

Chapter 4

The State, ‘New’ Muslim Leaderships and Islam as a ‘Resource’ for Public Engagement in Britain

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Introduction

In this chapter I start from the premise that scholarly accounts of Muslims in Western Europe ought to reflect more deliberately on the relationship between all three of the structure of particular states, the cultural capital of social actors and the ‘resources’ of the Islamic tradition. Where Islam is a resource for the articulation of quite different strategies of adaptation to minority status, I want to explore two short case studies of the ways in which mainly middle-class Muslim activists, with a good deal invested personally and professionally in the ‘mainstream’, are prioritizing ‘engagement’ over ‘isolation’ or ‘resistance’ (Lewis, 2002: 219) in the context of contemporary Britain.

My account begins with an overview of the ways in which the structure of the British State, in terms of legislation, policymaking and the existence of an established church, has provided the framework within which a distinctively ‘Muslim’ identity politics has evolved in recent decades. In particular, my account examines the current New Labour government’s emphasis on ‘civic renewal’ and the related emergence of what I call the ‘faith relations industry’. Thereafter, in my first case study, I trace a shift in the main focus of Muslim leaders’ engagement with the state, from ‘old’ ethnically-oriented grassroots networks in the 1980s, to a more ‘professionalized’ national focus for representation in the 1990s, culminating in the inauguration of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) in 1997.¹

While many Muslims have found ‘non-Islamic’ routes to pursue participation, not least through the established political parties, it has most often been ‘reformist Islamist’ activists with historical links to movements such as Jama’at-i Islami (JI, the Islamic Party, formed India, 1941) that have sought to engage the public sphere in Britain on an avowedly ‘Islamic’ basis.² Since the 1970s and 1980s ‘reformists’ in Britain have pioneered (selective) access to the ‘resources’ of the Islamic tradition in English as part of the project of rethinking what it means to be a European Muslim. In a second case study focusing on the engagement of the Islamic Foundation (IF), then, I consider what it might mean for the JI tradition to become transformed, not only as the movement has ‘travelled’ (Mandaville, 2001)

from a Muslim majority to a non-Muslim state context, but also as the cultural capital of a British-born generation has begun to impact organically on the intellectual activism of this institution.³

From 'Race' to 'Faith' Relations: State, Multiculturalism and Established Church

As members of the Commonwealth, South Asian heritage Muslims became *de facto* 'citizens' as soon as they settled in Britain during the 1950s and 1960s. However, immigration legislation since 1962 has progressively reproduced narrower conceptions of 'citizenship' (Husband, 1994). Indeed, recalling the administration of colonial affairs, state management of non-European immigrants in Britain has been organized in terms of the pragmatic recognition of essentialized 'cultural communities' rather than individual civil rights (Baumann, 1999). Anti-discrimination legislation of 1966 and 1976 established the racial and ethnic basis of this paradigm and witnessed the emergence of a so-called 'race relations industry' to oversee minority affairs. As members of 'ethnic' groups, Jews and Sikhs were afforded protection by the law, but not Muslims, given the multiethnic and transnational nature of Islam.

'Race' relations in Britain have also been administered in terms of state policymaking under the rubric of 'multiculturalism' (compare Sunier, this volume). As Parekh (2000: 42) suggests in the report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, the main political debate in this respect has been between 'nationalists' and 'liberals', both of whom emphasize the importance of social cohesion over plurality. Since the 1960s, 'nationalists' have advocated an 'assimilationism' which maintains that 'minorities' should conform to British 'norms'. In contrast, 'liberals' have posited a public space which claims to be ideologically 'neutral' but is still avowedly secular and prioritizes 'equality' at the expense of 'difference'. However, with minorities refusing assimilation and advancing religion as a major basis for public recognition, Parekh (2000: 48) concludes that if Britain is to become a more inclusive and harmonious society, it must expose itself to a conversation between liberalism and greater pluralism. Indeed, in a postcolonial age of 'transnational citizenship', he has asked the radical question, could Britain recognize itself as, a 'multicultural post-nation' (2000: 39)?

Perhaps not surprisingly, Parekh's report was not well received by 'nationalists' or 'liberals'.⁴ Moreover, the possibility of any progressive debate about the future of multi-ethnic Britain was quickly overtaken by local and global 'crises' when, in the summer of 2001, there were disorders involving Pakistani Muslim heritage youth in the 'northern towns' of Bradford, Burnley and Oldham, events quickly followed by the attacks of 9/11. By the end of the year the New Labour government had articulated a concern for 'community cohesion' in a series of its own reports.⁵ Without reference to Parekh (2000), Home Office Minister, Denham, proposed the need for a debate about 'shared values' and 'common citizenship' in order to 'minimise the risk of further disorder' (2002: 1-2). Denham also maintained that the aim of the new policy of 'community cohesion' would not

be to revisit assimilationism (2002: 21) but rather to promote a commitment to 'civic identity' (2002: 11-12) and 'civic renewal' (2002: 18). Here, it is possible to detect the influence of the 'communitarian' political philosophy that achieved prominence in the USA under the Clinton presidency.⁶ Indeed, ironically echoing the New Right backlash against local authorities' 'multicultural' policies in the 1980s (Husband, 1994), here was a UK-based communitarian critique of the 'old' Labour culture of 'rights', now said to have neglected citizens' 'responsibilities' and so reinforced ethnic 'segregation'.

In such a context, any remaining taboos against publicly challenging aspects of minority 'culture' understood to inhibit 'cohesion' have finally been broken. In February 2002, for example, a Home Office White Paper, 'Secure Borders, Safe Haven' proposed a new citizenship ceremony for Britain, an oath of allegiance, language tests (especially for ministers of religion including *imams*) and a debate on the desirability of the custom of transcontinental marriage (which Anne Cryer, Member of Parliament for Keighley, near Bradford, has described as 'importing poverty', *The Guardian*, 12 July 2001).⁷ Together with a raft of new anti- and counter-terrorism measures, which in the main targeted Islamic groups (see Birt, this volume), Muslim communities, in particular, are currently subject to unprecedented levels of intervention and regulation by the British State.⁸ In the face of new local-global 'crises', there has been a deepening of the 'moral panic' about those allegedly 'in' but not 'of' the West, with transnationalism seen unambiguously as a threat and the real dilemmas of diasporas at the grassroots generally overlooked.

Of course, Britain is unusual amongst liberal democracies in that religion has an 'established' position in the structure of the state (Modood, 1997). One outcome of Anglican privilege has been that no system of formally recognizing 'other faiths' exists. Nevertheless, Muslims have benefited from the presence of a Church of England which not only legitimates space for religion in public life but has also been hospitable to sharing that space with others (Lewis, 2002; compare Jonker, Chapter 8, this volume). For some Muslims this has meant that they can support 'establishment' both as a symbolic recognition of God's sovereignty and a more tangible critique of secularism's presumed 'neutrality' (Modood, 1997). Lacking the capacities and infrastructure of the Church of England, interfaith activity has also provided Muslims with opportunities for making alliances and learning how best to negotiate with the state as was the case during the successful campaign for a 'religion' question at the 2001 Census.⁹

Even beyond the specialized sphere of interfaith relations, there has been a new openness to religion in British politics over the last decade or so. In 1992, the Department of Environment, in collaboration with the Church of England and with the help of the Interfaith Network for the UK (founded 1987), formed the Inner Cities Religious Council (ICRC).¹⁰ With a view to tapping into religious communities' resources – people, networks, organizations, buildings – as a part of urban regeneration, the ICRC provided the first government forum for multifaith representation and consultation on a national level (McLoughlin, 2002). However, religion remained a somewhat ambiguous presence in politics during the early to mid-1990s. Rather than government it was independent public policy bodies such

as the Runnymede Trust (1997) which took the lead in commissioning research and producing reports on such matters as 'Islamophobia'.

Since 1997, when New Labour came to power, government has engaged 'faith' more publicly and controversially. 'Communitarianism' regards religious communities as a particular source of social capital, especially in deprived areas where other forms of social infrastructure may be absent (Putnam, 2001). Indeed, in New Labour's first year of office, the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions issued advice to all local authorities on 'involving faith communities' in neighbourhood renewal.¹¹ More recently, in October 2003, 'the religious issues section of the Home Office Race Equality Unit was reconstituted to form the new Faith Communities Unit', suggesting that 'faith' is becoming as important as 'race' in the state's management of minority ethnic affairs.¹² Legitimated by the 2001 Census, which produced the politically 'useful' statistic of 76.8 per cent religious affiliation in Britain, such developments reflect the emergence of a new 'faith relations industry'.¹³ This exists to: i) engage the many (socially excluded) 'newcomers' to Britain (especially 'Muslims') whose principal mode of communal identification and organization has been 'faith' based; ii) facilitate government consultation with the main faith groups on policy-making and service delivery; and iii) promote 'community cohesion' through interfaith activity. Nevertheless, there are still many elements of 'hard' secularism in government and Britain's public culture per se, something reflected in the continuing opposition to recent attempts at legislation on 'incitement to religious hatred' (*The Guardian*, 6 December 2004).¹⁴

'Old' and 'New' Muslim Leaderships: The Emergence of the Muslim Council of Britain

The British State has stopped short of officially recognizing existing, or creating newly elected, 'Muslim' representative institutions as in some other European countries (see Ferrari and Caeiro this volume). Nevertheless, at the local level in the 1980s, and on the national level since the late 1990s, government has periodically leant unelected Muslim bodies and their leadership public legitimacy, mainly through consultation but sometimes by channelling resources in their direction.

Not unlike the leaders of the Pakistan movement, Muslim 'community' leaders in Britain have usually been 'lay' rather than religious specialists.¹⁵ Their 'authority' has drawn upon a 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) that overlaps with, but is distinctive from, the traditional leadership associated with the *'ulama* and Sufi *shaykhs*. Amongst the first generation of economic migrants, the men who emerged as the chairmen of grassroots mosque committees in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, and subsequently acted as the interlocutors of local government, often shared certain characteristics. These characteristics at once reflected their South Asian cultural heritage and yet set them apart from other first generation migrants, the majority of whom were illiterate and of rural peasant farming origin: membership of a powerful and well-established regional and/or patri-lineal kinship

(*biradari*) group; a reputation as a well connected and effective political operator – a ‘strong man’; some limited education, including basic competence in English; and, finally, experience of engagement with members of ‘wider society’, perhaps through a public service occupation (for example, transport) or, more usually, a small business (for example, owning a shop or restaurant).

This sort of cultural capital allowed a first generation of grassroots Muslim leaders to build up mosque institutions which sustained the life-worlds, and maintained the localized hegemony, of dislocated male migrants in particular (McLoughlin, in press). For this segment of the Muslim population, the ‘resources’ of the Islamic tradition were selectively employed to maintain ethnic boundaries, legitimate the authority of South Asian cultural ‘norms’ and reinforce conservative adaptation strategies. Moreover, within the ‘doing deals culture’ (Ouseley, 2001: 10) operated by some local councils as they sought to recognize large Muslim populations, the public engagement of mosques and their leaders has routinely been limited to competition for scarce resources, securing ‘rights’ and participating as required in photo-calls to ‘celebrate the community’ (McLoughlin, in press). In this context ‘Islam’ becomes reified as part of the dominant discourse of what Baumann (1999) calls ‘difference multiculturalism’ and ‘engagement’ is limited to a rhetorical transaction between community leaders and the state.

More than any event, the Rushdie Affair of 1988-89 illuminated the strengths and weaknesses of a Muslim community leadership grounded in grassroots networks and associations. If the early 1980s witnessed the local state consult representatives of Islam on questions of public recognition, by the end of the decade the numbers of ‘Muslim’ councillors was also beginning to rise (Lewis, 1994). However, there was not a single Muslim Member of Parliament and no national body with the authority to represent Muslims to an increasingly centralized government.¹⁶ Having been informed of the offending passages in *The Satanic Verses* by co-religionists in India (Ahsan and Kidwai, 1993), an alliance of mainly ‘reformist Islamist’ and ‘neo-traditionalist’ heritage elites recognized both the realities and the opportunities of this situation. Feeling that they possessed the professional, scholarly and social skills necessary to do business with government ministers, senior civil servants, publishers and the media, the UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs (UKACIA) was formed in London. However, despite the letter-writing, petitions, telephone-calls and meetings, the UKACIA’s peaceful lobbying failed to make an impact on the Conservative government of the day. Indeed, this ‘new’ leadership was eventually outmanoeuvred by the ‘old’ grassroots’ leadership associated with Bradford Council for Mosques (BCM) which had mobilized working class Muslims during the *halal* meat and Honeyford affairs earlier in the decade (McLoughlin, 2002). Strategies of ‘accommodation’ having failed, BCM resorted to protest and publicly burned Rushdie’s book, something the UKACIA’s middle-class leadership neither sanctioned nor approved of.

Into the 1990s, the UKACIA took its campaigning to the legal system, arguing in the High Court that Britain’s blasphemy laws, still protecting only the Church of England, should be reformed and extended to defend Islam. While this project, too, was unsuccessful, the organization doggedly persisted with engaged representational strategies on the national level, seeking recognition especially in

terms of legislation on 'religious' (as well as racial and ethnic) discrimination (UKACIA, 1993). Indeed, all Muslim activists were disappointed by their slow rate of progress during this period. However, himself frustrated at the continuing divisions between Islamic organizations, Conservative Home Secretary, Michael Howard, advised Muslim activists to speak with one voice should they wish to exercise more influence over government (*Q-News*, 25 March 1994).

Within a couple of months this intervention had prompted the UKACIA to form a National Interim Committee on Muslim Affairs. Having consulted over 1000 organizations on the need for a new national umbrella body (*The Muslim News*, 31 May 2002), and studied the constitutions of similar organizations such as the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the committee finally inaugurated the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) in 1997. Regarding its constituency as 'British citizens with an Islamic heritage', the stated aims and objectives of the MCB included 'a more enlightened appreciation of Islam and Muslims in the wider society' and 'better community relations and work[ing] for the good of society as a whole'.¹⁷

Today the MCB is run by a skeleton staff who, for the most part, work on a voluntary basis. Both general secretaries to date, Iqbal Sacranie (1998-2000, 2002-04) and Yousef Bhailok (2000-02), have been able to assume the role only because they are prosperous middle-aged businessmen. Indeed, a cursory glance at the biography of each begins to reveal the particular cultural capital of the MCB's most senior leadership. Sacranie and Bhailok are of 'African-Asian' ('twice-migrant') and 'Gujerati Indian' origin respectively, both relatively small but significant 'ethnic' segments of the British-Muslim population exhibiting a more upwardly mobile trajectory than the larger 'Pakistani' or 'Bangladeshi' constituencies. At the same time, both have experience not only of grassroots mosque institutions but also organizations with national profiles in sectors such as charity and education (*The Common Good*, 1(2): 2). Notably, Sacranie was also Joint-Convenor of the UKACIA.¹⁸

While Sacranie and Bhailok have associations with the 'neo-traditionalist' Deobandi tradition, many other MCB activists appear to be associated with 'reformist Islamist', and especially JI-related, organizations such as UK Islamic Mission, the Islamic Foundation, Young Muslims UK and the Islamic Society of Britain. Based on an analysis of the membership of the MCB's Central Working Committee available at www.mcb.org.uk in January 2003, I estimate that one-third to one-half of members' affiliations could be described as 'reformist Islamist' heritage. Moreover, the contents of the organization's occasional newsletter, *The Common Good*, reveal that it is the activities of such organizations that have the highest profile. However, while Muslim magazine, *Q News*, has labelled the MCB as 'lassi Islamists' (March-April 2002: 22-3) – a *halal* version of New Labour's 'champagne socialists' – such a representation is somewhat misleading. JI-related organizations may be home to a significant body of activists who have the requisite aptitude and energy for the MCB's political work. However, the organization also depends on its fair share of British-born, university-educated, young Muslim professionals in their thirties, a *new* rising middle-class first politicized by events such as the Rushdie Affair, the Gulf War and Bosnia, and who may or may not be (or have been) affiliated to JI-related or other organizations.¹⁹ So it is then that the

MCB is best viewed as providing a non-sectarian space for the advance of a Muslim politics of recognition.²⁰

Perhaps fortuitously, the MCB's consolidation of a 'new', professionalized and media-friendly Muslim representative body coincided with the election of New Labour. As we have seen, the party has been committed to an important role for faith in the more general project of civic renewal. However, as the elections of 1992 and 1997 had shown, it was also no longer in a position to take the votes of Muslims for granted (Nielsen, 2001). In any case, having received a positive response to its initial enquiries, the MCB soon found itself invited to regular meetings and receptions at the Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, even representing the latter as a part of delegations to Muslim countries (McLoughlin, 2003). Various government departments, agencies and civil society organizations, all now required to engage multifaith (as well as multiracial and multiethnic) 'partners' as part of the 'stakeholder society', also started to consult the MCB which provided user-friendly access to the necessary Muslim 'voices'.

By May 2004 the MCB had 395 affiliates at local, regional and national levels.²¹ Seeing itself as the 'first port of call' for government,²² it can certainly point to an increasing recognition of 'Muslims' on the national level since its inauguration.²³ However, it also seems clear that the changing place of faith in the policymaking of the British government has been equally, if not more important, in shaping these new developments. Moreover, the MCB is just one amongst many lobbies at Whitehall and has been unable to significantly influence 'higher' arenas of debate such as foreign policy (Radcliffe, 2004). 'Loyalty' was always going to be part of New Labour's attempt to incorporate a 'moderate' Muslim leadership. So, while the MCB was able to support military intervention in Kosovo during 1999 (*The Muslim News*, 28 May 1999), and issued a statement of condemnation within hours of 9/11, its 'failure' to support the war in Afghanistan in late 2001,²⁴ resulted in the government publicly questioning the very 'authority' it had taken a key role in ascribing. Birt (2005), for example, argues that while attempts to 'groom' the MCB ultimately failed, this provoked 'coded' public messages from New Labour 'spin doctors' expressing 'disappointment' at the failure of the 'moderates' to marginalize an 'extremist' fringe.

For the MCB, such experiences highlighted the problems of state patronage. Indeed, all minority leaderships must strike a balance between strategies of accommodation and protest (Werbner, 1991). So it was then that the organization was to belatedly take a more public role in supporting the Stop the War Coalition. One of its own affiliates, the 'reformist Islamist' Ikhwan al-Muslimun (the Muslim Brothers) related, Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), had taken a lead in the alliance alongside the Socialist Workers' Party, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and others.²⁵ Nevertheless, despite 'meagre resources' and the somewhat 'intangible outcomes' of its work,²⁶ against the context of huge external demands from the state and wider society, and amidst criticism of a tendency to seek to exercise control over the work of existing Muslim organizations (see, for example, *Q-News*, June 2004), the MCB's volunteers have remained committed to adapting the liberal public reason of 'democracy', 'the rule of law' and 'race equality' (Modood, 2002; Radcliffe, 2004) to the project of Muslim identity politics.

From Counter-culture to Multicultural Convergence? The Islamic Foundation in Transition

While revealing a good deal about the changing shape of both state policymaking and the cultural capital of Muslim community leaders, the emergence of the MCB provides only limited opportunity for reflection on the Islamic tradition as a resource for public engagement in Britain. The organization periodically convenes meetings of Islamic scholars to advise on important matters but the common currency of its representations to the state and wider society is not, of course, 'scholarship' but the 'sound-bite'.²⁷ Contestation over Islamically 'legitimate' strategies of adaptation vis-à-vis the non-Muslim state is increasingly conducted in the public sphere 'proper' as witnessed by the disruption of a MCB 'General Election 2005' press conference by 'radicals' rejecting the legitimacy of participation in a non-Islamic political system (*The Times*, 19 April 2005). However, such debates remain most elaborate and intense within the 'diasporic' public sphere (Werbner, 2002), where transnational Islamic movements and their related institutions and organizations compete for influence.

In this regard, the newly urbanized majority of Muslims in Britain have been most influenced by the 'traditionalist' and 'neo-traditionalist', Sufi and '*ulama*' based, Barelwi and Deobandi movements of South Asia.²⁸ Although in theory possessing access to the fullest range of classical Islam's intellectual resources, the religious specialists associated with these two movements have in practice tended to support 'isolationist' (Lewis, 2002: 219) strategies of adaptation to non-Muslim rule in Britain as they did under the Raj (see Birt, this volume). In contrast, a more upwardly mobile, 'Islamist' minority, which includes both the 'radical revolutionaries' associated with movements such as Hizb al-Tahrir and the 'reformists' I want to consider in more detail here, has tended to adopt positions of 'resistance' and 'engagement' respectively (Lewis, 2002: 219).²⁹

Since the 1960s and 1970s 'reformist' Islamist trajectories in Britain have been most associated with elite JI-related organizations. JI was formed in pre-partition India during 1941 by the noted theorist of the Islamic State, Sayyid Abu'l-A'la al-Mawdudi (d.1979). In Muslim-majority Pakistan, despite poor electoral performances, JI's cadres are known for being a dedicated, well-organized and 'opportunistic' vanguard, willing to accommodate to prevailing political conditions and structures in pursuit of political power (Nasr, 1994). Similarly in secular Britain, with no prospect of an Islamic State, it was the student and young professional migrants of the JI-related organizations who developed a *da'wa* ('call' or 'mission') strategy based on the creation of a revivalist 'counter-culture' (Lewis, 1994: 110).

A key 'reformist Islamist' player in the *da'wa* enterprise in Britain has been the Islamic Foundation (IF), based at Markfield in rural Leicestershire. However, research on Muslims in Britain reflecting developments in the 1970s, 1980s and into the early 1990s tended to discuss the IF only in limited detail (for example, Andrews, 1993: 71-2). Nevertheless, a scholarly discourse about the institution quickly became established, which can readily be summarized here. Although officially independent and with no formal links to JI, key IF staff during this period often had overlapping membership of JI/JI-related organizations. Indeed, one of the

institution's main activities, publishing, was generally concerned with the writings of JI's 'lay intellectuals', especially Mawdudi himself, Khurshid Ahmad (economist, founding Director General of the IF in 1973 and vice-president of JI) and Khurram Murad (d.1996, engineer, Ahmad's successor in 1978 and past vice-president of JI). In keeping with JI's 'revivalist' credentials, IF publications in the 1970s and 1980s routinely presented 'Islam' within a selective (and arguably sectarian) framework, tending to dismiss as innovations (*bid'a*) the alternative epistemologies of Sufism and Shi'ism. Notably, the availability of World Muslim League funding during this period identified the institution with a Saudi Arabian axis network of pan-Islamic organizations. A centre for *da'wa* and the Islamization of knowledge in Britain, the IF proved to be of little interest to Muslims at the grassroots.

In a definitive contribution to this literature, Lewis (1994: 108-112) detected the first suggestions of a questioning of Mawdudi's legacy amongst the youth of JI-related organizations during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Nevertheless, his overall assessment was that the tradition had not: 'at present developed the intellectual resources for living creatively and with good conscience with minority status and relative powerlessness in a pluralist state ... The emphases have been activist rather than reflective and intellectual' (1994: 110). Until recently there has been no attempt to update Lewis' account or comment upon developments during the 1990s, a period of important transformations within 'reformist Islamism' in the Muslim world per se. Indeed, while the ideological project of first generation Islamists such as Mawdudi was highly distinctive, since the mid 1980s and into the 1990s, emblematic movements such as the Ikhwan are now widely understood to have 'democratized', accommodating to the nation-state and institutionalizing within the mainstream of civil society. Roy (1994), for example, regards this as evidence of the 'failure' of political Islam whereas Burgat argues that 'it is the outsider's dominant view of political Islam that has failed, because it has chosen to ignore, if not fight against, the possibility that Islamism could evolve' (2003: 161). In this respect, I want to suggest that 'reformist' developments in 1990s Britain cannot be understood without some reference to trends which circulate on a global scale.

Interestingly, the IF is now beginning to attract the attention of European and American, as well as British, scholars. Peter (2003), for example, has argued that the Rushdie Affair exposed the institution to new opportunities for faith-based public engagement, its activity in this respect having hitherto been confined mainly to interfaith relations. The affair precipitated a crisis in the 'race and ethnicity' paradigm of minority affairs in Britain and into the 1990s the state and public services gradually sought to take Muslims as 'Muslims' more seriously. Moreover, Janson (2003) maintains that new markets for the IF's unique packaging of 'Islam' for English-speaking audiences, for example, school-based Religious Education, also began to consolidate at a time when streams of Saudi funding were running dry following the collapse of oil prices in the late 1980s. Indeed, not unlike the 'professionalization' associated with the UKACIA (and eventually the MCB), the IF began to imitate more 'secular' institutions, exhibiting 'considerably less interest in ... flag waving proclamations of ideological or theological orientation' (Janson, 2003: 170).

During the 1990s and into the 2000s, then, the IF has de-emphasized its original concern for *da'wa* and counter-cultural Islamization, especially in marketing some key ventures. These include a Home Office-endorsed *Cultural Awareness Training* programme on Muslims in Britain for non-Muslim professionals (McLoughlin, 2003),³⁰ and the *Markfield* Institute of Higher Education (MIHE) which offers postgraduate degrees in Islamic Studies validated by Loughborough University [my emphasis]. With the translation of Mawdudi's work now complete, Janson suggests that the IF's publishing business also exhibits signs of 'diversification' and 'controlled expansion' (2003: 179-180). However, his overall argument is that, while 'socially committed ... [and] actively working against Muslim isolationism', and while adapting to Britain's 'intellectual and commercial pluralism' (2003: 363), ultimately the IF still 'attempts to harness British liberalism for the sake of 'Islamic' particularism', that is, an essentialist 'Sunni revivalist interpretation of Islam', which is advanced as representative of 'Islam' per se (Janson, 2003: 151).

I think a more nuanced assessment can be forwarded here. Mandaville (2001: 132-6), for example, citing members of IF staff as examples, argues that, given the religious and political freedoms of the diaspora, and intensified encounters with Muslim 'others', Islamic intellectuals and activists in the West are increasingly evolving innovative, cosmopolitan and self-critical reformulations of their tradition. Mandaville perhaps overstates the widespread acceptance of such a trend in Britain, for any transformations at the IF are still, in my opinion, very much in transition. Nevertheless, since the late 1990s especially, I do want to argue that a critical mass hospitable to such perspectives has undoubtedly begun to emerge at the institution. The existing literature suggests that while the IF was initially inspired by the tradition of Mawdudi and JI – 'first generation' Islamism – it also reflects the values and experiences of a 'second generation' more aware of the global interdependency of 'Islam' and the 'West' – i.e. Khurshid Ahmad (Esposito and Voll, 2001). My contention is that it is now necessary to speak of a 'third generation' of (diasporic) intellectual-activists who are, moreover, far more reflexive concerning their Islamic lineage than Janson (2003) would seem to allow.

Although their numbers remain small, within the academically oriented 'Islam in Europe' and 'Muslims in Britain' research units of the IF especially, 'thirtysomethings' of British-Asian heritage have been joined by converts to Islam with whom they share similar cultural capital, lived experiences and investments, most especially in terms of confidently embracing and successfully negotiating relationships, education, activism and careers in the interstitial spaces that constitute 'British-Muslim' identity. Some remain well networked in terms of organizations such as the ISB. However, given the largely undocumented 'fragmentation and breaks' within the JI-related tradition during the 1990s, some of ISB's membership can be very much 'out on a limb', with concepts such as 'the Islamic movement' and '*da'wa*' all now 'up for grabs'.³¹ Indeed, again like the MCB, other members of staff are more determinedly 'non-affiliated', perhaps reflecting something of the 'the post-*ikhwan*', 'independent Islamist', trend described by Roald (2001: 54). Moreover, even those who identify with a 'neo-traditionalist' heritage, are critical of JI's dismissal of Sufism and want 'reformists'

to engage more seriously with the expertise of the *'ulama* (rather than simply making their own 'stabs' at 'indigenizing modernity'), can still find within the IF today an important intellectual 'breathing space away from activism'.³² A desire to work 'ecumenically' on concerns common to all British-Muslims is being reciprocated.

The argument here, then, is not that 'third generation'/(post) 'reformist Islamism' has displaced its more 'particularistic' (Janson, 2003: 151) forbears at the IF but rather that the two now 'cohabit' in the same space. Director General, Khurshid Ahmad, for example, welcomes the fact that 'it is no longer necessary to import staff' to work at the institution and that a growing 'British-Muslim ethos' is finally 'detaching the institution from Pakistani and Arab culture'.³³ At the same time, however, unlike many of his younger colleagues, Ahmad is still committed to 'Islamization from below' and does not exclude the non-Muslim state from such transformation although, 'the route to the state is through the individual, community and civil society ... there is loyalty to the society but we also to try to improve it'.

Traces of both trends are detectable in a short document concerning the 'duty' of Muslim participation in civil society, prepared by Malik (2000), a practising solicitor, ISB member and former Citizen Organising Foundation trainer based at the IF.³⁴ Engaging implicitly with New Labour's discourse of civic renewal, Malik begins by arguing that in terms of relations with non-Muslims the Qur'an teaches Muslims 'to uphold justice and equity' for all people 'regardless of their faith, race or gender' (2000: 2-3). All, he maintains, are the 'children of Adam' (2000: 4). Moreover, Muslims are encouraged to follow the example of the prophet Joseph who found the 'scope ... to promote good and prevent harm ... in a non-Muslim(!) government' (2000: 8). Indeed, Malik insists that the Qur'anic concepts of 'good and evil are not defined from some high moral ground' (2000: 8). Rather, that which is *ma'ruf* (good) means simply 'what is common to people or that which is known by common sense' (2000: 8). This puts an overwhelming emphasis on 'common values' as opposed to uniquely 'Islamic values'. Indeed, despite the 'self-interested' concern with 'tribal ancestry' of many mosques in Britain (2000: 3) – something discussed above – Malik suggests that it is only through supporting civil society causes *that do not affect Muslims directly* that they 'will come to know and understand others and allow others to understand them' (2000: 8). Muslims 'must not only learn about citizenship ... but teach others and be an example' (2000: 9), for 'to work collectively' shows the way to empowerment, 'to become powerful influential people in society' (2000: 10).

Here, the adoption of civic consciousness and active citizenship by British-Muslims does not suggest that they blindly adopt or assimilate dominant values. Rather, an emphasis on understanding the political system of Britain promises the possibility of learning the skills to engage in critical dialogue about 'citizenship' and 'integration' in a more pluralist, even post-national, society. Crucially, there is a concern with the 'common' rather than the 'communal' good, co-operation rather than competition, with non-Muslims seen as partners and religious differences 'relational rather than absolute' (Baumann, 1999: 131). While still reflecting a 'strategically essentialized' account of what it might mean to be 'a good Muslim', I

would argue that Malik is beginning to problematize ‘difference multiculturalism’ and usefully approach what Baumann (1999: 126) calls ‘multicultural convergence’, that is, seeking ‘the same point of agreement [with others]; but ... from its own point of origin, and by its own route’.

Conclusion

While the structure of the British State is such that religious institutions find a voice in the ‘secular’ public sphere more readily than in some other European countries, into the 1990s the creation of a ‘faith’ as well as a ‘race’ relations industry has both shaped, and itself been influenced by, an emergent Muslim identity politics. Precipitated by the Rushdie Affair especially, the move beyond grassroots representation, first by the UKACIA and then the MCB, has increased the public profile (but, for most Muslims at least, not necessarily the authority) of a national ‘community’ leadership. For this leadership, the desire for ‘engagement’ is in part a reflection of new and established middle-class cultural capital and ever increasing personal and professional investments in the ‘mainstream’ of British society. However, as the contested and incomplete transition from ‘counter-cultural *da’wa*’ to ‘multicultural convergence’ at the IF demonstrates, the ‘good’ of ‘engagement’ is legitimated Islamically in quite different ways. Whether attempts by Malik (2001) and others (for example, Ramadan, 1999) to ‘translate’ ‘Islamic’ political thought into ‘Western’ categories will ultimately produce a desecularizing and pluralizing challenge to the hegemony of liberalism (Parekh, 2000) and/or a rationalizing (and secularizing) ‘hollowing out’ of Islam (Roy, 1994) remains to be seen. In any case, the developments in ‘reformist Islamism’ considered here suggest the need for a re-imagining of ‘political Islam’ by Western scholars and policy-makers. Despite the appeal of rejectionism, what Burgat suggests of the re-intellectualization of Islam in the Middle East is increasingly true amongst avowedly ‘Muslim’ intellectual-activists in Europe: ‘democratization and re-Islamization are today following paths that meet at many points’ (2003: 138).

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Notes

- 1 My brief account of the MCB here is based mainly upon a mapping of the organization's website, www.mcb.org.uk. The website houses general information about the MCB, its press releases, a list of affiliates, membership and committee details, news of particular campaigns, weekly updates and back copies of its occasional newsletter, *The Common Good*.
- 2 I use the term 'Islamist' somewhat tentatively here to suggest a modern interpretation of Islam which is self-consciously ideological and political. 'Reformists' are routinely seen as those exponents of 'political Islam' who seek to 'Islamize' public space gradually through an accommodation to the political process, whereas 'radical revolutionary' Islamists sanction armed uprising in order to capture power.
- 3 My interest in the IF began when I met two members of its staff at a 'Global Ethics' conference at Glasgow University in September 2001. I was subsequently invited to two events organized by the IF, firstly at the Foundation in May 2002 and then at the British Council in London, June 2003.
- 4 See, for example, 'British is race slur' (The Sun, 10 October 2000), which 'misread' the report's decoupling of Britishness from its racialized connotations of whiteness, and Home Secretary, Jack Straw: 'I do not accept the arguments of those on the nationalist right or the liberal left that Britain as a cohesive whole is dead' (BBC News Online, 11 October 2000).
- 5 These are available at: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/comrace/cohesion/keydocs.html.
- 6 For an assessment of the relationship between 'communitarianism' and New Labour, see Goes (2000) and Bevir (2005). This is further explored in a lecture by former Home Secretary, David Blunkett, at www.homeoffice.gov.uk/docs2/civilrennewagenda.pdf.
- 7 Available at: www.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm53/5387/cm5387.pdf.
- 8 See www.homeoffice.gov.uk/terrorism/index.html.
- 9 See, for example, the MCB's account of the lobbying process at: www.mcb.org.uk/census2001.pdf.
- 10 See, www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/page.asp?id=524.
- 11 www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_urbanpolicy/documents/page/odpm_urbpol_608134.hcsp.
- 12 See the recommendations of the steering group on the engagement between government and faith communities at: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/docs3/workingtog_faith040329.pdf.
- 13 For the main 2001 Census data on religion see www.homeoffice.gov.uk/comrace/faith/.
- 14 Nevertheless, the 2005 Queen's Speech (BBC News Online, 17 May 2005) mentioned bills legislating against both Incitement to Religious Hatred and 'religious discrimination' (Equality Bill).
- 15 However, a number of younger Muslim 'alims (scholars) in the Deobandi tradition (see note 28), who combine the classical training of al-Azhar with higher degrees from British universities, now speak on community affairs in their localities and work through the MCB on a national level. See Birt, this volume.
- 16 A national umbrella organization, the Union of Muslim Organisations of the UK and Eire (UMO), had been set up in 1970, but as Nielsen remarks it was 'essentially irrelevant because all the major aspects of government which affected Muslims were based at local level until well into the 1980s' (1999: 40).
- 17 See www.mcb.org.uk/aim.html.
- 18 A national newspaper quickly 'promoted' Sacranie to 246th 'most powerful person in Britain' (The Observer, 24 October 1999).
- 19 Telephone interview with Sher Khan, Chair, MCB Public Affairs Committee, 26 June 2003.

- 20 Indeed, 'no member body and its branches could have more than five of its members elected to the Central Working Committee' (*The Common Good*, 1(3): 2).
- 21 See MCB Annual Report 2003-04 at: www.mcb.org.uk/agm2004.pdf.
- 22 See the Secretary General's Introduction to the MCB Annual Report 2002 at: www.mcb.org.uk.
- 23 1998, for example, saw Muslims achieve equality with Anglicans, Catholics and Jews when the first state-aided Muslim primary schools were established. In 1999 the first civil service post directed at the Muslim community was announced, an Islamic advisor to the prisons, where Muslim numbers have more than doubled in recent years.
- 24 See 'press releases' under 'media' at www.mcb.org.uk: 'MCB expresses total condemnation of terrorist attacks' (11 September 2001) and 'MCB opposes War on Afghans – Insists on Justice' (9 October 2001).
- 25 See Secretary General's Annual Report 2002-03 at: www.mcb.org.uk/2002-3.pdf.
- 26 *Ibid.*
- 27 The Qur'an, 5:32, for example, which establishes the sanctity of life, was widely cited by Muslims in the wake of 9/11 to disassociate Islam from terrorism (MCB, 2002: 29).
- 28 Lewis makes the succinct distinction between those Islamic movements which seek to 'defend' (the Barelwis), 'reform' (the Deobandis), or 'reject' (Ahl-i Hadis, Jama'at-i Islami) the traditional paradigm of South Asian Islam, exemplified by Sufi pirs (mystical guides, saints) and their shrines (1994: 28).
- 29 Hizb al-Tahrir (the Liberation Party, founded 1953, Jerusalem) propagates a utopian message of reviving the ummah (Islamic community) and liberating those Muslims who live under kufr (systems of unbelief in Muslim or non-Muslim countries) by (re)establishing the khilafah (Caliphate) and an Islamic state ruled by shari'ah (Taji-Farouki, 1996).
- 30 The approach to this training was described to me as 'warts and all' (personal correspondence with Dilwar Hussain, IF, 3 February 2003).
- 31 Interview with Dilwar Hussain, IF, 27 October 2003.
- 32 Interview with Yahya Birt, IF, 27 October 2003.
- 33 Interview with Khurshid Ahmad, IF, 17 October 2003.
- 34 The Citizen Organising Foundation promotes broad-based community organizing and the strengthening of civil society, including a role for faith groups. A 'memorandum of understanding' was signed with the IF in 1998.

