are at the centre of questions about what it means to be British or English. The basis of this rests in issues on the global agenda as well as local area concerns in relation to “community cohesion”, citizenship and multicultural political philosophy (Abbas “Recent Developments”).

Youth, Muslims and Radicalisation

Patterns of immigration, settlement and the current malaise in relation to radicalism of Muslims are remarkably similar across Western Europe. Post-war immigrant groups who were either invited or came searching for improved economic opportunities have found their young growing up in societies which exhibit prejudice, discrimination and racism towards minority Muslim communities. Local education for the young has been limited, for much the same reasons as in Britain: that is, poor schools in poor neighbourhoods, often with less educated parents. Daun and Walford in their recent review of Muslim schooling issues in the context of globalisation have reaffirmed these experiences. Access to quality education directly impacts on the likelihood of securing quality higher education and labour market entry. This is also linked to levels of social and community participation (as “good” citizens) by individuals and communities. There are also inter-generational tensions as a result of language, culture and attitudes towards majority communities.

In general, as the process of adaptation begins to evolve in subsequent generations of migrant communities, an adjustment to and integration into majority society occurs. At times there is resistance, as in the case of a few Muslims who see integration as a negative feature in their lives in liberal secular nation states, regarded by some as somewhat antithetical to the life of “a good Muslim”. Others have been positively disposed towards integration but, as a result of ongoing racism, they experience a sense of dislocation and alienation, perceived or real, which negatively affects their outlook. These experiences encourage some to seek to “resolve” Muslim issues, both at home and abroad, and they are often politically subjugated by radical interest groups, which may result in the carrying out of horrific acts of violence, invariably involving the annihilation of the self. For some commentators, the incessant interest and focus by the state and the media on “militant jihadi” activity in Britain potentially perpetuates the problem. Certainly, there is a feeling among many that British and US foreign policy has impacted on the perceptions of already much maligned and disenfranchised young Muslim males who feel they have no voice, as illustrated by the analysis of the events of 7/7 by Rai.

This so-called radicalisation of Islam has its historical precedents. A perceptible pattern can be found in which Muslims in Islamic lands have opposed the dominant interests of major capitalist states vying for a “new world order” including the Salafi

(“early Islam”) writings of Muslim ideologues (e.g. Sayid Qutb, Hassan al-Banna, Maulana Abu’l a’la Maududi) in the 1930s, 1940s or 1950s, the actions of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation and its wings, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and Fateh in the 1960s and 1970s, and the political activities of Libyans, Iraqis, Iranians and Lebanese in the 1980s. This cumulative response has come about over the last 200 years as Islam and Muslims have tried to counter the imperial and colonial onslaught, often supported by US and British interventions in the Middle East and the Muslim world in an effort to maintain control of important economic concerns or to fight the cold war against the “red enemy”, as described by Dreyfuss.

However, before the events of 9/11, the Rushdie Affair of 1989 highlighted to the world that there were unresolved issues pertaining to the British South Asian Muslim community until then regarded as relatively innocuous. Pictures of the “book burnings in Bradford” reverberated around the globe and media reaction to them was particularly negative, at home and abroad, as explained by Modood (“British Asian Muslims”). According to Ahmed, the collapse of the Soviet Empire in 1991 and troubles in far-off Muslim lands firmly placed Islam and Muslims in the immediate sphere of media and political attention. After 9/11, and certainly after 7/7, a whole host of factors have negatively impacted on British Muslims. These include increasing anti-terrorist measures, greater policing powers, racial and ethnic profiling in the criminal justice system, civil society debates around culture that place South Asian Muslims at its heart, although never explicitly, and questions around the apparent unassimilability of Muslims, with a focus on “community cohesion”. These questions have all coexisted alongside the apparent and increasing “jihadi salafi” radicalisation of young Muslims.

Furthermore, gender issues are important additional dimensions to explore, as it is often men who are most likely to be embroiled in these processes. Young Muslim women have been shown to better engage with the theological, political and social pressures placed on their identities as British-born and Muslim people. Without doubt, it is reasonably well confirmed that Muslim women outperform their male counterparts in higher education, and are more successful in negotiating issues of ethnicity, identity and high profile religious minority status. Recent research by Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert, Macey, and Abbas (“Islamic Political Radicalism”) illustrate these findings poignantly. Effectively, they argue that a crisis of masculinity is impacting on Muslim male experiences in particular ways. Muslim women have generally been better able to interpret and apply the teachings of Islam in a confident, articulate and well-informed way and consequently have been able to transcend ethnic and cultural divides in relating to other Muslims and non-Muslims. While first-generation Muslim men dominated the domestic and public sphere in relation to a South Asian Muslim presence in society, this is being increasingly eroded in the face of improved opportunities for women per se and the ways in which Muslim men have succumbed to a crisis of masculinity that has affected all. As such, many young Muslim men who do not progress in education are more likely than others to enter

into crime. At present, masculine Muslim male identities are reified in the light of the “war on terror”, persistent social inequalities, cultural and structural racism, and negative media portrayal.

The Decline of Civil Liberties

The Human Rights Act of 1998 guarantees the right to life, freedom from torture, freedom from slavery and forced labour, the right to liberty and security, right to a fair trial, right to privacy, freedom of conscience, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association, and the right to marry and have a family. There are also the freedoms that protect the individual from arbitrary government interference, which include freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and trial by jury – usually created and protected by a constitution. As a result of local, national and international events, namely, the disturbances in the North in 2001 and the “war on terror” as a reaction to the events of 9/11, policy has sought to place at the heart of practice the concerns majority society has in relation to Muslim groups. According to Kundnani, the “Community Cohesion” reports, the official Home Office response to the Northern disturbances, were regarded by many at the level of the community to be a blame-the-victim pathology, seeking to placate the current policies of multiculturalism and ensuring that the focus remains firmly on the British South Asian Muslim communities themselves. At the same time, in the aftermath of 9/11, the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 was rushed through Parliament. It gave powers to hold without charge foreign nationals suspected of involvement in terrorism. In order to do this it meant “opting out” of Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights, allowing for this “in time of war or other public emergency threatening to the life of the nation”. Britain was the only nation to take this route.

Nellis and North explore how pressure mounted to alter the way in which this legislation seemingly impacted on Muslim groups, and in December 2004 the Law Lords ruled 8–1 on the All-Party Human Rights Commission support to repeal the internment powers in the legislation. It did so when the Court of Appeal, under Lord Woolf, reversed the decision of the Special Immigration Appeals Commission ruling that detention without trial was compatible with British and international law. In December 2004, Lord Hoffman said, “the real threat to this life of the nation, in the sense of a people in accordance with its traditional laws and political values, comes not from terrorism but from laws such as these” (House of Lords Session). Rather than immediately repealing the Act, it was suggested by the Home Office that “control orders” would be adopted: a non-custodial response, applicable to both foreign *and* British subjects, without charge and for an indefinite period if it was suspected that an individual was involved in domestic or international terrorism. Measures included electronic tagging, curfews, a ban on the use of the Internet and “house arrest”. Although some minor concessions were made, it was still felt necessary to depart from the European Convention on Human Rights. Without

doubt, the government has more powers than ever to hold people without charge, a function of the current climate of fear, the constitutional crisis raised by the Law Lords judgement and the availability of surveillance technologies. The erosion of the principle of habeas corpus has severely undermined the civil liberties of every citizen. The essential justification provided is that a trial would be damaging to the interests of the security services, as it would expose their secret wire-tapping operations.

The continued racist profiling of asylum seekers and migrants is yet another feature in the negativity experienced by new Muslim groups, shown too in New Labour's attempts to evade the 1951 UN convention on refugees. The somewhat blanket targeting of young Muslims under stop-and-search laws continues unabated, exacerbated by comments made by Hazel Blears MP, the minister responsible for counter-terrorism, who said in March 2005 that Muslims will have to accept as a "reality" that they will be stopped and searched by the police more often than the rest of the public (Home Affairs Select Committee). Since the original terror laws were passed in 2001, around 1,000 people have been arrested. As of December 2006, although half have been released without charge, around 350 have been charged under anti-terror and other legislation. But, only about 20 have been convicted for terrorist offences, including four Islamists. It is difficult to ascertain a precise picture because of the paucity of information. The Institute of Race Relations states that the arrests under the anti-terrorist laws have attracted widespread media coverage while convictions of non-Muslims in court have not been widely reported. Most people are left with the impression that the criminal justice system is successfully prosecuting Muslim terrorists in Britain. Up until 7 July 2005, large numbers of innocent Muslims were being arrested, questioned and released without charge. In the post-7/7 period, this pattern has remained if not intensified, particularly given that three of the four perpetrators of the suicide bombings in London were young British-born Pakistanis.

Government policy in the area of race relations and multiculturalism tends to be one of "integration with cultural tolerance", but the striking feature of the structural experience of British Muslims, new and old, is the economic and social positions they possess. It is, indeed, difficult to generate a position of cultural and social integration from a weak economic and social foundation. The recent developments to anti-terrorist legislation, the ways in which young British Muslims have been overly targeted by stop-and-search, the debates in relation to multiculturalism and the integration of Muslim minorities serve to provide a multi-pronged attack on the freedoms and liberties of everyone, but especially on British Muslims. The general election in 2005 saw New Labour's majority plummet, partly because of the dramatic switching of the Muslim vote, for example, in Bethnal Green and Bow (and given also that in fact more people voted for the Conservatives in England than New Labour). Rather than seeking to empower individuals and groups who seek to integrate successfully into a racially, culturally and religiously tolerant society, the view from government tends to focus on anti-terrorism. It does so at the expense of civil liberties, in particular in relation to Muslims in Britain who remain trapped in poor

localities facing direct and indirect cultural and religious racism. What recent events leading up to 7/7 served to illustrate was the continued rhetoric of a benign multiculturalism that is soft on inequality but hard on identity and culture. Furthermore, neo-Orientalist considerations in relation to Islam continue to penetrate the popular imagination through biased media and its perpetuation by far right groups who target Muslims as the “enemy within” and “a fifth column”. There is no attempt to disentangle the broad category of British Islam, which contains class, cultural, ethnic and even theological nuances and the fact that most British Muslims are indeed indigenous members of society.

“10/8”: Politico-media Manufactured Event or a Threat to “Our Ways”?

The recent “foiled terrorist plot” of 10 August 2006 has revealed an interesting set of issues in relation to the developing nature of Islamophobia in Britain. Within hours of the arrests, high profile policing figures were airing concerns in relation to the “biggest terrorist event since 9/11” and “death and destruction on an unprecedented scale”. As the day unfolded, details emerged that over 20 arrests had been made, largely relating to British Pakistanis but with a number of “converts” also among them. Countless passengers suffered in long queues, with mothers made to taste their baby’s bottled milk to assuage the safety concerns of aviation authorities (this was a nonsensical approach, as chemicals used to make liquid bombs do not harm people if they are taken in limited quantities: rather they need to be mixed together to cause the devastating effects). By the next day a healthy dose of scepticism began to develop in the communities from which these suspects emerged. This scepticism was further confirmed by Internet bloggers, letters in newspapers and opinion columns. A media manufactured attempt to be inquisitor, jury and judge ultimately resulted in people across society becoming suspicious of such negative institutionalised voices. The event in Forest Gate in June 2006, which involved a 3 a.m. raid on a family home in East London, focusing on two brothers suspected of perpetrating terrorism, using over 250 police officers, security and anti-terror personnel, was ultimately an intelligence and policing disaster, further complicated by the fact that one of the brothers was “accidentally” shot in the chest and thrown down two flights of stairs before being tossed onto the pavement outside, to be subsequently carried off by ambulance staff waiting close by. These events in Forest Gate in June 2006, along with the hiding of the truth in relation to the brutal killing of Jean Charles de Menezes in August 2005⁵ remain vivid memories in the minds of many. Having had time to reflect, interpret the events and report on them, it is clear the nation is under the grip of a kind of rampant Islamophobia. And it is a media-driven phenomenon that is supported by a wider geo-political campaign to undermine, destabilise and effectively remove Islam’s ever-growing presence.

The speed with which Muslim elites and commentators went on the offensive was quite remarkable. After 7/7, Muslims felt a double bind: as Britons, many were frightened by the terrible acts of indiscriminate violence. As Muslims, communities

did not have leaders who were confident or articulate enough to take on the establishment. A year on, leaders have become somewhat stronger, wiser and more coherent, and they have come to appreciate that a great many non-Muslim people in Britain support them. Inevitably, there has been a backlash as Muslim criticism in relation to such matters is often dismissed out of hand: another quite specific feature of Islamophobia. Indeed, six Muslim parliamentarians and 28 leading organisations published an open letter to the Prime Minister two days after the “foiled plot”. It spoke of the role of foreign policy and how it was furthering the causes of militant suicide cults. The authors of the letter found themselves quickly ostracised as a result.

A particular question in relation to “10/8” and the developments preceding it is “why Pakistanis?” Why are other South Asian groups who arrived and settled in Britain at the same time not implicated? The answer is not entirely about ethnicity, rather it is more to do with factors such as social class, alienation, inter-generational tension, gender and lack of a political voice. Clearly, when we speak of young Muslims who are involved or suspected of being involved in terrorist attacks, a great many do emerge from poor neighbourhoods, including “reverts”. However, a number do not. What these sets of people share in common are limited opportunities to engage with others in particular spheres, a lack of a sense of belonging and exclusion from mainstream politics. Notions of cultural and social capital are implicit in the ideas behind “community cohesion” but disaffection, disenfranchisement and isolation are functions of both poorer and richer Muslims, and are adequate to lead either into radicalisation.

It could be argued that, in effect, the nation state has let down British Muslims at many different levels. In October 2005 the Home Office appointed working groups which detailed their recommendations and suggestions on how to tackle extremism, however, only a small number have since been taken forward, many with limited long-term benefits. Indeed, the British state has determined a range of responses to the events of 7/7 but one essential concern that has fallen on deaf ears is the call for an official inquiry. This is exacerbated by the fact that the nation state dismisses any link between “home-grown terrorism” and foreign policy, particularly in relation to activities in Muslim lands. In specific attempts to directly tackle extremism, the state has orchestrated the setting up of MINAB (Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board), in an attempt to focus on the mosques and their functions. Formally launched at the end of June 2006, this body consists of members from the Al-Khoei Foundation, Muslim Council of Britain, Muslim Association of Britain and the British Muslim Forum. It is an encouraging step in the right direction. First, it represents broad Muslim ownership of such an important set of issues. Second, it shows the importance of Muslims building consensus with other Muslims – something that has been significantly lacking until recently. The outcomes of this initiative, and how well they are supported, will be important future considerations.

Nationally and internationally, we are continuing to witness a shift to “new right” politics and an unadulterated sympathy with a US-driven neo-conservative political and economic agenda, as noted by Ali. Locally, there is limited inward investment in the areas in which South Asian Muslims are concentrated. Poor education and high unemployment continue to influence their life chances in starkly negative ways. These circumstances are further compounded by the rural origins of first-generation migrants, who have largely organised community and political culture around clan-based kinship networks, where opportunities for the subsequent generations to “break out” do not always exist (Bunting). Local Muslim leadership is relatively weak, including its capacity and the vision it has for the future. Inter-generational tensions are not being resolved, particularly in relation to patriarchy. And, for the most part, mosques and imams have underserved their communities, not in terms of how the young are thought to have become radicalised, but rather, in how they have been removed from the direct religious edification of Muslims. Young Muslims have subsequently gone on to form their own study circles, use the Internet to access alternative sources of information and utilise modes of communication familiar to them, that is, the English language. Here, the already marginalised and predisposed are particularly vulnerable to negative external influences when all else has failed them internally.

Tony Blair’s speech in December 2006, billed as the definitive statement in relation to multiculturalism after 7/7, left few in doubt that Muslims in Britain are regarded as the major cause of the recent strains in race relations. However, talk of the “duty to integrate” left out the “into what element”. In a post-Empire, post-colonial Britain, notions of Englishness and Britishness remain ill defined. It seems that the problem is less of new or existing groups making better efforts to integrate rather than elements of the “host” society needing to work harder to ensure the confidence of new groups. The focus of Blair’s speech was on ensuring a balance between integration and diversity. However, without empowering the disempowered, the various ethnic, cultural, religious and gender divisions will remain, if not intensify. Ultimately, Muslims in Britain, with their “excessive cultural relativism”, are weakening the cultural nationalist framework so desired by Blair and New Labour, as argued in an engaging paper by Back et al. With so many shifting goalposts at many levels it is little wonder that many are unsure which way to turn.

Conclusion: After 7/7

Witnessing the events of the last three decades, from the Iranian Revolution of 1979 onwards, the Muslim world has been in turmoil while Muslim minorities in the Western world have faced economic, social, political and cultural marginalisation. It is these harsh realities that characterise sociological, anthropological, cultural studies and political science interests in the study of British Muslims. In the current climate, the need to refer to the notion of “British Muslim communities”, not “Muslim

community” is quite apparent. Many South Asian Muslims trapped in a cycle of decline are far removed from the expanding high-income, well-integrated savvy class of professional Muslims, often living and working in the South. As part of this analysis, what is also clear is that the debates in relation to integration and multiculturalism have been sidelined by a focus on religious minorities and their supposedly “alien ways”. There is a formalisation of the discussion on multiculturalism away from a concentration on class issues, equality and diversity to one that emphasises culture and values.

In the final analysis, with the nation state making its moves through the empowerment and incorporation of a burgeoning professional and, more importantly, (what are regarded as a) moderate middle class of Muslims, there have been some gains in how this process has positively engaged some young people and Muslim women. At the level of the community, which is differentiated by ethnicity, culture, social class, region and sect, a number of Muslim civil society and community organisations are working at the chalk face, and these projects are delivering some valuable outcomes. For most Muslims in Britain there is pernicious socio-economic exclusion. Only when structural pre-conditions emerge to permit education, employment and housing opportunities will groups value their presence in society, becoming engaged citizens in the framework of an ever-evolving national politico-cultural paradigm. At the level of the nation state, popular discourses have been focusing on culturally essentialist notions of “the Muslim” – for example, based on the perceived problems of “arranged marriages”, “cultural relativism” and “self-styled” segregation. It is a victim-blaming pathology that is saturating public opinion. Furthermore, in a hostile local, national and international climate, radical Islamism can easily target susceptible young Muslims, directly or indirectly. Their seeming integration, implied by their outward appearance, often masks a frustration and angst that is easily exploited. The violent radical Islamist ideology appeals because of its political and theological context however improperly legitimised. This extremist ideology is also fuelled by perceptions in relation to the actions of certain nation states and their approaches to foreign policy as well as how they go about integrating Muslim minorities at home. The 2004 Madrid and 2005 London bombings, and the continued threat to Britain, perceived or real, are testimony to this. As the state continues its legal, social and cultural assault on Muslims, with its attempts to ever-strengthen anti-terror legislation at home while fighting Muslim “insurgents” abroad, many more young Muslim men are being radicalised.

Ultimately, unless there are greater efforts to tackle the structural discrimination and inequalities of Muslim minorities as well as the non-Muslim majority politico-ideological constructs in relation to Muslims in society, the potential threat of violent Islamic political radicalism will remain in the near future. How Muslim minorities experience and help to determine a viable multicultural *and* multi-religious society will be dependent on change and development at the local, national and international levels.

Notes

- [1] This paper was originally presented to the Association of Muslim Social Scientists International Conference, "Citizenship, Security and Democracy", as "British Islamic Culture after 7/7: Ethnicity, Politics and Radicalisation", Istanbul, Turkey, 1–3 September 2006.
- [2] The event of 7/7 refers to the coordinated attacks on London's public transport system in 2005 in which over 50 commuters died and several hundred were injured.
- [3] The August 2006 "foiled terrorist plot" was an attempt by a group of terrorists to detonate explosives on transatlantic flights. Several suspects have been subsequently detained and arrested in association with this plot.
- [4] Although defined as Pakistanis, the Pakistanis in Birmingham predominantly originate from the Mirpur district of Azad Kashmir. The term "Mirpuri" is also interchanged for Pakistani or Azad Kashmiri. It is difficult to estimate the proportion of Pakistanis in the UK who are actually from the Azad Kashmir district. Many of the Pakistanis in the West Midlands and in the North of England are Azad Kashmiris although the category itself is not recognised in official statistics. Furthermore, the term Azad Kashmiri has not quite become accepted parlance in academic or practitioner discourse. It is also important to state that some people would not consider Azad Kashmir to be part of Pakistan and would not want to be identified as Pakistanis.
- [5] Jean Charles de Menezes was a Brazilian who was killed on the London Tube on suspicion of carrying explosives. All allegations were later proven false.

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