

## Chapter 3

# British Muslim Identity

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### INTRODUCTION

Of all the internal debates that face Muslims in Britain perhaps one of the most vigorous is about identity. The identity of those who migrated to the UK from various parts of the world, the first generation of the settled communities, is perhaps easiest to define. Those who lived their formative years in Pakistan, Bangladesh or Egypt would rarely deny that they are Pakistanis, Bangladeshis or Egyptians who live in Britain. The issue becomes somewhat more complex for those who have been born in the UK, second and third generation Muslims who will be the primary focus of discussion (and address) here. I am not going to delve into the issue of identity among converts to Islam directly or specifically, though this is an interesting and worthwhile area of study that has some significant parallels with the case of second and third generation Muslims.

Why is the issue of identity so important? Because without being able to psychologically take up the identity of being British, people whose ancestors have settled on these isles, will not feel that they are 'at home'. Hence, they will be

condemned to remain as ‘migrants’, never really putting down roots. Or will be perceived as a ‘minority’ even though some of Britain’s boroughs are now over 50% non-white. This chapter will look at the issue of British Muslim identity and examine why this is an important debate for Muslims. On a methodological note, it should be mentioned that while such a discussion would initially seem very sociological, a solely sociological approach when dealing with a phenomena such as British Muslim identities may create a discourse that is too reductionist in nature. Such a subject has explicit social, political, and theological dimensions, (not to mention perhaps also psychological and economic ones implicitly) and it is therefore difficult to have a proper discussion of contemporary Muslim identity without also engaging with at least the political and theological dimensions of the subject matter. The chapter therefore takes these three perspectives into account and presents an insider view of British Muslim identity, primarily addressing a second generation, British Muslim audience.

What is a British Muslim? Can such a creature exist? A simplistic definition might be: anyone who carries a British passport and is a Muslim. But obviously the situation is far more complex. A look at the root of the word ‘identity’ will show that it implies some degree of ‘sameness’ hence the word ‘identical’, yet it also connotes difference,<sup>1</sup> suggesting that an identity is an individual, differentiating phenomenon. One may therefore say that identity is relational with ‘another’ and not an entirely isolated matter. Thus, identity, which can have many facets – social, personal, psychological, political, etc. – is the (self) definition of a person or group, in relation to others. The reason for pointing this out is that, logically speaking, from the outset a discussion of identity cannot be an entirely isolationist one, as by definition there has to be interaction. What is up for discussion, however, is the degree and nature of this interaction.

Entwined with this discussion are the many debates surrounding Britishness itself. What does it really mean to be British? Of course this question could be broadened to cover almost any national identity, yet with Britain there is a peculiar factor, the difference between being English and British. In order to look into what this difference may exactly be, one has to really look at the history of Britain, the precise meaning of the terms English and British and how they have come about. Another important factor to consider is how these terms are defined. Is it simply a matter of what is commonly accepted, or is it by self-definition? Are these differences based on race, culture or language, or are the differences deeper? It is perhaps due to the very complexity of this debate that it has remained a contentious one for so long.

For many there seems to be a crisis of identity among young Muslims in Britain; however one needs to be cautious of generalising and drawing such conclusions hastily. For while in the minds of some young people there is a genuine sense of crisis – they are not sure as to what their identity should be – one finds many others that are comfortable with their individual identity, but because different people have adopted different means of self-definition, collectively there is not as much congruence as one would have presumed, leading to a sense of chaos or ‘crisis’ in collective terms.

The events of 11th of September 2001 and the ensuing ‘war on terrorism’ have placed a spotlight on Muslim communities across the world that is difficult to avoid. This has been further exacerbated by the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. In the UK, Muslims have come under considerable pressure from the media, with accusations of disloyalty to their country being levelled in some cases. New laws have been rushed through Parliament that affect not just terrorism, but immigration, asylum and a host of other matters. The Home Secretary’s call for a language test has been seen by some as a departure from Labour’s traditional defence of

minorities. However, one can see some reasons for concern. The riots that broke out in Oldham and Bradford in 2001, the condition of inner city areas, the ‘segregated lives’ that people are leading, are all constantly challenging the boundaries of the many debates around being Muslim and British.

Recent research among Muslim youth shows that many young people are blending the local identities of their environment and friends and the culture of their parents to come up with new, hyphenated identities such as ‘British-Pakistani-Muslim’.<sup>2</sup> While most Muslims would comfortably include Britishness in their self-description, and those living in Scotland and Wales quite easily self-define as Scottish or Welsh, it seems that few of those living in England would say that they are English. Yet moving to the regional level many would quite easily identify themselves as a ‘Scouser’ or a ‘Brummie’. This difference between regional, English and British identity is one that will be considered briefly here but deserves further exploration.

Although a poll undertaken by MORI reported that 87%<sup>3</sup> of Muslims surveyed feel ‘loyal to Britain’, notions about being British are by no means unanimous within Muslim circles. The real debate is raging on within the minds of young people who are faced with different influences from their parents, ‘the community’, school, peers and the broader influences of British society. Yet despite the fact that the debate hovers above the heads of Muslim youth, it would be naïve to think of this as a new debate within Muslim circles. The settlement of the early Muslim communities in Europe refluxed the question of how much of European culture could be adopted and how much should be rejected. In 1865 two opposing *fatwās* were formulated about Muslims wearing hats that originated in the West.<sup>4</sup> And going back to the early days of Islam, one would, no doubt, find similar debates among the Muslim communities that migrated from the Arabian

Peninsula to other parts of the world as they encountered Persian, Byzantine, African, Slavic, Chinese or Indian Culture.

To make matters more serious and controversial, the debates around identity touch upon crucial questions – the whole nature of the relationship between the Muslim world and the West, and the nature of the relationship between Islam and modernity.<sup>5</sup> How much of Muslim legacy and tradition is sacrosanct and therefore ‘non-negotiable’ or firmly established (*thābit*) and how much is a matter of interpretive application, and contextually bound to a particular era and geography, and therefore subject to change (*mutaghayyir*) over changes of time and place? This debate has aroused the passions of the Muslim world and led to a wide spectrum of responses ranging from complete rejection of anything Western to challenging the validity, in the contemporary world, of the Qur’ān and/or the *Sunnah*.

## IDENTITY

### *The Definition of Self*

In modernised societies there is a heightened sense of the individual and self-identity. The daily choices we make about clothing, food, the newspapers we read, the television programmes we watch, all speak volumes about who we are and send out images, consciously or sub-consciously, about the type of person we think we are. Choices of belief, personal philosophy, career, relationships, similarly give out such signals. Yet this is not just one-way traffic, for we constantly influence others and are influenced by external factors, be it the people around us or the pervading culture. Because of the individualisation of society and the break from traditional modes of social roles, this notion of self-identity becomes more powerful. The individual has achieved a greater

scope of choice to shape his/her self, to be an individual. As Giddens puts it:

What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity – and ones which, on some level or another, all of us answer, either discursively or through day-to-day social behaviour.<sup>6</sup>

The individual however is not completely free to act alone. For Giddens there are connections between the most ‘micro’ aspects of society – individuals’ internal sense of self and identity – and the bigger picture of the state, multinational corporations, and globalisation, the ‘macro’ level.<sup>7</sup> Sociology cannot make sense of each of these levels by looking at them in isolation. If, for example, one is to consider the changes in morality in Britain post World War Two – looking at relationships outside marriage, increases in crimes of an immoral nature or the increase in sexual imagery in the public domain, such changes cannot be accounted for adequately by looking at either the micro or macro levels. They were not led by social institutions or the state, yet neither did individuals spontaneously change their minds about moral behaviour. Most of such changes were influenced by a decline of religious authority and were perhaps coupled with the rise of materialism in British society. These changes were in turn affected by other social factors and influences. Changes in laws regarding family and gender roles would have come from the macro level, yet their demands would have stemmed from the micro level. The change within the micro level would have been caused by social movements at the macro level, which of course would have come from people’s experiences and dissatisfaction at the micro level. Change is therefore a result of a very complex interaction of micro and macro forces.

### *The Media*

There are few influences in the modern world as great as that of the mass media. Whether it is in the form of popular entertainment, documentaries, chat shows, or news magazines and papers, the media is likely to shape our images of self, others and the relationships between the self and the other. It may not be an exaggeration to say that no such 'force' existed in the past in visual, electronic, audio and print format; constantly on, constantly interacting with us. Ranging from a reflection of what happens in society to allowing us to escape from what happens in society, the media constantly nudges and challenges us. While news and documentaries may inform us or 'report' to us, such information is also reappropriated by society and a cause and effect loop is set up. Hence information in the media does not merely reflect the world, but constantly shapes it as well.

### *Transient and Multiple Identities*

Michel Foucault looks at identity as something that is not within a person, but rather as something that results from people interacting. People do not possess a real identity; an identity is a temporary construction that is constantly shifting. For Foucault the notion of self is related to power. Power, which may be defined as the ability to influence the environment, or the ability to act, is something that individuals engage in. Power is not possessed, it is exercised. And where there is power, there is bound to be resistance. Hence identities are not given, but are the products of ongoing processes, meaning that identities are constantly produced and transformed through social interaction.<sup>8</sup> It is the reality of the world that individuals, despite being single entities rarely occupy or appropriate single identities. An individual may be a father, husband, son, cousin, uncle, office worker, sportsman, etc. all at the same

time. Shifting effortlessly from one role to another or indeed juggling different roles at the same time while negotiating his way through life. Similarly when considering a religious and national group such as Muslims living in Britain, multiple layers of identity come into play.

### *Multiculturalism*

The invitation of a migrant labour force from the Commonwealth Countries after World War Two, with the existence of push-pull effects,<sup>9</sup> led to a rapid influx of migrants during the 1960s and 1970s. While those arriving into Britain may have already been 'British Subjects' it was for the first time in recent history that such large numbers of people, so visibly different were taking residence in the British Isles. It became clear that with such migration the idea of Britishness would inevitably change. The experience of fascism across Europe had meant that most people were not willing to support notions of racial exclusion as a popular ideology. The tension that this created was significant. Enoch Powell in his (in)famous speech of 1968 said:

We must be mad, literally mad, as a nation to be permitting the annual inflow of some 50,000 dependants, who are for the most part the material of the future growth of the immigrant-descended population. It is like watching a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre.

Powell continued to elucidate the dangers that the settlement of migrants would pose,

For these dangerous and divisive elements the legislation proposed in the Race Relations Bill is the very pabulum they need to flourish. Here is the means of showing that the immigrant communities can organise to consolidate their members, to agitate and campaign against their fellow citizens, and to overawe and dominate the rest with the legal weapons which the ignorant and the ill-informed have provided. As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding; like the Roman, I seem to see "the River Tiber foaming with much blood".<sup>10</sup>

Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech may sound unacceptable to us now, but it seemed to have articulated the sentiments of the nation. Opinion polls showed that 75% of people supported Powell.<sup>11</sup> Just prior to this, in 1964, a Conservative local candidate in Smethwick won using the slogan "If you want a nigger for your neighbour, vote Labour". Policy makers embarked on a twin track policy of 'limitation' and 'integration', as Roy Hattersley summed it up, "without limitation integration is impossible, without integration limitation is inexcusable,"<sup>12</sup> showing how laws to curb immigration were linked to legislation aiming to outlaw racial discrimination and creating a place for 'blacks' in British society. It was Roy Jenkins who took this a step further, articulating the early British notion of Multiculturalism:

...not a flattening process of uniformity, but cultural diversity, coupled with equal opportunity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance.<sup>13</sup>

## What do we mean by Muslim Identity?

In order to understand British Muslim identity, let us take a step back to look at *Muslim* identity. It is proposed here that the most important elements that impinge on the formation of a Muslim identity are:

- The concept of self (who/what am I?)
- The concept of territory (where am I?)
- The concept of community (the people I live with).

### 1. *Self*

Muslim notions of the self are forged by the complex interchange of numerous factors, perhaps the most influential among these being the concept of God and man's relationship with God. For a Muslim, God is One (a concept known as

*Tawhīd*) and is the Loving and Merciful Creator, Sustainer and the final Judge of all affairs. He is the Lawgiver and the Sovereign (among other attributes), but above all He is Compassionate, Forgiving and Just. And while man is created in a natural state of purity and goodness as vicegerent of God (*khalīfah*), he is capable of weakness and forgetfulness. Man is therefore deputed (*istikhlāf*), but encouraged to constantly bear his Lord in mind (*dhikr*) in order to be conscious of God (*taqwā*) and fulfil his duty as *khalīfah* with justice and diligence. This strong relationship between man and God is designed to keep God at the hub of human life such that the Divine Spirit touches all of man's actions whether this worldly or other worldly – in fact such a division is artificial, for God is the Guide in all affairs. In order to remind mankind, throughout the ages, God has chosen messengers and given them inspiration and revelation to remind people. This role now rests with the believers who are encouraged to 'call unto good things', to 'promote what is right and discourage what is wrong'. This spiritual relationship and divine context (*rabbāniyyah*) sets the scene for man's many and varied roles in life.

The Muslim is therefore a subject of God, in fact His deputy, who lives not for himself only but to bring goodness to humanity. The concepts of *tawhīd*, *istikhlāf*, *dhikr*, *taqwā* and *rabbāniyyah*, *inter alia*, form the core of a Muslim's being and essence.

## 2. Territory

Traditional Muslim societies were not based on the nation-state and it is largely a European influence that led to the creation of the many Muslim nations that exist today. Nationalism was embraced by some, but initially vehemently rejected by others. The days before the nation-state saw the Muslims living in territories where it was not uncommon to see people of various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds sharing the same geographical

space. To this day, the debate goes on as to how legitimate nation-states are within the Islamic framework.

Another fundamental idea in the conception of space is the role of religion in public life. Until secularism became prominent, mainly during colonialism, Muslim societies saw a fusion of religious, political, economic and social life, as Ernest Gellner comments that the association of Islam with temporal authority,

has one important sociological consequence: the absence of accommodation with the temporal power. Being itself Caesar, it had no need to give unto Caesar.<sup>14</sup>

This said, there was always a recognition within Muslim societies of distinction between the public and private, and political and religious domains leading to a *de facto* division of powers. However, this was not as pronounced, particularly in the case of the latter, as in modern secular states.

During early Islamic history, Muslim scholars derived specific geo-political terms to define the way in which the law should apply to Muslims living within and outside the Muslim territories. The region that was under Muslim rule was defined as *dār al-Islām* (abode of Islam) and the 'other' regions were variously described as *dār al-ḥarb* (abode of war), *dār al-kufr* (abode of unbelief), *dār al-‘ahd* and *dār al-ṣullḥ* (abode of treaty), *dār al-‘amn* (abode of security), etc. Many more definitions were coined, but by far the most common were the first two, leading to what Tariq Ramadan calls 'a binary vision of the world':<sup>15</sup> the world of Islam and the world of 'others'. The implication this had on jurisprudence was great. Though there were differences among the various schools, most of them disliked that a Muslim should live outside *dār al-Islām*. Limited permission was granted for traders, students, preachers, etc., but these were generally seen as exceptions granted for a minimum time. This was inter-linked with related issues that arose among the scholars of

the time: If a Muslim lives in a non-Muslim society, what are his duties towards that society? What are his duties towards the *Sharī'ah*, i.e. the law of the 'homeland'? What if a person (living in a non-Muslim society) converts to Islam, should he/she migrate to *dār al-Islām*? The opinions of scholars were quite diverse. While Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 767) disliked that Muslims should reside in non-Muslim territories and Mālik ibn Anas (d. 795) felt it was strictly prohibited, Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Māwardī (d. 1058), on the other hand, was of the opinion that if a Muslim could practise his religion in a non-Muslim land, that land could be seen as part of *dār al-Islām*. Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 765) suggested that at times it might be better for a Muslim to live in non-Muslim territory.<sup>16</sup> Upon close scrutiny one can deduce that the vital criteria of *dār al-Islām* were seen to be factors such as personal security, justice, freedom of worship and avoidance of corruption. Thus, in the context of North Africa – to where Muslims were fleeing from persecution encountered in Spain and Southern Europe – one finds very categorical Mālikī *fatwās* urging Muslims not to live in *dār al-ḥarb*.

One may, therefore, raise questions about the ironic situation today, where in some cases Muslims have been forced to flee from Muslim countries and seek refuge in countries in the West because of political problems. It is bearing these factors in mind that some contemporary scholars are questioning the whole approach of this binary vision.<sup>17</sup> Is it possible in this globalised world to have such a vision, especially when no such entity exists that the scholars can unanimously identify as *dār al-Islām* against which a *dār al-ḥarb* can be defined? Fathi Osman, Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Faisal Mawlawi are notable scholars who have been writing and speaking on this issue over the last decade. Their views now seem to be filtering into US and European Muslim circles, especially as the latter two scholars are involved in a European *fiqh* council established in 1997.<sup>18</sup> Along with

others,<sup>19</sup> these scholars have questioned the contemporary validity of the above terms pointing out that such definitions were a matter of juristic opinion, *ijtihād*, and are not found in the Qur'ān or the *Sunnah*. The Qur'ān reminds us that: “to God belongs the East and the West”,<sup>20</sup> that regardless of political or moral expression in different countries the *whole* earth belongs to the Creator.

### 3. Community

Community here means all the people that one lives among, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The Qur'ān relates the story of many messengers, saying that God sent the messengers ‘to their brethren’,<sup>21</sup> who were non-Muslims. The Prophets addressed their community as ‘my people!’<sup>22</sup> (*qawmī*). Hence there is a fraternal relationship between the Muslim and his community, regardless of their belief. The Muslim is one of ‘them’, ‘they’ are part of the *qawm*. The Qur'ān further clarifies this:

O mankind! Behold, We have created you from a male and female, and have made you nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Verily the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most conscious of Him...<sup>23</sup>

Thus, plurality of cultures and ethnic groups is acknowledged as a positive factor to enhance human life, rather than be a cause of prejudice.

At the same time there is the notion of belonging to a single ‘community of faith’, an *ummah*. This notion, often expressed in terms of brotherhood, is intended to be essentially faith-based rather than being ethnic, cultural or linguistic, though these notions have their place. This creates a very strong affinity and trans-national link. Sophie Gilliat-Ray comments that:

Nationalist ties appear to be a secondary means of identity for many young British Muslims. Given the racism so deeply embedded in parts of British society, feelings of ‘belonging’ to this country may be insecure, while at the same time they do not feel that an identity based upon being of Pakistani origin offers a viable identity in this country. Religion provides a way out of this identificational *impasse*, and presents a secure foundation for identity based upon time-honoured religious myths and rituals.<sup>24</sup>

However the notion of *ummah* does not negate one’s duties to those who are neighbours, fellow countrymen or part of one’s *qawm*. The idea of the concept of *ummah*, as theoretical as it may be, is to transcend the bonds of kinship, language, region and ethnicity. Such ties, identified as *‘aṣabiyyah* by the fourteenth-century Muslim historian and sociologist Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1395), are frowned upon when taken as the normative in group cohesiveness. In reality all Muslim societies struggle, and have struggled since the dawn of Islam, in trying to balance the idea of an *ummah* of Islam, with ties of faith alone, with the human desire to aggregate on the basis of lineage, language or class. We will consider this a little further in the next section when looking at national identity and Islam. Having looked at the notions of self, territory and community, let us look at the era of the Prophet Muḥammad and his Companions, to see how they dealt with the issue of identity:

1. Although the Prophet prescribed that the believers were to “be different from the disbelievers”<sup>25</sup> a close examination shows that this applied to those aspects of life that dealt specifically with religious symbolism, or acts that were distinctly opposed to Islamic teachings. However, when it came to issues of social interaction, such as trade, marriage or even consumption of food, then not only was allowance granted for Muslims to interact with people outside their

- faith, but the Qur'ān goes out of its way to declare that, "The food of the People of the Book is lawful unto you and your food is lawful unto them".<sup>26</sup> This shows that the outlook of the early Muslim community was not one of isolation.
2. The Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) respected diversity within the community. Bilāl was from Abyssinia, Salmān from Persia and Ṣuhaib from Rome, yet they became the Prophet's close comrades. When Salmān once faced a taunt from one of the Arab Companions, the Prophet intercepted saying that Salmān was from *ahl al-bait*, the Prophet's family. His statement that "no Arab is superior to a non-Arab",<sup>27</sup> his statement that "wisdom is the lost property of the believer, wherever he finds it, he should partake of it"<sup>28</sup> all show that Muḥammad (pbuh) was not a monocultural person, on the contrary he was keen to learn from, and interact with, people who were different, people who had other experiences than himself. Yet today Muslims urgently need to rediscover the appreciation of pluralism that is evidently present in their history.
  3. Muḥammad (pbuh) laid down a simple guideline for being part of an 'ethnic' group: a man once visited the Prophet's mosque in Madinah where he saw Companions like Bilāl and Ṣuhaib and said, "If the tribes of Aws and Khazraj support Muḥammad (pbuh), they are his people, but what are these people doing here?" Muḥammad (pbuh) was disturbed when this was reported to him; he went to the mosque and summoned people and addressed them, "O people, the Lord and Sustainer is One. Your Ancestor is one, your Faith is one. The Arabism of anyone of you is not from your mother or father. It is no more than a tongue (language). Whoever speaks Arabic is an Arab."<sup>29</sup> With this sweeping statement Muḥammad (pbuh) took

away the privileged position that the ethnic Arabs occupied within Muslim society. Thus he empowered ‘others’ to become equals and encouraged the pursuit of a common language. He also showed that in his estimation birth and lineage counted for much less than what a person could choose to become. He emphasised that a cohesive community must be a united one and that, “He is not one of us, whoever asserts any race over another, or fights on racist grounds or dies in a racist cause.”<sup>30</sup>

4. The spread of the early Muslims to neighbouring regions after the death of the Prophet and the expansion of the boundaries of the Islamic society show that they did not go on a ‘Quraishising’ or ‘Arabising’ mission. Rather the cultural diversity that we can see to this day, from Morocco to Malaysia, is a testimony to the respect they had for local traditions and cultures.
5. Islamic law recognises the revealed law of those before Islam (*sbarā’i man qablanā*) under certain conditions as legal precedence. In addition, custom (*‘urf*) is recognised as a possible source of law where there is no contradiction with established laws. This shows that, contrary to the beliefs of some, Islam did not come to eradicate whatever was achieved before it. It is not a destructive force or even a revolutionary force; rather it tries to build on the positive aspects of previous civilisations. Muḥammad (pbuh) summarised his whole life by saying that he had been “sent to complete and perfect good conduct.”<sup>31</sup> the emphasis here on ‘completing’ gives a sense of continuity and progression rather than replacement.

The emphasis on the Oneness of God has led Muslims to develop a *tawḥīdic weltanschauung*, there is one Book, one final Messenger, one *Dīn*, one *Ummah*. However, embedded within this unity lies a strong sense of plurality. The acceptance

of different faiths, different opinions in *fiqh*, differences of ethnicity, the encouragement of juristic reasoning, all show this deep sense of pluralism that lies at the heart of Islam. Ultimately, the Qur'ān teaches, "...you will be brought back to God and He will show you the truth of the things about which you differed".<sup>32</sup> Meaning that the plurality of opinions held among people in this life will not be resolved and are not meant to be resolved, but we should live with each other in respect. "And if God had willed, He could have made you one people..."<sup>33</sup>

This pluralism extends into cultural expression also. Although many Muslims often speak of 'Islamic Culture', it is difficult to pinpoint one particular cultural expression in the Muslim world and label it 'Islamic' to the exclusion of others. The points mentioned above indicate that Islam is something of a moral backdrop, a framework, rather than a culture in itself. This explains the diverse Muslim cultural expressions that can be seen around the world. However, this does not mean that there are many 'Islams', but rather that there are many expressions of the Muslim way of life. Islam encapsulates values and ideas that lead to a cultural manifestation in the context of the particular area of the world where those values are implanted. This manifestation takes on the colour of the society it resides in and remains willing to change with time.

#### BEING A MUSLIM AND HAVING A NATIONAL IDENTITY

Islam does not give much importance to nationalistic identities; on the contrary, as mentioned before, it frowns upon those who divide themselves up on this basis, rather than unite around the common bond of faith. However, this does not mean that a Muslim cannot hold a piece of land dear to his

or her heart and even identify with that territory, state or country. Surely, it is only natural for people to have a land they call home. For some Muslims living in Britain that homeland may be Pakistan, for others Bangladesh, and yet others that feeling of homeland, of home, finds its locus in the British Isles.

This can cause some tension for those who remember Britain as a colonial empire, or who feel aggrieved at some of Britain's policies at home or abroad. Some of these matters will be dealt with in the section on 'Objections to Accepting Britain as a Homeland'. Perhaps the point most often made is "how can you belong to a non-Muslim country?" Yet few would say that it is wrong to talk of 'Indian Muslims', although this is a clear example of a country where Muslims are in a minority, where there are political problems with Kashmir, and where the majority culture is not Islamic. We are used to hearing of 'Indian Muslims', because somehow that is more acceptable than the terms British, French or American Muslims.

What does all this mean for Muslims who live in Europe or the West? Can one be Muslim and be British or French? The answer to this rings out clearly if we ask the question with regard to those who convert, for what else could they be but British or French Muslims, etc? Let us look at the issue in a more controversial way, what does it mean to be Bangladeshi or Egyptian? What makes these nations Islamic? All the territories around which these nations were formed were at one time inhabited by people who were non-Muslims as were all other places including Saudi Arabia. It cannot be a matter of Islamic rule, as most would contest the 'Islamicity' of these governments. Is it then just a matter of presence or numbers, i.e. that Muslims in these countries are in a majority? Well how about Indian Muslims then? Or Malaysia where the population is about 50% Muslim?

It seems that the issue really is an emotional one. Perhaps it is the case that historically so much animosity has existed between the Muslim world and the West and that even today there is so much tension between some Muslim countries and some Western countries that people find it difficult to appreciate that Muslims now live in the West as Westerners themselves.

For some Muslims it is not a question of opposing the adoption of a Western nationality, but any nationality, *per se*, is wrong. Therefore one may hear, at times, the predictable, radically framed statement – “I am not British or Pakistani, just Muslim!” We must acknowledge that while Islam frowns upon nationalism as a primary tie of association, there are acceptable forms of adherence to national ties. The Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) and most of the Companions around him were Arabs and they were not ashamed of their Arab heritage where it did not contradict Islam. The tribes were acknowledged as a reality and even in the latter part of his life, after the conquest of Makkah, Muḥammad (pbuh) gave the keys of the Ka’bah and the privilege of providing water for the pilgrims to individuals knowing that their clans would hold on to these traditions. If one needed further proof, then the statement of the Prophet on his return to Madinah from a journey is clearer, “...this mountain loves us and we love it...”<sup>34</sup> referring to the mountain of Uḥud (which symbolised his approach to Madinah) and also the well-known anguish that Muḥammad (pbuh) and many of his Companions faced in fleeing from Makkah, their beloved home. It is related that while leaving Makkah, Muḥammad (pbuh) looked back and said:

Of all God’s earth, thou art the dearest place unto me and the dearest unto God, and had not my people driven me out from thee I would not have left thee.<sup>35</sup>

What Islam is against is the type of nationalism that degenerates into tribalism, of support for one’s kinsfolk while

putting aside ethical concerns. When one thinks “My countryman right or wrong”. The deciding factor is, then, justice. That is where the ultimate loyalty of anyone should lie.

O believers, stand up for justice, as witnesses unto God, even if it be against yourselves, your parents or closest of kin. And whether it is against rich or poor, for God’s claim takes precedence over either of them. And follow not your desires lest you swerve from justice...<sup>36</sup>

This means that conflicts are handled and measured on the scale of justice. If one’s own country, Muslim or non-Muslim, does something wrong then it is one’s duty to make this clear and stand against the injustice. If another country, Muslim or non-Muslim, aggresses against one’s country unjustly, then it is only right that one stands up to defend his/her country. This principle of justice is further enunciated in the Qur’ān.

O believers, be steadfast in your devotion to God. And never let the hatred of a people lead you into the sin of deviating from justice. Be Just! This is the closest to being God conscious...<sup>37</sup>

Muḥammad (pbuh) further said, “Help your brother, whether he is an oppressor or is oppressed.” The Companions asked, “We know how to help the oppressed, but how do we help the oppressor?” He replied, “Stop him from doing wrong. That will be your help to him.”<sup>38</sup>

The question of physical manifestations of belonging is another point of debate. As a citizen, can a Muslim engage in acts of patriotism – perhaps the most visible of which are acts such as displaying the flag or reading or standing for the national anthem? According to Shaykh Faisal Mawlawi:

Muslims living in non-Muslim countries are to respect the symbols of those countries such as the national anthem, national flag, etc. This is part of what citizenship dictates as

per modern customs. Thus, standing up for the national anthem is not a form of prohibited loyalty. If a Muslim is to change a wrong action in a majority non-Muslim country, let him do that through *Da'wah*, wisdom and fair exhortation. At the same time, he should not obey any rules that involve disobedience to Allah.<sup>39</sup>

One other question that is often posed is “which are you first: Muslim or British?” In light of the above discussion on justice, such a question is actually a non-issue. In fact, there are two distinct identities involved here: one is a religious and philosophical identity and the other is a national or territorial identity. Just as one could be Christian and British, or Humanist and British, so one can be Muslim and British, without the need for contradiction, tension or comparison between the two.

At the centre of debates such as Muslims expressing an identity that is British, or indeed engaging in the political process of a Western country (that may be at odds with some section of the Muslim world) is the notion of loyalty (*walā'*). To whom is loyalty due? According to a *fatwā* of the European Council for Fatwa and Research *walā'* can be divided into two areas:

1. Loyalty in religious matters. It refers to creedal loyalty, which lies in believing in Allah and shunning other beliefs that run counter to the Oneness of Allah. This kind of *walā'* is due to Allah, His Messenger and the believers. Almighty Allah says: “Your friend can be only Allah; and His messenger and those who believe, who establish worship and pay the poor due, and bow down (in prayer)”.<sup>40</sup>
2. Loyalty as regards worldly matters: This refers to transactions between people living in the same society or between different societies, regardless of the distance and the religion. It is permissible for Muslims to engage with non-Muslims in commercial transactions, peace treaties and covenants according to the rules and conditions prevalent

in those countries. Books of Jurisprudence do contain many references about such kind of dealings.<sup>41</sup>

Loyalty is hence multi-faceted and operates at different levels. Each one of us regularly balances loyalties to ourselves, our families, our work commitments and careers, our friends, the community, the nation, etc. Often these loyalties can clash, but this is not a case just for Muslims, but for all people. A person with a passion for the environment, for example, may have personal views about how to live and consume that do not agree with the views of the majority, or at least with some state policies. Living in any society involves a constant negotiation of our different values and ideas, allegiances and loyalties. The very framework of most modern constitutions, as well as international treaties on Human Rights are designed to facilitate this by giving room for freedom of individual thought and belief.

#### BRITISHNESS AS A CHANGING PHENOMENON

As has been mentioned a number of times previously, identities are not static but dynamic. Historically, the British Isles have been host to so many different groups of peoples including the Celts, Romans, Vikings, Normans, Saxons, and more recently, from the twentieth century onwards, migrants from almost all other parts of the world. Each group has in some way, even if small, added something to what is now known as Britishness. It is important to realise that when we talk of Britishness we are not talking of a monolithic or homogenous identity. Even today, if one travels the British Isles the range of different regional customs and habits, norms and subcultures and dialectal variations, is quite amazing.

When one stereotypically pictures this country – as John Major did talking of long shadows on the cricket grounds,

warm beer, green suburbs and old maids cycling to communion in the morning mist – one often sees very romantic and quaint notions of Britishness or, more specifically in this case, Englishness. But it is interesting to note that some of the very popular symbols of Englishness such as the St. George's Cross, Christianity, afternoon tea, the Royal Family and fish and chips all have major foreign influences. The legend of St. George was brought to England by crusaders returning from the Middle East. Christianity, of course, also originated in the Middle East, tea comes from the Far East, the Royal Family is a result of trans-national marriages and fish and chips are thought to be a combination of Jewish and Irish culinary skills. Even the English language is classified as a Germanic language coming from the Indo-European family of languages.<sup>42</sup>

While Britishness has, in recent years, become acceptable and inclusive for non-whites, Englishness remains more elusive. In the words of Bernie Grant who is happy to call himself British, "It would stick in my throat to call myself English."<sup>43</sup> What is it about Englishness that is so exclusive? While we do not wish to go into this in detail here it is worth raising as an issue for future concern. It is possible that non-whites find it so difficult to call themselves English, and as a society we find it difficult to accept non-whites as English, because the implicit definitions of Englishness are related to ethnic origin, skin colour, or perhaps even religion. For some, to be truly English, (or even British), one must be of Anglo-Saxon descent and Christian. Yet who has defined these terms? Does anyone have a right to freeze a nation in time and use such a snapshot to define it?

For so long the rhetoric of the far right has been that Britain must be preserved for the British, meaning that it must be kept white. Yet this is not far removed from the comments of those who say that Englishness or Britishness are defined by ethnic origin. Why is Englishness so important? Because it is very likely that its pertinence will increase as

regional consciousness increases within the UK. Already we can see that the cross of St. George has become much more common over the last few years. As a reaction to growing Welsh and Scottish consciousness, Englishness is bound to increase. Hence, if it is not today, it will become a serious debate tomorrow. It is important that Muslims are able to play a pro-active role in this debate before they are taken through the rigmarole of a whole new series of loyalty tests and put under the identity spotlight yet again.

Whatever the age-old concepts of national identity, in this globalised age of citizenship-based nation-states it seems valid to question the use of ethnic or racial criteria to define a national identity, be that Pakistani, Welsh, Scottish, or English. In the developed world, and indeed most parts of the whole world, it is very rare indeed to find a group of people that have remained completely racially isolated. The question then is where does one draw the line? Does one stop at the Roman influx into Britain, or the Viking, Norman, or twentieth century? The obvious answer is that one cannot draw such lines; nations are constantly changing and one cannot take a snapshot in time to define a nation for ever. For some, they would be comfortable in looking at colour, for others it is a matter of cultural practice, for others allegiance, but even these cannot be defining criteria – often these are only posed for those who are under suspicion of not belonging, of being ‘other’, of being disloyal. A white person, be they of Anglo- Saxon (which is in itself heterogeneous), Scandinavian, Jewish, or French Huguenot origin would rarely be questioned about their Englishness or Britishness – it would be assumed and taken for granted. Such an allowance cannot be granted to non-white people – especially in the case of Asians and Muslims, all the more so since 11th September 2001. Is it any surprise then that such thinking is described by some as racist?

The implication of this is serious because the success of the integration process of Muslim communities (or indeed any other community) is heavily dependent upon how included these communities are made to feel. Integration is a very problematic word to use as people have varying definitions. Here it is used as opposed to assimilation or segregation, as a middle way in which minority communities can become part of society while maintaining something of their values and religious and cultural norms. Attempts at assimilating migrant communities could ironically lead to the formation of stronger barriers between communities. For evidence of this one could compare the situation of Britain's 'minorities' with France where the policies have been much more assimilationist, or Germany, which has only recently officially accepted that it has something called immigration!<sup>44</sup> Britain, with some justification, prides itself on its treatment of 'minority' communities – yet things are far from perfect and it is with great dismay that such communities continue to watch political parties treat the issue of race as a political football. In 2002 the Home Secretary, David Blunkett talked of asylum seekers 'swamping' British schools, harkening back to Thatcher's statement in 1978 "that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture".<sup>45</sup>

#### OBJECTIONS TO ACCEPTING BRITAIN AS A HOMELAND

These are not the only problems that face the Muslim community in the integration process. Those from within the Muslim community who are not convinced of the need for integration, for acceptance of a British Muslim identity, often raise a number of points as challenges (in addition to some of those presented beforehand). These can be summarised as:<sup>46</sup>

## 1. Religious-theological barriers:

- Britain is considered as *dār al-kufr* or *dār al-ḥarb*.
- One must migrate to the Islamic State once it is established, so our stay here is temporary.
- The conflict between Islamic and British law.
- Immoral practices.

## 2. Social-Political barriers:

- The aggression by Britain against Muslim countries – historical and contemporary.
- The taxes of Muslims used for the above.
- The conflict of loyalties (for example in a military situation).
- Muslims will never really be accepted as British anyway and are often treated negatively and in a prejudiced manner.

It should be pointed out firstly that these objections are often raised by people who have themselves made Britain their home. They chose to live in Britain, are protected by the state and in some cases claim financial support from the state. Naturally, this somewhat undermines such objections in the first place. As far as the question of the terminologies of *dār al-Islām* and *dār al-ḥarb* are concerned, we have mentioned that these were used at a particular time and place and are not part of the revealed body of knowledge. They are not relevant in today's globalised world, where Muslims sometimes flee from 'Muslim' countries and seek refuge for their very lives and well-being in 'non-Muslim' countries, or where one finds greater freedom to practise and debate about Islam in some 'non-Muslim' countries than in some 'Muslim' countries. Some have even stipulated that ideally Muslims should migrate to a Muslim country in order to 'preserve their faith' citing the example of the Prophet migrating from Makkah to Madinah. The condition of migration (*hijrah*) to an Islamic

territory is one that is deeply misunderstood, as though it would be a practical feat to transport the millions of Muslims that live as minorities around the world to the Muslim world. The Companions of the Prophet affirmed that, “there is no further migration after the conquest of Makkah.”<sup>47</sup> *Hijrah* as a physical,<sup>48</sup> religious obligation was a special condition for early Muslims because the situation in Makkah was very dangerous for those who believed in Islam and in Madinah they would be free from any molestation. Furthermore, the migrant community was a relatively small one.<sup>49</sup> Where possible, Muslims today are expected to live where they are and to build their own future and contribute to the lives of people around them. With respect to the conflict between Islamic and state law, this is the situation in all parts of the world, as there is no country that applies the *Sharī'ah* in full. However, some scholars argue that the objectives of the *Sharī'ah*<sup>50</sup> are better achieved in a country like Britain than under despotic rule, as in some of the Muslim world. Furthermore, the contractual status of Muslim communities living within non-Muslim states necessitates that they respect the norms and laws of the land.

The argument about morality in Britain or the West is a red herring; as if the Muslim world does not have vice and corruption. The people that the Prophets throughout the ages were sent to were not ‘good practising believers’, they were people who were criminals, worshipping false gods, or who were oppressing the weak. These were the very people the Prophets called their brethren, their people. Are we then in any way better than the Prophets? If we look closely at the story of Muḥammad’s life, the Makkah he fled from was dominated by *mushrikīn* (idol worshippers), yet he felt it was his home. The whole Arab identity was one that revolved around the culture of idolatry, a culture in which baby girls were buried alive and in which drink and promiscuity were common. Yet the Prophet never asked the Muslims to deny

their Arab identity, he simply redefined it, redirected it. He took the good things from it, like the honouring of guests, sticking to one's word, chivalry and courage, and discarded what was unacceptable. In fact, this is why the Qur'ān uses the phrase *amr bil-ma'rūf wa nahy 'anil-munkar*, promoting the good and discouraging the wrong. *Ma'rūf*, commonly translated as 'good', actually means in Arabic 'the things that are common and well known', established in society – the common good. Hence you simply take on those things that are good and reject those that are bad. There was never a revolution where the Prophet suddenly changed the lives of people, it was a gradual process of change.

It is true that there has been much historical animosity between Britain and parts of the Muslim world and that to this day there are many grievances about foreign policy matters. Yet were the Arabs not at odds with Muḥammad? Did that ever cause him to deny his Arabness? Even when the Quraish were oppressing the Muslims, this was no reason for the Muslims to denounce their Quraishī ancestry. Furthermore, many 'Muslim' countries are the chief perpetrators of crimes against other Muslim nations – would we expect Iraqis to denounce their Iraqi identity because their country attacked Kuwait, or the Pakistanis to denounce their Pakistani identity because they allowed the US to attack Afghanistan? This is also true in terms of how tax-payers' money is used. The conflict of loyalties can be resolved by considering our previous discussion on loyalty, justice and national identity. Within a military context, Muslims living in the West have recourse to conscientious objection. The Qur'ān goes even as far as stating that if Muslims are unfairly treated in a country that has a treaty with an external Muslim community, the latter need not intervene if this would breach the agreement for the treaty must be respected:

yet if they ask you for help against persecution, it is your duty to help them – except against a people between whom

and yourselves there is a covenant: for God sees all that you do.<sup>51</sup>

It was on this basis that when asked about a few British Muslims who wanted to go to Afghanistan to fight alongside the Taliban (against British troops), Shaykh Abdullah al-Judai<sup>52</sup> answered as follows:

1. As far as the *Sharī'ah* is concerned, the situation of Muslims living in the UK is that they are under contractual obligations to the state in which they live. This is a natural consequence of the citizenship that we all bear. By accepting to live here, we have taken up a social contract to live within the framework of the English Legal System whilst practising and perfecting our Islamic faith. We have to realise that these agreements are ratified between two parties, i.e. the state and the individual. Therefore, even if the state breaches its contract with any other party with whom the individual has a connection of some sort, be it Muslim or otherwise, the individual remains bound by the contract between him and the state. It is totally and completely unlawful from the Islamic point of view for a Muslim individual to actively seek to breach or contravene this agreement.
2. There is nothing in the Islamic sources that compels a Muslim living in Britain to go to Afghanistan to fight. In addition to what was aforementioned in the first point, there is no obligation upon Muslims to respond to the call to fight with Muslims elsewhere because the source of such an obligation, such as an oath of allegiance or a Muslim ruler, to whom obedience is obligatory, is absent. It is important to note that even if such a source was available, such as a Muslim ruler, responding to his call to take up arms falls only unto those who have pledged their allegiance, and such an oath cannot run concurrently with a ratified agreement or contract with the opposite party.
3. The ruling of the *Sharī'ah* in such a case is clearly expressed in the Qur'ān in Sūrah al-Anfāl. The verse is categorical, that Muslims are not allowed to take up arms

against a party that they are in a treaty with, even when this is to go to the defence of other Muslims, as abiding by agreements and treaties is one of the most crucial aspects and features of Islam.

Following this, it is not allowed for British Muslims to go to another country to fight in such a way that British forces would be attacked by Muslims.

As regards people not accepting Muslims, this is a legitimate concern for it is difficult to 'belong' to a place if there is a perception of not being accepted. It is important that the reciprocal nature of the relationship between belonging and acceptance is highlighted in policy discussions that are gravitating towards citizenship tests and other measures to 'encourage' people to integrate. If people are constantly reminded that they do not belong, whether on the crude level of the rhetoric of far-right groups, or the more challenging day-to-day discrimination that they may face, or when the government fails to listen to their concerns and request for needs, it is only a matter of time before they will feel alienated and lose the desire to belong. Having said that, Muslims must also realise that in this arena there is much that Muslims must work at, while realising that in all societies some unsavoury people will exist. Just to give some hope, one can see the tremendous impact that Asians and Blacks have already had on Britain. Perhaps a rather flippant example is that curry is one of the most popular dishes in the UK! But on a more serious note, it is easy to see that most people are happy to accept and even celebrate the diversity of contemporary British society. And with time and concerted efforts real change can be brought about. For example, in the 1970s the Local Authority in Leicester placed advertisements in Ugandan newspapers asking the Asians being expelled by Idi Amin not to come to the city – yet Leicester is now held as a model of a multicultural, multifaith city, having won beacon status for its community cohesion in 2003.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR MUSLIMS IN BRITAIN

In order to understand the importance of the debates around British Muslim identity, one should consider some demographic facts about the Muslim community in Britain. A large proportion of Muslims in the UK are young. Data from the 2001 census shows that 52% of Muslims are under the age of 25, compared to the national figure of 31%. As the youth are most actively engaged in thinking about identity issues the subject is directly relevant to a very large sector of the Muslim community. To compound this it was also found, in a 1997 survey carried out by the Policy Studies Institute (PSI),<sup>53</sup> that 90% of ethnic minority children under the age of 16 were born in the UK, whereas 90% of ethnic minority adults aged 35+ were born outside the UK. Meaning that in addition to the normal generation gap, there is likely to be a wide culture gap between the first two generations of Muslims in Britain. Another factor that bears on the situation is that there seems to be a heightened sense of religious consciousness among the Asian community as compared to the white community. According to further results from the PSI survey, 96% of people of Pakistani origin and 95% of those of Bangladeshi origin said they were Muslims, compared to 68% in the general white population who said they were Christians. The same survey showed that 66% of Pakistanis said that they think of themselves 'in many ways' as being British, 90% also said the same regarding being Pakistani. 23% said they were not British and 4% said they were not Pakistani. It therefore seems that a large number see themselves as both British and Pakistani forming hyphenated or hybrid identities.

Why is the question of identity so crucial to British Muslims? It is because of the consequence of the answers. By accepting that Muslims are British and this is their home, they move on to discuss as a consequence:

1. How to build a place for themselves in Britain and,
2. How to contribute to the lives of the people in Britain, I would say, “my people”.

Integral to both of these challenges is that Muslim communities become more open to people around them (and vice-versa) so that there is increased mutual understanding and trust, as well as an appreciation of that which is in common – which is far more than that which is different.

The duty of Muslims is not just to ask about their rights and privileges, but to contribute, to help build this society. This is why it is necessary that Muslims understand that this is their society, that the people around them are their people.

The Prophet never isolated himself from the people, he always interacted with them, engaged with them, talked to them, lived with them. It was by seeing his behaviour, his personality that people were most impressed. That’s how he began to tackle the Islamophobia that started to arise at his time. When some Muslims talk of ‘Islamic activism’, they often think of proselytising by giving talks, organising conferences, or even going to the neighbourhood knocking on people’s doors or handing out leaflets. Yet faith in Islam requires something far more profound than that; that Muslims live in British society and involve themselves in it fully – that they simply live Islam rather than talk of Islam. Muslims should have ideas to contribute when it comes to health, education, crime, unemployment, homelessness, and all other areas of life. It would be a shame if they were to sell themselves short by being boxed into a niche, labelled as commentators on ‘religious matters’ or ‘Islamic matters’ alone.

If Muslims are to really make their contribution to British society there must be open and frank dialogue and interaction in both directions. Muḥammad was known as ‘the Trustworthy’, ‘the Honest’, ‘the Truthful’. How many Muslims in Britain have the same reputation? Muslims need desperately to sort

out their own house and also tackle prejudices that hamper people's views of them. But this too is not enough for they also have to know their people. How many Muslims have a deep understanding of the history, literature and traditions of Britain? How many actively interact and engage with their non-Muslim co-citizens? Yet how many lead lives that involve almost no interaction with non-Muslims in their day-to-day affairs in some meaningful way? Unless Muslims are able to feel the pulse of society they will not talk *to* people, but talk *at* them, and their words will have very little effect. This again shows exactly why Muslims need to be in tune with their Britishness.

There is also much to be said for removing the cultural obstacles that can get in the way of communication. Murad Hofmann asks Muslims to think of:

...separating religion and civilization. Only if we can peel away the many layers of civilizational, local lacquer can Islam become universally relevant...<sup>54</sup>

The idea implied here is that if Muslims are able to apply the principles of Islam to a Western environment, a new Western Muslim cultural expression will develop that may be more akin to meeting the challenges of future generations of Muslims than say Asian or Arab culture. While there is some obvious credence in the idea, some care needs to be taken, especially given the reality of globalisation, for cultures are now in flux, more so than ever before. Is such a detachment from history and tradition an ideal way to deal with the contemporary? And is it possible that a sudden stripping of imported culture would leave a vacuum that would create an identity 'crisis' rather than address one? Perhaps Muslims can in some ways also enrich Western culture with parts of their 'cultural baggage'? Food is a prime example of this. In any case, it may be that the process of distinguishing between Islam *per se*, and Muslim cultural accretions, is a healthy exercise, for it may allow a whole generation of Muslims in

the West to see Islam for its principles rather than its application. This can indeed be a revitalizing opportunity and one of the challenges for Muslims living in Britain. In the process of discovering their new British Muslim identity, they may well re-evaluate important issues such as the participation of women in society, the attitude towards people of other faiths, political participation and engagement in civil society.

## CONCLUSION

For Muslim communities today the impact of nationalism, globalisation and the diasporic nature of large numbers of Muslims is something that cannot be ignored. This means that around the globe, one can see a tremendous interchange of cultures and ideas, and at times upheaval, taking place within the Muslim world. The debates around issues such as identity, how to deal with the West, how to cope with modernity have common threads that weave them together. Muslims living in the West are in a unique position; they are at the coal-face of the debates.

The cultural acclimatisation of any group of people is not an easy process and there are natural and organic sociological processes that will take time, perhaps generations. As the British Muslim community matures it becomes more and more evident that setting it 'cricket tests' and 'loyalty tests' are not the right way forward. In any case, Lord Tebbit's cricket test is reduced to a farce when you have a cricket team once captained by someone called 'Nasser Hussain' and a football team managed by someone called 'Sven-Goran Eriksson'; a football team composed of about one-third non-white players who are valiant fighters for England on the pitch, but cannot easily fit into the definition of English off the pitch. British Muslims need time to settle down – this can be made easier by giving them space to ease into British

society, yet it can be made more difficult by perceptions of forced assimilation. One needs to also realise the impact of Islamophobia on Muslims in Britain. The fact that some cannot accept brown skinned Muslims as truly British is a standing argument for those who would say, “this country will never accept you so why bother?”

We have seen that we cannot afford to hold onto static notions of ‘Britishness’ or ‘Englishness’ and many prominent symbols of our nation, whether they are Christianity or the flag originated in far-off shores. This leads one to think that perhaps one day, Islam can also be ‘normalised’ and seen as an indigenous British faith. Britishness is of course a national debate and there seems to be no clear answer as to what it is precisely. But perhaps this is itself an opportunity for those wishing to catch the boat. For as long as there is openness in exploring the meaning of Britishness there is also the chance to contribute to it, add to it and subtly redefine it. This is exactly what ‘minority’ communities and migrants have done in Britain over the last 2000 years.

At the heart of the debate around British Muslim identity lies an acute sense of protecting oneself from ‘the vices of the West’, the erosion of religious and community values by modernity and individualism. Some would wish to preserve their values by isolating themselves; others would throw caution to the wind and give up their religious identity for a secular one. Somewhere in between there is a balance that could be struck. In an attempt to deal with Western cultural influence, some Muslims have decided to become more Eastern in their consumption of culture; satellite and cable stations can give a regular dose of Zee TV or Bangla TV.<sup>55</sup> But this begs the question – will such a defensive strategy be successful in the long term? Is it necessary? Is a film that flouts Islamic norms of decency any better because it is transmitted in Arabic, Hindi or Turkish?

By exploring the Islamic sources regarding notions of identity, and in addition looking at Britishness itself, we can see that there is no contradiction in a Muslim taking up full citizenship in British society and considering it his/her own country. In fact this is exactly what is needed if Muslims are to really build a place for themselves and for their future generations in Britain. Only as confident, assertive and engaged citizens can Muslims continue to shape British society and be of service to it. This necessitates that they complete the paradigm shift that has already begun, to realise that Britain belongs to them and they to Britain.

## Notes

1. Jenkins, Richard, *Social Identity*, London, Routledge, 1996, p. 4.
2. See Modood, Tariq et al., *Ethnic Minorities in Britain*, London, PSI, 1997.
3. MORI Poll commissioned by *Eastern Eye*, November 2001.
4. Kahani-Hopkins, Vered and Hopkins, Nick, "Representing' British Muslims: the Strategic Dimension to Identity Construction", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 25. No. 2, March 2002, pp. 288-309.
5. Without entering into a detailed discussion of what modernity means, the term is primarily used here to mean the product of (i) on the religious and cultural level – enlightenment rationalism and (ii) on the scientific and technological level – industrialisation.
6. Giddens, Anthony, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1991, p. 70.
7. Gauntlett, David, *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction*, London and New York, Routledge, 2002.
8. Kahani-Hopkins, Vered and Hopkins, Nick, op. cit.
9. This refers to the 'push' from the original society of the migrants due to relatively poor economic, educational and health standards and the 'pull' from within the UK due to the labour shortage, especially in the industrial sector.

10. See *Hansard*, 23rd April 1968.
11. Quoted in Alibhai Brown, Yasmin, *Who Do We Think We Are? Imagining the New Britain*, London, Penguin, 2001.
12. Quoted in Malik, Kenan, *The Trouble with Multiculturalism*, in <http://www.spiked-online.com/Articles/00000002D35E.htm>. 18 December 2001.
13. Jenkins, Roy, *Essays and Speeches*, 1967. Quoted in Lewis, Philip, *Islamic Britain: Religion, Politics and Identity among British Muslims*, London, I.B. Tauris, 1994, p. 3.
14. Gellner, Ernest, 'A Pendulum Swing Theory of Islam', in Robertson, Roland (ed.) *Sociology of Religion*, London, Penguin, 1976, pp. 127-138.
15. Ramadan, Tariq, *To Be a European Muslim*. Leicester, Islamic Foundation, 1999.
16. Fadl, Khaled Abou El, 'Islamic Law and Muslim Minorities: The Juristic Discourse on Muslim Minorities From the Second/Eighth to the Eleventh/Seventeenth Centuries', *Islamic Law and Society*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Leiden, 1994, pp. 148-150.
17. See Ramadan, Tariq, *op. cit.*
18. The European Council for Fatwa and Research (*al-Majlis al-Urubbī li'l-Iftā' wa'l-Buḥūth*) which brings together scholars from different schools to consider the challenges facing Muslims living in the West, especially Europe.
19. Another member of this *Fiqh* Council, Abdullah bin Bayyah, regards the condition of Muslims in minority situations as *dār al-ʿahd* (abode of contract).
20. Qur'ān, 2: 115.
21. See Qur'ān, 7: 65, 7: 73, 7: 85, 11: 50, 11: 61, 11: 84.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Qur'ān, 49: 13.
24. Gilliat-Ray, Sophie, 'Back to Basics: The Place of Islam in the Self-Identity of Young British Muslims', in Clarke, Peter B., *New Trends and Developments in the World of Islam*, London, Luzac Oriental, 1998, pp. 93-103.
25. *Ḥadīth*, Bukhurī and Muslim.
26. Qur'ān, 5: 5.
27. Guillaume, Alfred (ed.), *Ibn Hisham, Life of Muhammad*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1955. Also narrated by Bayhaqī.

28. *Ḥadīth*, Tirmidhī. Though this *ḥadīth* is categorised as a weak narration, its meaning is said to hold true to the spirit of Islam.
29. Ḥafīz Ibn Asākir from Imām Mālik.
30. *Ḥadīth*, Muslim.
31. *Ḥadīth*, Aḥmad.
32. Qur'ān, 5: 48.
33. Ibid.
34. *Ḥadīth*, Bukhurī.
35. Lings, Martin, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*. London, Unwin Hyman Ltd., 1984, p. 118.
36. Qur'ān, 4: 135.
37. Qur'ān, 5: 8.
38. *Ḥadīth*, Bukhurī.
39. <http://www.islamonline.net/fatwa/english/FatwaDisplay.asp?hFatwaID=79294> (Date of Fatwa: October 2002).
40. Qur'ān, 5: 55.
41. <http://www.islamonline.net/fatwa/english/FatwaDisplay.asp?hFatwaID=78491> (Date of Fatwa: August 2002).
42. See *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*.
43. Paxman, Jeremy, *The English: A Portrait of a People*. London, Penguin Books, 1999, p. 74.
44. Though it is now declining, the term *Gastarbeiter* (guest worker) was used to describe the offspring of Turkish migrants in Germany, despite the fact that German Turks are now into the fourth generation.
45. *World in Action*, Granada Television, 30th January 1978. Quoted in: Alibhai Brown, Yasmin, op. cit, 2001, p. 78.
46. For a discussion of the challenges facing British Muslims in terms of expression of loyalty and belonging, see Seddon, Mohammad et al. (eds.), *British Muslims: Loyalty and Belonging*, Leicester, The Islamic Foundation and Citizen Organising Foundation, 2003.
47. *Ḥadīth*, Bukhurī.
48. A number of commentators of the Qur'ān have viewed the Qur'ānic injunctions on migration as a spiritual and moral advice for later generations, see Mawdūdī, Abu'l A'lā, *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*.
49. Islamic Law, the norms of International Law, and above all common sense, would dictate that if contemporary communities were to face persecution, they should migrate to a place of security.

50. Protection of faith, life, intellect, family/lineage and property.
51. Qur'ān, 8: 72.
52. Shaykh Abdullah al-Judai is based in Leeds, UK, and is a member of the European Council for Fatwa and Research. This *fatwā* was issued in November 2001 and was titled, 'Fatwa on British Muslims Fighting in Afghanistan'.
53. Modood, Tariq et al., op. cit.
54. Hofmann, Murad, *Islam 2000*, Beltsville, USA, Amana Publications, 1996, p. 67.
55. Asian satellite channels.