The Denmark School

Muslim Communities Perspectives on Radicalisation in Leicester, UK

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Islamism and Radicalisation – *the Denmark School*

The ambition of the Denmark School is to remedy the fragmentation between different fields of research in Islamism. The Denmark School wants to explore the phenomena of 'Islamism' in its different manifestations and to highlight the mechanisms of radicalisation processes among Muslim youth in Europe. One of the innovative approaches is the linkage between 'soft security' and 'hard security'. While other projects mainly focus on *terrorism*, this project first of all focuses on *Islamism*. The identification of Islamism requires a distinction between three possible phases: 1) ideology, 2) movements and 3) political regimes.

The study of Islamism in international relations is usually limited to treating only one aspect of Islamism as a transnational actor, namely terrorism and the corresponding anti-terror measures. But Islamist ambitions and strategies are expressed through a number of other means, such as foreign policy, boycotts, crises, strategic alliances and perhaps even the acquisition of WMD. These must be mapped in order to provide an empirical basis for studying contemporary Islamist world views and conceptions of international relations.

This report on Leicester in the UK is the fourth report published by the Centre for Studies in Islamism and Radicalisation (CIR). Like two previous reports on Denmark (with special focus on Aarhus) and one on Parma and Verona in Italy, this report is based on empirical research, in this case conducted by Dr. Jonathan Githens-Mazer, Dr. Robert Lambert, MBE, Dr. Abdul-Haqq Baker, Safiyah Cohen-Baker, and Zacharias Pieri, all from the European Muslim Research Centre at the University of Exeter, UK.

A report on Lille in France will be published later in the same series.

It is important to mention that, for the sake of harmonisation, CIR organized meetings between the researchers to discuss and prepare the practical questions related to the process of investigation. At these meetings, the participating researchers coordinated their research and elaborated a common interview guide. It is also important to stress the independent character of these investigations. The projects have been carried out in accordance with the standards for good research practice, and the Centre has in no way interfered in the research process.

In this delicate and highly sensitive field of research, carrying out interviews is a difficult task and the researchers have faced various obstacles during the process. The completion of the investigations has taken many months. The interviews have mainly involved three different groups: Young Muslims, religious leaders and social workers who work with activities and issues in relation to Muslims and immigrants on a daily basis.

The first version of the reports was finished during the autumn of 2009 and was submitted to an international committee of experts for evaluation. Based on the comments of this committee, the researchers revised their reports. I should like to thank the members of the evaluation committee for a wonderful cooperation.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the reports exclusively reflect the findings of the researchers and do not necessarily express the views of CIR. Comments to the reports are welcome.

Mehdi Mozaffari

Head of CIR

Leicester railway station, mosque and council flats

Staff and graduates at Markfield Institute of Higher Education, Islamic Foundation, Leicester

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Muslim Communities Perspectives on Radicalisation in Leicester, UK

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1. Introduction

Understanding Muslim communities' perspectives on political mobilisation and violent extremism is an important but complex issue in Britain and Europe. Too often peaceful Islamic belief, practice and thought has been conflated with violent radicalisation and Islamically inspired political violence, not least because few researchers and commentators have engaged in research that listens to young Muslims' own views on these issues. While there exists a very real threat of violent extremism in the UK, this threat comes from an extremely small minority, and many young Muslims feel as though they are under constant surveillance and scrutiny despite rejecting any form of political violence. These same young people also often feel as though their own individual efforts to empower communities to be resilient against violent radicalisation and violent extremism are not being understood and/or heralded by non-Muslim communities, politicians and the police and security services. This report illustrates Muslim communities' perspectives on issues of radicalisation and violent extremism – through a series of qualitative structured interviews with young Muslims, their parents, community social workers and imams from Leicester (UK).

This report stems from the current project on the *Qualitative Research on European Medium-size Cities* research project being conducted under the auspices of Centre for Studies in Islamism and Radicalisation (CIR) at the Department of Political Science, Aarhus University. The broader project was a comparative study on the issue of radicalisation amongst a range of young Muslims living in Europe. The UK component of this project was conducted in Leicester, a city comparable in size to Lille, France (<280,000 inhabitants in the city, and a total of <450,000 in the wider Leicester urban area) with a massive Muslim population. Leicester was selected for several key reasons including its comparability to other cities selected for the *Qualitative Research on European Medium-size Cities* research project, and its high density of a diverse Muslim population, including many sects of Islam (Sunni, Shi'a, Salafi, Barelvi, Deobandi etc.), and many different stories/generations of

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immigration (ranging from Asians who migrated to the UK in the 1950s and 60s, to more recent Somali immigrants to the UK).

2. Conceptualising Radicalisation

The meaning of 'radicalisation' is relatively unexplored compared to the use of the term 'terrorism', which has not lacked academic attempts at conceptualisation and definition over a sustained period (Schmid and Jongman, 1988; Stepanova, 2008) When applied to Islam and Muslims, the term radical is often being used interchangeably and opaquely with terms such as fundamentalist, Islamist, Jihadist and neo-Salafist or Wahabbist with little regard for what these terms actually mean, and instead indicate signals about political Islam that these members of the media and politicians wish to transmit (Saeed, 2007; Turner, 2007).[1] In such cases, Islamic radicalism can mean "those people who believe that Islam is under threat and that they are sanctioned to defend Islam from that threat" (Lim, 2005), and often 'Islamic radical fundamentalism' is used interchangeably with 'fundamentalist radical Islamism'. Fundamentalism is a term generally being used to denote religious practice based on literal interpretation of a sacred text, and in discussions of popular religion, is a term applied to Muslims and Christians (Lewis, 1993)[2]. In other cases, radical Islamist is a euphemism for violent Islamist (Langohr, 2004).

In the academic literature, the terms radical, radicalise, radicalisation have been used in a variety of ways. It has been used to indicate forms of populism related to revolutionary opportunity (Ellner, 2005), a revolutionary act in response to declining power (and used interchangeably with 'fundamentalism' (Ferrero, 2005)), an 'ultra' form, or intensification

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[1] This is not to tar all recent work on this subject with the same brush: see especially Fuller, G., 2002, The Future of Political Islam. *Foreign Affairs* 81, Hafez, M. and Q. Wiktorowicz, 2005, Violence as Contention in the Egyptian Islamic Movement, in: Q. Wiktorowicz, ed., *Islamic Activism: A social movement approach* (University of Indiana Press, Bloomington, IN) 61-88, Hafez, M. M., 2003a, The armed Islamic movement in Algeria: From the FIS to the GIA. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35, 175-178, Hafez, M. M., 2003d, *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Violence in the Islamic World* (Lynne Rienner, London) Pages., Kurzman, C., ed., 1998, *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook* (Oxford University Press, Oxford) Pages., Wickham, C. R., 2004, The Path to Moderation: Strategy and Learning in the Formation of Egypt's Wasat Party. *Comparative Politics* 36, 205-228., Euben, R., 1995, When Worldviews Collide: Conflicting Assumptions about Human Behavior Held by Rational Actor Theory and Islamic Fundamentalism. *Political Psychology* 16, 157-178., Project, P. G. A., 2006, Muslims in Europe: Economic Worries Top Concerns About Religious and Cultural Identity, (Pew Research Centre, Washington, DC).. These authors, amongst others, are often meticulous in defining and using terms to denote specific forms of Islamically inspired politics, and their careful and articulate use of terms allows for the reader to gain complete sense of their analysis and description of the phenomena they are examining.

[2] One way of understanding the relationship between fundamentalism and radicalisation is legitimacy. Fundamentalist reliance on sacred texts as being pure, unadulterated and inherently 'true' provides a moral basis for further political action. See hurryupharry, 2009, Interpal's Ibrahim Hewitt.

of existing political orientations and behaviours often typified by a shift from peaceful activity to (ever more) violent 'extremism' (Brighton, 2007; Jenne, 2004; Jenne et al., 2007; van den Broek, 2004) the process by which political moderates become militant or increasingly support extremists and their positions, as well as a related sense of reaction to catalyst occasionally described as recruitment (de Figueiredo and Weingast, 2001; DeNardo, 1985; Duffield, 2002; Fraihi, 2008; Mesquita and Dickson, 2007; Rosendorff and Sandler, 2004; Ryan, 2007; Saad-Ghorayeb, 2003), and finally an individual sense of becoming hyper-aware of critical issues, resulting in a 'radical irrationality' and a subsequent willingness to violently act on this awareness (Gustafson, 2007; Simon, 1985).

For EU policy makers, radicalisation often denotes violence and terrorism, a move from a peaceful perspective to one which encourages and thrives on the use of violence. 'Violent radicalisation' is currently a term only being used to describe terrorism being carried out by Muslims, and the 2005 EU *Strategy for Combating Radicalization and Recruitment to Terrorism* is intended to "prevent, protect, pursue and respond" to terrorist threats posed by "violent radicalisation" (Secretariat, 2007). As a policy area, the Commission has had a mixed record of defining and acting on violent radicalisation. The Commission has launched a policy for the 'prevention of and response to violent radicalisation' identifying existing EU policies that play an important role in addressing violent radicalisation and then focusing on channelling these policies effectively.[3] According to the Commission, it recognises that its strategy has to recognise that addressing the problems of violent radicalisation are 'beyond the power of government alone' and therefore willing to support a broad range of projects from the municipal level to intergovernmental levels. On a more concrete level, the commission has focused its approach around seven key themes. These include – competence building for leaders, enhancing knowledge among youth on the different interpretations of Islam, promoting channels for addressing perceived or real grievances, improving engagement with spiritual and political leaders, facilitating cross-cultural dialogue, empowering voices that counter terrorist rhetoric and monitoring recruitment and grooming of terrorists over the internet.[4]

For the EU, more generally, policy activity on radicalisation has been devolved to four member states (Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK) to take the lead on activities related to 'counter-radicalisation'. In part, this reflects the inability to gain a consensus on how to react to radicalisation that is evident in the still officially unreleased Report prepared by the European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation, which observed, "the term "radicalisation" is problematic in that its relationship to "radicalism" as an expression of legitimate political thought, still reflected in the titles of some political

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[3] See especially
http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/funding/2004_2007/radicalisation/funding_radicalisation_en.htm
[4] See especially
http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/funding/2004_2007/radicalisation/funding_radicalisation_en.htm

parties in Europe, is confusing." (Radicalisation, Unpublished, Submitted 2008: 5) For the Expert Group, radicalism itself reflects a mindset that seeks to do away with "traditional and procedural restrictions which support the status quo." (Radicalisation, Unpublished, Submitted 2008: 5) This does not, assert the Expert Group, inherently mean that there is a link between radicalisation and violence, with key examples cited that indicate radicalism can be associated with reform rather than revolution, and where radicalism does not inherently advocate "violence to strive for the realisation of social or political change." (Radicalisation, Unpublished, Submitted 2008: 5)

The 'Prevent' strand of the EU strategy, and the *Ad Hoc Briefing Paper on Preventing Violent Radicalisation and Terrorist Recruitment in the EU* (2005) heavily refer to Al-Qaida-related activities, and the 'radical era' of Islamism. For the European Commission, radicalisation constitutes 'the phenomenon of the people embracing opinions, views and ideas which could lead to terrorism'(EU-Commission, 2007). Radicalism as advocacy of, and commitment to, sweeping change and restructuring of political and social institutions has historically been associated with left- and right-wing political parties – at times even with centrist and liberal ideologies – and involves the wish to do away with traditional and procedural restrictions which support the status quo. As an ideology, radicalism challenges the legitimacy of established norms and policies, but it does not, in itself, lead to violence. There have been many radical groups in European political history which were reformist rather than revolutionary. In other words, there can be radicalism without the advocacy of violence to strive for the realisation of social or political change.

Additionally, one might note that the assumption (explicit in the EU definition of radicalisation) that radical ideas are sort of necessary preconditions for violent behavior is not supported by empirical research on political violence (a point which is indeed made in the conclusion of the report, but could be stressed in this part as well).

This definition of radicalisation certainly denotes a clearer understanding of this concept than that used by the UK's Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG). The DCLG's 2007 document on *The Role of Muslim Identity Politics in Radicalisation (A Study in Progress)* never actually defines radicalisation (DCLG, 2007). It does, however, suggest an implicit relationship between Islam and terrorism, which hinges on vulnerability. In this model, readers are left to guess that those suffering from identity crises, are vulnerable to radicalisation when a youthful affinity for terrorism meets a search for identity during moments of 'personal crisis'.

In many recent cases, the term radicalisation has come to increasingly denote the unstated, but implicit correlation between the 'dangers of radical Islam' and violence (Kepel, 2005b; Kirby, 2007). Where radicalisation is being used to specifically denote Islamically inspired political violence, terms like 'radical activities' are also being used to mean terrorist activities, and indicate not just the perpetration of actual terrorist attacks, but the logistics and training behind them (Cesari, 2008). In this way, 'Muslim radicals' (here of-

ten meaning politicised Muslims) are inherently understood by many Western politicians and media to be 'anti-Western' – an inherent danger to Western cultural and political values, and distinct from (and a malign influence on) psychologically weak/ideologically feeble 'vulnerable' Muslims in the UK and beyond (Kirby, 2007; Lewis, 2007). Clinical psychologists suggest that support for Islamic political radicalism (and by extension, participation in radical violent *takfiri* jihadism) results from inherent psychological traits of Islam (splitting and rage at bad objects and the identification of God with the superego), as well as the identity diffusion between youth and age. (Hudson, 2005: 60) Other psychologists suggest, however, that it is not possible to diagnose terrorists as psychopathic or mentally sick, that instead they are 'quite sane', but 'deluded' by religion and ideology. (Gurr, 1970)

Other scholars assert that political violence, 'inspired' by specific forms of Islamic ideology is causally associated with a belief that Western liberalism is fundamentally evil, and that the first step in (re)achieving heaven on earth is the destruction of such values. (Stern, 2003) For Stern, this is a function of 'spiritual intoxication', a search for simple answers in a complex world, and a belief that violence can 'cleanse' the world of 'impurities' (Fox, 2004; Stern, 2003: 281). Some scholars suggest that the non-integration of European Muslims, and their discomfort with Western values have left them as vulnerable 'prey for violent dogmas'. (Jackson, 2005: 54-55; Phillips et al., 2007: 218; Sageman, 2004; Shore, 2006; Silber and Bhatt, 2007: 8) The notion that Islamists specifically, and Muslims more broadly, 'don't get Western liberal freedoms and lifestyles' is part of UK and US popular political discourse, and the British Government sees this as a function of alienation and marginalisation rather than a structural issue. (Shore, 2006: 165) For Gerges, there is an all pervasive sense amongst Muslims in Europe and beyond that the West is enjoined on a 'crusade' to oppress the Muslim world, its culture and beliefs – crusades apparent in Danish cartoons, US support for Israel, and the invasion of Iraq. (Gerges, 2007) In such cases, religion aids in explaining occurrences of mobilisation and perceptions that the protection of identity has become a moral obligation. (Gerges, 2007: 286-9; Yaqoob, 2007: 279) Authors such as Abbas (2005; 2007) and Rehman (2007) pursue another line of causality in the form of psycho-structural causation, whereby individual interactions with social structures (i.e. immigrant experiences in dealings with the State) are seen as causing alienation. This alienation stems from exchanges between immigrant communities and xenophobic and broadly unsupportive 'host-nation' societies, and creates and further exacerbates intergenerational tensions within these communities. (2007) Single variable explanations which suggest that identity induced economic and/or social 'deprivation' or non-integration of Muslims into Western societies causes *radical violent takfiri jihadism* [5](RVTJ)

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[5] While there are many forms of 'radicalisation', both in terms of typology (where distinctions can be made on bases such as violent vs. non-violent, foreign vs. domestic, group vs. individual, etc.) and case (Islamically inspired political violence, violence in the name of animal rights, radical violent nationalism, etc.) this paper will only focus on a specific type in a specific case setting. The

can be increasingly challenged, as there is an emerging consensus that low income may be causally related to other forms of political violence, such as civil war or coups d'états, but that inequality or lack of education are not causally associated with terrorism. (Shore, 2006) In fact, there is some suggestion that terrorist violence is actually overall associated with higher paying jobs and higher education, and Von Kippel, Pape, and Sageman have all established that those most likely to participate as foreign fighters in Afghanistan and/or Iraq are middle class and well educated. (Krueger and Malečková, 2003; Pape, 2005; Sageman, 2004; von Hippel, 2002: 26)

Of course, missing from much of these works are perspectives derived from communities' own experiences of what constitutes radicalisation, especially placed in relief with violent radicalisation and/or Islamically inspired terrorist acts, and what members of Muslim communities themselves feel and indentify as those factors which can be understood to cause violence in the name of Islam. What we mean here is the empirically observed accounts of what constitutes radicalisation and/or violent radicalisation for communities themselves, rather than what constitutes radicalisation for non-Muslim academic and practitioner observers. While many of the authors listed above try to work from empirical data, there are many assumptions made as to the translation of faith, belief, practice and/or religious inspired world-view with concrete political agendas and actions. The vast majority of Muslims in the West do not participate in extremist activities or radical violent *takfiri* Jihadism on the grounds that it is immoral and unproductive no matter what their political perspective, and this becomes apparent when polls show that a majority of Muslims in Britain feel that unemployment is a much more vital issue than a concern that they are enduring a new Crusade.[6] Indeed as Olivier Roy has pointed out, alongside a resurgence of violent radicalisation has come a revival of spiritualised Islam, as well as post Islamist movements that focus more on civil society than on politics (Roy, 2005; Roy, 2006). In European Muslim communities, religion can be both a differentiating and binding phenomenon, at once a basis for discrimination and distinction, and in recent times has become an important basis for political action and mobilisation in 'community politics' (Roy, 2006). Despite any intuitive non-empirically examined assurances of correlation between Islamic faith, belief and practice and political violence, the causal relationship between identity, religious faith, belief and practice, and the use of violence remains

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paper will mainly concentrate on radical violent takfiri jihadism (RVTJ). *Takfiri* refers to radicalised Muslims who feel that it is a religious and moral obligation to wage Jihad against *kafir* or non-believers. *Takfiri* often feel unconstrained by traditional *fiqh* or Islamic jurisprudence, as they see their goal of attacking apostasy and ensuring the emergence of a Muslim world as ends which can justify almost any means, whether this means violating any element of the *fiqh* including eating pork, drinking etc. While some scholars may feel the term radical violent *takfiri* jihadist over-elaborated, the point here is to suggest individuals who are radical, committed to violent political action, and who not only believe that jihad can be waged in Muslim lands of conflict/occupation, but that this fight can be taken and imposed on non-believers anywhere at any time.

[6] See especially recent Gallup Polls here:
http://www.gallup.com/consulting/worldpoll/26410/gallup-center-muslim-studies.aspx

opaque at best, and defining the exact role of religion in radicalisation is complex and problematic.

Academics and practitioners with relevant field are now engaged in projects which suggest that misleading and potentially counter-productive to conflate extremist politics with terrorism. (Kenney, 2007, 2008; Mark, 2002) Our research with Muslim communities on other projects has also highlighted the problematic assumptions that underpin some research on radicalisation. Our interviews with individuals who had suffered terrible physical and mental repression for their political activism in locations outside of Britain, but who later came to settle permanently in the UK, suggest that there is simply no question of their participating in any form of violence in Britain. (Githens-Mazer, 2009a; Lambert, 2008a; Lambert, 2010; Lambert and Spalek, 2008) There is quite simply precious little evidence to establish the hypotheses of authors such as Ed Husain that non-violent Islamic inspired pursuit of political reform and engagement is serving as a conveyor belt or even providing the mood music for Al-Qaida and related terrorism. (Husain, 2007) Moreover, in August 2008, the Guardian newspaper quoted a leaked MI5 study of violent radicalisation that cautioned against the 'logical fallacy' of 'assuming that all those who share a common experience of dislocating episodes will become terrorists'.[7] This insight helps make a clear distinction that we hear echoed again and again by communities that 'radicalisation' (like joining Hizb ut Tahrir) has no inherent relationship to terrorism. Such findings indicate that there are substantial new research questions to be further unpacked on this subject, including what makes individuals willing to engage in activities at high personal risk and cost in their countries of origin and beyond to engage in peaceful politics in the UK? It certainly is not that such individuals feel less passionately committed to an Islamically inspired political agenda, or that they felt that their nations of origin had become less repressive or more democratic. Could it instead reflect some aspect of engagement in the British political sphere?

3. Methodology

This project was based on interview guidelines provided by CIR, Aarhus University. This required the use of qualitative semi-structured interviews that allowed for open-ended responses to specific questions. The nature of the interview sample used here was shaped by the demands of the project: That the sample reflects a combination of young people, parents, and social workers in communities and the recruiting strategy as well. The associate who conducted the interviews is a male who grew up in Leicester, and has long standing contacts with family and friends who still live there. This individual embraced Islam as an adult, and therefore reflexively had his on views on these issues, and this has also shaped the nature of the contacts which he made in this context. This being said, the

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[7] Travis, Alan, 2008. The Making of an Extremist. The Guardian. 20 August.
http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2008/aug/20/uksecurity.terrorism accessed 3.3.09.

interview strategy included using existing contacts in order to interview community workers in this context, and then using snowball sampling in order to conduct interviews with young people in Leicester. Considering that this report is meant to provide information of radicalisation, one crucial question is to what extent does our sample reflect direct or second hand experiences of radicalisation. As a research strategy, we made a conscious choice not to target those who were 'radicalised'. This was for three reasons. Firstly, there was a conceptual hurdle; because there is no universal definition of what constitutes being 'radicalised' then how could a sample indisputably (or at least objectively) claim to reflect a radical sample? Secondly, there is a fundamental legal issue. If we asked subjects to what extent they were 'radicalised' and/or participating in activities which were supporting or participating in extremist violence, then we would have been duty bound to betray confidentiality to the relevant authorities, or ourselves risk violating the UK Terrorism Act (2000). Lastly, there was an intellectual rationale for not seeking to sample a 'radicalised' sample – if we did this, we ran the risk of sampling only on the dependent variable, and reflecting only one perspective on the issues of what constituted and was causing violent radicalisation in Leicester. While this methodological choice has a bearing on our findings, we feel confident that given these three reasons, our sampling strategy for this study was the right one.

The sample size of this project was fifty respondents – a relatively small-n study, but given that these interviews took more time than a questionnaire, we feel pleased with this sample size. There can be no claim made that our sample universe is representative of public opinion amongst Muslims living in Leicester, and in fact given the background of our interviewer and techniques of recruitment, this sample is likely to be over-representative of certain segments of the Leicester Muslim communities. This is not least true in so far as while there are some women respondents, the overwhelming majority are male indicating the difficulty for male researchers to reach the entirety of the Muslim population in this context. The sampling technique deployed here ultimately met with mixed success. While gaining a sample of young people and community workers proved fairly straightforward, making contact with parents and imams was much more difficult. To this extent, several were approached, but only two participated in this study. There are three key factors to explain this mixed success. Firstly, there is currently a high degree of suspicion amongst British Muslim communities, with serious and prevalent concerns as to the nature of current academic research being carried out in these communities, and as to where the funding for this research comes from. This is set to increase, especially given recent revelations about the nature of UK Government PREVENT funding, and accusations that the Government seeks to put the British Muslim communities under increased surveillance and scrutiny compared with other communities. The second is that there is a high degree of 'research fatigue' amongst British Muslim communities. There are many projects ongoing in the British context, and these projects often require elaborate questionnaire and interview engagement with the population. This has two immediate effects,

the one is that individuals feel over-studied and are therefore much less willing to participate in these sorts of projects and the other is that respondents, already familiar with the nature and context of this research, may come to know how to engage the researcher and respond in a not completely authentic manner. The last problem with this sort of sample are the tangible political concerns amongst those in authority in British Muslim communities – there is a demonstrable concern amongst imams, for example, that if they participate in interviews, and their responses are publicly reported, that this could bring disrepute amongst their personal reputations and the reputation of their mosque. For most of these imams, this is not to say that they have particularly controversial or strident points of view or perspectives, but that they are concerned that any negative reporting of their responses, whether genuine misrepresentation or disingenuous misreporting of their words, can have very serious knock-on consequences.

In terms of the interviews themselves, they were conducted in various locations in and around Leicester, including mosques, offices, cafes and taxi ranks. Where possible, the interviews were recorded, but in many instances the subjects did not feel comfortable with the recording of the interviews, so there had to be notes taken instead. In many cases this reduced the nuance of the responses, so to overcome this, we have coded the responses to the protocol as induced from the range of responses. For example, when asked about religious practice and how often individuals prayed, the research team reduced this down to degrees of praying – ranging from five times a day, to not at all. This was the first element of our engagement with the data – to analyse the 'manifest' responses to the data. (Aberbach and Rockman, 2002) The next step in our treatment of the interviews was to think about broader subject areas indicated by the guidelines, rather than measure and annotate specific responses. Therefore, we broke down the guidelines into twelve main themes:

- Identity Background

- Educational Background

- Professional Background

- Family Situation (including degree of religiosity)

- Neighbourhood

- Religious Background

- Religious Practice

- Sources for Understanding Islam

- The Islamic State

- Cultural versus Religious Practice

- Politics and Islam

- Deradicalisation Initiatives

After looking at the responses to these themes ('latent' coding), we then felt able to make some broader analyses in the context of the themes themselves (Aberbach and Rockman, 2002). For example, after looking at issues of religious practice, we then felt able to make some general points about how individuals view the relationship between personal religious practice and the wider context of perceptions of religiosity amongst friends and family, or within the context of political Islam. From these 'latent codes', we felt as though we were in a good position to make global claims about what this sample was saying about the relationship between Islamic faith, or belief or practice and political engagement and/or radicalisation.

4. Leicester Context

Leicester is a medium-sized city in the UK. The United Kingdom Census 2001 showed a total resident population for Leicester of 279,921, a 0.5% decrease from the 1991 census (Statistics, 2001). Approximately 62,000 were aged under 16, 199,000 were aged 16-74, and 19,000 aged 75 and over. 76.9% of Leicester's population claim they have been born in the UK, according to the 2001 UK Census. Mid-year estimates for 2006 indicate that the population of the City of Leicester stood at 289,700 making Leicester the most populous city in East Midlands. 11% of the population of Leicester was estimated to be Muslim, compared with 14.7% Hindu and 44.7% Christian (Statistics, 2001). This compares favourably with the broader UK Muslim population, where the average Muslim is 28 years old (13 years below the national average age); nearly half of all Muslims are below the age of 25; one third are aged 16 or younger (Sughra, 2009). The population density is 3,814 inhabitants per square kilometre (9,878.2/sq mi) and for every 100 females, there were 92.9 males. Of those aged 16–74 in Leicester, 38.5% had no academic qualifications, significantly higher than 28.9% in all of England. 23.0% of Leicester's residents were born outside of the United Kingdom, higher than the English average of 9.2% (Sughra, 2009). In terms of districts by ethnic diversity, the City of Leicester is ranked 11th in England. According to 2006 estimates, 58.3% of residents are white British (just under 170,000 people), 3.7% other white (around 10,000 people), 29.4% Asian or Asian British (some 84,000 people), 4.6% black or black British (some 9,000 people), 2.6% mixed race (approximately 6,000 individuals) and 1.5% Chinese or other ethnic group (over 2,000 people). Amongst some of Leicester's emerging ethnic groups are the Poles who now number an estimated 30,000 in the city (Sughra, 2009).

Leicester compared			
UK Census 2001	Leicester	East Midlands	England
Total population	292,600	4,172,174	49,138,831
Foreign born	23.0%	6.0%	9.2%
White (2001)	63.9%	93.5%	90.9%
White (2006)	62.0%	91.4%	88.7%
South Asian (2001)	29.9%	4.0%	4.6%
South Asian (2006)	29.4%	4.8%	5.5%
Black (2001)	3.1%	0.9%	2.3%
Black (2006)	4.6%	1.4%	2.8%
Mixed (2001)	2.3%	1.0%	1.3%
Mixed (2006)	2.6%	1.4%	1.6%
East Asian	0.8%	0.5%	0.9%

Alongside English there are around 70 languages and/or dialects spoken in the city. In addition to English, many other languages are commonly spoken: Gujarati is the preferred language of 16% of the city's residents, Punjabi 3%, Somali 3% and Urdu 2%. Other smaller language groups include Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin), Hindi, Arabic, Bengali, Malayalam and Polish (Sughra, 2009).

Leicester has a particular history in the development and growth of Muslim identities in the UK that provides valuable context for this research study and also for a wider understanding of the issues that are raised in interviews with Muslim respondents resident in Leicester. Robert Lambert, co-author of this report, was a London based police officer from 1977 to 2007 and enjoyed liaison with police and Muslim communities leaders in Leicester on several occasions between 1989 and 2007. Much of that experience has been utilised in this report and helps provide background and context. The first police experience of relevance to this report occurred in 1989 when police and Muslim communities leaders in Leicester, London, Bradford and elsewhere co-operated in the planning of demonstrations against the publication of Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses*. Ap-

proximately 200 Muslims resident in Leicester travelled to London to take part in a national demonstration that called for the book to be banned. Over 2000 Muslims took part in a peaceful protest in London. One of those who attended the demonstration as a young student is now a lawyer. His recollections of the event and its impact are germane to this report:

> This was the first time British Muslims came together to protest. It was a hugely significant event and looking back I can see it was a watershed – a turning point. It was the first time I felt I was a Muslim and not just an 'Asian'. Some of the figures who took part in the protest would go on to become national figures first became politically active as Muslims during the Salman Rushdie affair.[8]

Individuals who fit this profile include Sir Iqbal Sacranie, former secretary general of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), and Iniyat Bunglawala, media spokesman for the MCB. Both Sacranie and Bunglawala are on record as acknowledging the significance of the Rushdie affair in the development of their roles as Muslim campaigners and advocates. Bunglawala, writing on the 20th anniversary of the publication of Salman Rushdie's novel recalled its impact:

> At the time, extracts from the novel were circulated by some Islamic organisations to mosques and Islamic societies across the country to help acquaint British Muslims with its contents. I was in my second year at university and could not comprehend why someone like Rushdie, who had been brought up in a Muslim family, would write a provocative novel that he must have known would cause offence to millions of people. Why constantly refer to the Prophet Muhammad as Mahound, the old medieval name for the devil? And to have a group of prostitutes in a brothel to take on the names of the prophet's wives in order to better arouse their clients – what was Rushdie thinking? There can be no real doubt that Rushdie was aware that his book would spark a huge controversy. A clearly tongue-in-cheek passage in *The Satanic Verses* has a character being told, "Your blasphemy, Salman, can't be forgiven … to set your words against the word of God."

Bunglawala captures well the nature of events as they unfolded:

> A series of demonstrations were organised calling for the book to be withdrawn from circulation... There were a couple of infamous book-burnings. Some Muslim organisations called for the blasphemy law to be extended to cover more than just the Anglican faith. The protests against the book soon spread to Muslim majority countries. Then came Feb 14 1989 and Ayatollah Khomeini's dramatic intervention from Iran calling upon Muslims everywhere to kill Rushdie for the crime of insulting the prophet.

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[8] Interview 27.5.09.

Bunglawala's reflection is noteworthy and relevant: reminding us that many of today's 'radicals' in Leicester as elsewhere in Europe pose no inherent subversive or security threat and will mature in the same way:

> Just over a year ago, I wrote a Comment is Free piece [for the Guardian website] arguing that it was time to admit that those of us who had called for the book to be banned or pulped were wrong. Utterly wrong. It was understandable why many regarded and still do regard passages in *The Satanic Verses* to be so offensive, but that could not be used as a justification to try and prevent others from reading the book. My piece got a mixed reaction from the Muslims I spoke to. Some agreed that the episode had been a disaster while others strongly disagreed with me and did not accept that a novelist should have the "right to offend". I tried to explain that the right to offend did not imply that one agreed with what was being said – it was just that the writer should not be prevented from doing so as long as he was not breaking any laws.

> In a 1990 essay entitled "In Good Faith", Rushdie tried to explain his reasons behind writing *The Satanic Verses*. Rushdie argued that he and his book had been consistently misrepresented but also asked: What is freedom of expression? Without the freedom to offend, it ceases to exist. Without the freedom to challenge, even to satirise all orthodoxies, including religious orthodoxies, it ceases to exist. Language and the imagination cannot be imprisoned, or art will die, and with it, a little of what makes us human.

> It is painful to admit it, but on the need to uphold the freedom to offend, Rushdie was right. The consequences of not doing so should be apparent by now to Muslims above all. Earlier this year, the leader of the far right Dutch Freedom Party, Geert Wilders, called for the Qur'an to be banned because he found some passages in the book offensive. And there's the rub. Who is to decide what is offensive or not? What may be offensive to me may be just harmless fun to you and vice versa. Some months back, I had dinner with a well-known British columnist who has some rather strident views about immigration and Islam. I asked him outright what it was that so annoyed him about Islam and he said it was what he viewed as the seemingly constant attempts by Muslims to try and restrict freedoms. And regrettably, like it or not, that is the image too many people now have of Muslims (Bunglawala, 2008).

Given Bunglawala's reasonable and enlightened position on this and other topics it is surprising and significant to note that he is nevertheless cast in the role of a subversive and sectarian by an influential body of political opinion in the UK (Bright, 2006). Most notably in a report that is understood to have persuaded the UK Government to sever its close ties with the MCB, Bunglawala and his MCB colleagues were linked to Jamaat-i-Islami, an Islamist political party that was founded by Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi in 1941 in Lahore (Bright, 2006). This in turn explains why Leicester has come to be associated

with the same influence. In 1973, the Islamic Foundation was established in Leicester by Khurshid Ahmad, a senior figure in Jamaat-i-Islami (Humayan, 2004). From humble beginnings the Islamic Foundation has grown significantly over the years and is now home to the Markfield Institute for Higher Education, the Policy Research Centre and Kube Publishing (IslamicFoundation, 2009). Situated on the outskirts of Leicester, the Islamic Foundation has become an established centre for education, training, research, and publication of issues related to Islam and build building between Muslims and others (Islamic-Foundation, 2009). In a rebuff to critics, Mohammad Siddique Seddon, research fellow at the Islamic Foundation, states:

> Islam doesn't need liberalising. Continuous renewal is central to Islamic jurisprudence. Those who say that Islam should reform itself have misunderstood it. Muslims are often asked why their faith does not get modern or undergo liberalisation. Such a question shows a misunderstanding of Islam and its relationship to modernity. As a phenomenon essentially of the Christian world, modernity has not affected the Muslim world to the same extent. The impact of the Enlightenment in Europe culminated in a separation between faith and reason. Secularisation publicly elevated the profane and relegated religion to the realm of the private (IslamicFoundation).

According to one interviewee who has worked at the Islamic Foundation in the past a major bone of contention has been the issue of real or perceived support for Hamas within the centre.[9] Certainly, the leading historian of Hamas, Azzam Tamimi (Azzam, 2007), was asked to resign as a lecturer at the Markfield Institute once his support for Hamas became a major issue in the media (Azzam, 2007). In fact, the Islamic Foundation has worked hard to appease its critics.

Today, the Islamic Foundation is home to the Policy Research Centre which has moved a long way from its historical roots. In its most recent report, the research centre analyses data from focus groups with young Muslims in Glasgow, Bradford, Manchester, Leicester, Birmingham, Cardiff, Tower Hamlets in East London, Brixton in South London ,and Slough to establish issues of importance for communities and policy makers (Sughra, 2009). In fact, the study provides synergy with our own research by arguing that young Muslims clearly see themselves as British, but also feel let down in several ways 'by a society that misreads them – but wastes no time in speaking about them' (Sughra, 2009). Sughra Ahmed, the report's author, comments:

> We are used to hearing about young Muslims in the context of radicalisation of Muslim opinion, but their lives are far more complex. They feel a strong sense of patriotism, but also feel let down by voices that do not do justice to their aspirations. Young people are comfortable in negotiating their multiple identities, but some also feel a sense of disconnection from older generations as well as pressure from a society that increasingly stereotypes young people. (Sughra, 2009)

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[9] Interview, 6.6.09.

The findings in the report challenge both British society and the Muslim communities to 'do more to connect with young people and their latent talents' (Sughra, 2009). It makes a number of recommendations to policymakers, statutory services and Muslim communities, including: 'better and more informed outreach programmes to connect with young people; the need for greater investment in young people to develop their capacity and to create leaders and role models; and the need for initiatives that help bridge inter-generational gaps within Muslim community' (Sughra, 2009).

If the Islamic Foundation and its major centres in Leicester, the Markfield Institute for Higher Education, Policy Research Centre and Kube Publishing have moved considerably to distance themselves from the contentious issue of Israel and Palestine, in contrast, Ibrahim Hewitt and Ismail Patel, two established and well-known Leicester residents, have remained steadfastly attached to the Palestinian cause. Both activists have spoken to the researchers about the importance they attach to the Palestinian issue and their willingness to endure disapprobation and accusations of anti-Semitism of the kind they have become accustomed to over the last two decades. Their roles are significant because as a local headmaster and campaigner respectively both have considerable influence over local youth communities. Both have promoted their interest in Palestinian issues at hundreds of community meetings in Leicester and throughout the UK over two decades and more recently on the *OpenMinds* blogspot (OPENMINDS, 2009).

Hewitt is an authoritative and widely respected figure in Leicester. He retains the military bearing that pays tribute to his earlier career in the British army and a cheerful disposition that regularly wins respect. Police in Leicester have often had occasion to value his role in maintaining order, upholding civic values and promoting good citizenship in the neighbourhood.[10] Many former pupils have paid tribute to his positive and formative influence.[11] Others have commented on his important role locally, not least as a convert (or as they would say, revert) to Islam (OPENMINDS, 2009). Hewitt's role as headmaster of Al-Aqsa Primary School in Leicester is very much the outcome of negotiations he first entered into with the leaders of the Islamic Foundation in the 1990s (School, 2009). Hewitt explains:

> Al-Aqsa Primary School started life as an idea when it became obvious that Muslim parents in Leicester needed to have a wider choice of schools for the full-time education of their children. The first phone call concerning the school was made by Ibrahim and Abeda Hewitt in December 1997. This was followed by a series of consultative meetings held in various mosques (so that the school wouldn't be seen as 'belonging' to any one mosque or group) after which Al-Aqsa Schools Trust was formed in March 1998. There were seven founding trustees, including local Ulema, reflecting the fact that the school was and remains a community project, not just a personal effort. An

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[10] Interview with police officer, 13.6.09.
[11] Interview 13.6.09.

unsuccessful local search for premises led the Hewitts to approach the Islamic Foundation to ask if the school could rent accommodation at the Markfield Conference Centre. Alhamdulillah, Al-Aqsa Primary School opened in September 1998, in one room at Markfield, with four children from two families (School, 2009).

As with Iniyat Buglawala, it is significant that such a positive Muslim communities' and local reputation should be marred by a reputation as an extremist by commentators, journalists and bloggers loyal to Israel for whom Hewitt's dedication to a Muslim view of the Palestinian issue (exemplified in the name of the Leicester primary school he helped establish) is anathema.[12] Hewitt's role as chairman of the Palestinian charity Interpal has been the focus of much adverse attention:

> Interpal claims that it is a "non-political" charity. This is an interesting contention. ....when Israel killed Hamas leader Sheikh Yassin in 2004, Hewitt addressed a protest rally organised by the hard-core Islamists of the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB). Azzam "Kaboom" Tamimi and Ismail Patel, both known as supporters of terrorist groups, also spoke at the rally. In recent years, Hewitt has also appeared at several Islamist conferences. In addition to Tamimi and Patel, fellow speakers at these events have included hate preacher Riyadh Ul Haq; Anas al Tikriti, the former president of the MAB, who said "now all of us are Hamas" at one of the January demos; Reza Abu Luqman of Hizb ut Tahrir, who believes a caliphate should "use the economic and military power of the Ummah to liberate Palestine"; Massoud Shadjareh, the head of the Khomeinist "Islamic Human Rights Commission", which organises the annual "Al Quds Day" hate marches in London; and George Galloway, the well-known supporter of the butchers of the Iraqi "resistance".

> Note that Hewitt is no rogue within Interpal: the charity itself is hardly wary of associating its name with extremists. On its website, under the heading "Interpal events", one currently finds meetings featuring speakers Daud Abdullah of the Muslim Council of Britain, who thinks every day should be Al Quds day; Mohamed Ali Harrath, the CEO of Islam Channel and convicted terrorist; Ismail Patel; Azzam Tamimi; and Anas al Tikriti.

As mentioned in the above extract another highly respected Leicester resident Ismail Patel is described as an Islamist extremist for identical reasons. Patel is the chairman of Friends of Al-Aqsa, a Leicester based non-profit making NGO formed in 1997 to defend 'the human rights of Palestinians and protecting the sacred Al-Aqsa Sanctuary in Jerusalem' (Al-Aqsa, 2009). According to its website, Friends of Al-Aqsa campaigns to:

    (a) Highlight Human Rights abuses suffered by the Palestinians

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[12] See for example Harry's Place website, Gove, M., 2006, Celcius 7/7 (Weidenfield and Nicholson, London) Pages, Kepel, G., 2004, *The War for Muslim minds: Islam and the West* (Belknapp Press of Harvard U.P., Cambridge, Mass) Pages, Phillips, M., 2006, *Londonistan: How Britain is Creating a Terror State Within* (Gibson Square, London) Pages.

(b) Put pressure on the British government to make Israel respect International Law and human rights

(c) Bring the Palestinian issue to the attention of those concerned with International Law, human rights and UN Resolutions

(d) Mobilise international condemnation for Israel's apartheid policies to be manifested through the boycott of Israel

(e) Educate people on the issue of Palestine through conferences, lectures and publications

(f) Emphasise the significance and the centrality of the Al-Aqsa Mosque to the Islamic faith and the Muslim identity and re-affirming the Muslim historic and religious rights to the area

(g) Work in conjunction with international heritage, cultural and humanitarian organisations in joint ventures to advance these aims (Al-Aqsa, 2009).

Every year, many young Muslims in Leicester attend classes and seminars organised by Friends of Al-Aqsa. For supporters, this is seen as positive radicalisation and a potential bulwark against Al-Qaida and related propaganda. For detractors, however, it is interpreted as a first step in an adverse process of radicalisation that may lead to subversion, sectarianism and support for or participation in terrorism. As such two stalwarts of Leicester's Muslim communities fit the profile of the arch subversive Islamist threat that dominates analysis of the radicalisation debate in the US and Europe.[13]

Other key figures in Leicester's burgeoning Muslim communities include Yayha Birt and Ibrahim Mogra. Yahya Birt played an important role in conjunction with other Muslim representatives in the aftermath of 7/7, liaising with the Home Office to produce a report on preventing violent extremism (Islam, 2005a). In addition to publishing some of the most insightful articles and chapters on the issues and challenges facing British Muslims,[14] Birt also provides an insightful commentary on his website: *Musings on the Britannic Crescent* (Birt, 2009). Much to the amusement of his readers, Birt pointed out the irony when the Quilliam Foundation, a self-proclaimed 'counter-radicalisation think-tank', named itself after Britain's first Islamist, Abdullah Quilliam (Birt, 2009). Ibrahim Mogra, is a highly respected imam in Leicester and chair of the Masjid and Community Affairs Committee of the Muslim Council of Britain. Trained in classical theology and the traditional sciences of Islam, Mogra holds religious credentials from Dar-ul-Uloom, Holcombe as well as advanced theological qualifications from Al-Azhar University in Cairo (Birt, 2009). Howev-

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[13] See for example, Birt, Y., 2005, Lobbying and Marching: British Muslims and the State, in: T. Abbas, ed., *Muslim Britain: Communities Under Pressure* (Zed Books, London), Birt, Y., 2006, Islamic Citizenship in Britain after 7/7: Tackling Extremism and Preserving Freedoms, in: A. Malik, ed., *The State We Are In: Identity, Terror and the Law of Jihad* (Amal Press, Bristol).

[14] See for example, RHC, 2009, Biography: Ibrahim Mogra, (Royal Holloway College, London).

er, neither Birt nor Mogra campaign actively in support of the Palestinians and so are not subject to the vilification reserved for their fellow Leicester citizens, Hewitt and Patel.

Professor Tariq Ramadan, arguably Europe's most well-known Muslim public intellectual, wrote his seminal book *To Be A European Muslim: A study of Islamic Sources in the European Context* while resident in Leicester in 1997 (Ramadan, 1999). The book was the outcome of a year's research he undertook in Leicester with support from what was then the 'Islam in Europe' unit of the Islamic Foundation. In an acknowledgment, he pays tribute to excellent research facilities made available to him at the Islamic Foundation and the support he received from its chairman, Professor Khushid Ahmad, director Dr. Manazir Absan and key members of staff, including Dilwar Hussain, who is now the director of the Policy Research Centre (Ramadan, 1999). Ramadan's experience of living in Leicester served to inspire his vision of a Europe in which Muslims became fully integrated Europeans without being required (as they were, for instance, in France) to relinquish what most Muslims regard as essential components of religious practice.[15]

In the same year, Ramadan was researching points of reconciliation and harmony between European Muslims and their neighbours, Abu Hamza, the notorious hate-preacher at the Finsbury Park Mosque in London, was actively promoting violent confrontation (Lambert, 2010. Forthcoming). The striking difference between the two positions was illustrated when Tariq Ramadan visited Finsbury Park in 1998 to deliver a talk at the neighbouring Muslim Welfare House (300 metres from Abu Hamza's headquarters) (Lambert, 2010. Forthcoming). Notwithstanding his opposition to Abu Hamza's hate-filled preaching in 1998, Ramadan was himself already being vilified as a dangerous anti-Semitic Islamist threat to the West. The complete antithesis of Abu Hamza in style and appearance Ramadan was concerned to encourage young Muslims to integrate fully into their local communities while keeping their Islamic identity intact. He challenged the notion that Islamic and national identities were in conflict. On the contrary, he argued that they answered different questions:

> Muslim identity is an answer to the question "Why?" while national identity answers the question "How?" and it would be senseless and foolish to expect geographical attachment to come first or to solve the question of being' (Ramadan, 1999).

One person who attended Tariq Ramadan's talk at the Muslim Welfare House in 1998 recalls that two of Abu Hamza's supporters came to disrupt it, but were identified and ejected (Lambert, 2010. Forthcoming). Ramadan was a champion of close partnership engagement with non-Muslims. He espoused a confident vision of Islam that did not feel threatened or inhibited in the close company of non-Muslims. Abu Hamza, on the other hand, insisted that non-Muslims were a corrupting influence that should be treated with great caution (Lambert, 2010. Forthcoming). Ramadan also talked about the future in a way that appalled Abu Hamza and his supporters (Lambert, 2010. Forthcoming). For Ra-

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[15] Conversation with co-author, 2005.

madan, the local grass-roots partnership work of the Muslim Welfare House was a model for the future role of European Muslims:

> The creation of multi-dimensional partnerships is one of the keys to the future: not only will it confirm to Muslims that their values are shared, but it will make it possible for their fellow-citizens better to gauge how and why the presence of Muslims in the West, with the vitality of their organisations and their convictions regarding social mission, is a source of enrichment for the society they share in common (Ramadan, 2004).

Ramadan developed his thinking in the late 1990s and put it into practice in the 2000s as a key member of new partnerships including the European Social Forum:

> New organisations that, while complementing what is already being done in the field, will be set up around shared values, social projects, and causes and will not be based simply on the Muslim identity of its founders (Ramadan, 2004).

In doing so, Ramadan did not hide away from the issue of Islamophobia that Abu Hamza used as a recruitment or radicalisation tool. Instead, he urged young Muslims to take these obstacles in their stride:

> It is an established and unacceptable fact that the governments of the United States and Europe maintain relations that are sometimes disrespectful of and even clearly discriminatory against citizens and residents of their countries who are of the Muslim faith. It is no less true that they apply a security policy including constant surveillance: distrust is maintained, and the image of the ''Muslim'' other remains suspect. The general picture conceived by the Western population in general is so negative that one could call it Islamophobia, and this is a fact that many Muslims have lived with on a daily basis. One could extend the list of difficulties at will. My response to all these phenomena is to insist to Muslims that they stay in the higher reaches, in awareness of their principles, values, and responsibilities.' (Ramadan, 2004).

While Tariq Ramadan clearly sits at the progressive end of the Islamist spectrum his strict allegiance to the fundamentals of political Islam pays tribute to the influence of the Islamic Foundation in Leicester. By the time the 7/7 bombers brought Abu Hamza's ideology to the attention of all British citizens Tariq Ramadan had become a UK resident and a controversial figure whose legitimacy as a government partner was seriously questioned by powerful lobbyists who equated Islamism with subversion (Islam, 2005b). Along with Yayha Birt and Iniyat Bunglawala, Ramadan helped the UK government assess the causes of the 7/7 bombings (Islam, 2005b). Their report represents the high-water mark of influence of Leicester's Islamic Foundation on government policy (Lambert, 2008b, c). From 2006, the UK government turned instead to groups including the Sufi Muslim Council

and the Quilliam Foundation: Groups that challenged and denigrated all forms of political Islam.[16]

Two major issues arise from this background chapter that bare upon the interviews for this study. First, during the same two decades that violent extremists, including Abu Hamza, Abu Qatada and Abdullah el Faisal, chose London as their base from which to spread their violent extremist version of Islamic obligations to Muslim youth audiences in the UK (Quilliam, 2008), scholars and activists linked to the Islamic Foundation used Leicester as their UK hub for a mainstream rendition of political Islam that countered it. Second, funded by government, Muslim youth audiences are now taught by the Quilliam Foundation and the Sufi Muslim Council that former Leicester resident Tariq Ramadan and many of his Leicester associates are merely the thin end of an inherently dangerous Islamist wedge that threatens the cohesion and safety of the UK (Fiqh-Council, 2001).

5. Interviews in Leicester

Identity and Familial Background

In the first instance, it is useful to aggregate elements of the socio-demographic data so as to be able to say something about the nature of the sample. Eighteen respondents (36%) self-identified as being British Muslim, while the next most popular category of self-identification was simply as Muslim (twelve respondents, 24%). Nineteen subjects did not identify themselves as explicitly Muslim, with six of these respondents (12%) self-identifying as being British, and another seven of these (10%) as being some combination of Asian, British-Asian, or British-Pakistani. Most subjects reported that they were born in the UK (thirty, 66%), and only eight of the fifty in the sample responded that they were born abroad. Twenty-three subjects (46%) responded that they did not feel part of an immigrant community, and only nine subjects (18%) responded that they felt part of an immigrant community in this context. Some responses went so far as to assert that the question of being a member of an immigrant community was an anathema to them – they were clearly British (whether this was British Muslim, British Asian, British Pakistani etc.) so therefore they could not be 'immigrants'.

Despite the plurality of respondents indicating that they were born in the UK and/or did not feel part of an immigrant community, this did not stop many respondents from react-

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[16] See for example: Kelly, Ruth, 2006c. DCLG Secretary. Speech at launch of Sufi Muslim Council, 19 July. http://www.communities.gov.uk/speeches/corporate/sufi-muslim-council accessed 27.8.09; Quilliam Foundation, 2008. Pulling Together to Defeat Terror. Policy document. April. http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/images/stories/pdfs/pulling-together-to-defeat-terror.pdf accessed 29.8.09.

ing positively to the question as to whether they had family abroad (i.e. in a place of ethnic origin) or whether they would consider visiting this family:

Yes, of course I would. Just for a holiday, just to muck around…see what it's like over there. (Interview 18)

Many respondents indicated that they would in fact do so on special family occasions, such as births, deaths or marriages:

Blood ties in Islam are very important, so occasional visits. (Interview 29)

Religious Background

One key defining characteristic of the sample selected was that they were Muslim, though there was variation in degrees of religiosity. Some of this variation was contextual. Only eight respondents indicated that they became Muslim as a result of a 'reversion' experience, with four respondents (8%) indicating that they became Muslims 'by the Will of the Prophet and Allah', three (6%) thanks to the intervention of a friend, and one through interactions at a mosque. Forty-two respondents (84%) indicated that they were Muslim by birth – though this familial link did not necessarily indicate that there was a similar degree of belief and/or practice along family lines. Four respondents indicated that while they were born a Muslim, some members of their family were active Christians, another four respondents indicated that their parents were more religious than themselves, five that their parents weren't practicing at all, and five respondents indicated that their parents were less religious than they were. The vast majority of respondents (thirty-six, 72%) did, however, indicate that their parents were more or less the same in degree of religious practice and feeling as themselves. Amongst the respondents themselves, some twenty-two (44%) felt as though they had become more religious over the past three years, seven (14%) felt that they had become less religious and ten (20%) felt that they had remained the same.

Religious Practices

Degrees of religiosity varied in some areas, but not in others. Twenty-three (46%) respondents indicated that they prayed five times a day, and answers to this question were often punctuated with the belief that this is what a good Muslim should be doing.

I try to pray as often as I can in the day; we are obliged to pray five times a day and I try and stick as closely as I can to that. (Interview 3)

I am a Muslim. I don't miss prayer. (Interview 37)

I am strongly Muslim. Five times a day. (Interview 38)

Practising Sunni. Always five times a day, Alhamdulillah (praise to God). (Interview 40)

A further ten respondents (20%) of the sample indicated that prayed between one and five times a day.

I maintain the five basic pillars of Islam. Five times a day. (Interview 29)

Alhamdulillah (praise to God), I pray five times a day. I try to do as much as I can. (Interview 41)

There was, however, a variance in how often individuals reported going to mosque, with two (4%) indicating attendance five times a day, five (10%) indicating two to three times a day, and a further seven (14%) indicating about once a day. Another set of respondents attended between around three times a week (four, 8%), and another four (8%) indicating that they only attended once a week for Jummah. Others were more opaque in answering this question, indicating that they attended as often as possible (four respondents, 8%).

Religious Practices, the Family and Friends

In fact, questions about religious practice, especially when compared to how religious individuals felt in comparison to their families and friends did not provide a straightforward degree of correlation between religious practice and self-perceptions of religiosity:

My parents pray every day, but they are not, like, religious. My friends are less religious. (Interview 17)

Further examples include how almost all (forty-four respondents, 88%) reported that they observed the fast during Ramadan, twenty-eight (56%) responded that they participated in Iftar. Itikaf was a much more controversial issue – where only 10 (20%) respondents indicated that they participated in this, and 17 (34%) that they didn't – though some indicated that this was because they felt too young to do so.

In terms of how often individuals indicated reading the Qur'an, fourteen individuals (28%) indicated that they at least tried to do so every day, 8 individuals (16%) indicated a response along the lines of "not often", and another six individuals (12%) chose not to respond to this line of questioning:

I don't read the Qur'an often…maybe…in Ramadan I do, and throughout the year, maybe now and then, when I've got a bit of free time. I would say less than my friends, because I would class my friends as quite religious. (Interview 2)

Fifteen respondents (30%) felt that they read less of the Qur'an than their parents, against nine (18%) who felt they read more, and another nine (18%) who read about the same. When compared to their friends, eleven (22%) felt they read more than their friends, eleven (22%) felt they read the same, and nine (18%) indicated less. Answers to this question, however were often punctuated with a sense of doubt – how could a respondent know how much their friends were reading the Qur'an, and why would the investigator wish to know? When asked about whether the individual felt they practiced more or less than friends and family, there was a similar even split, nine individuals (18%) felt they practiced more than their family, and nine (18%) indicated that they practiced more than their friends. Eleven individuals (22%) indicated that they practiced less than their parents, ten

(20%) indicated that they practiced less than their friends. The highest response was amongst those that felt they practiced the same as family and friends, with nineteen (38%) indicating that they practiced the same amount as their parents, and the same amount (nineteen, 38%) indicating they practiced the same as their friends.

This sense of religious context also comes through in the responses to questions over whether or not the respondent's friends were religious, where twenty-nine respondents (58%) indicated that their friends were religious:

> *Well, it depends on what you mean by religious. But most of them practise the same way that I do, in the sense that they'll pray as many namaaz's (prayers) as they can. And eat halal food only, and not haram food; they don't drink, they don't smoke etc. But I wouldn't say they are overly religious. (Interview 4)*

Another thirteen (26%) indicated that they had both religious and non-religious friends:

> *Most of my friends I would say are Muslims although I've got non-Muslim friends as well; primarily Sikhs and a few Hindus. (Interview 2)*

> *Some friends are similar. Others are not Muslim, others are not practicing Muslims. (Interview 42)*

Only four (4%) indicated that they had no religious friends. When pushed to clarify how and what was meant by their friends being religious, the answers became much more ambiguous, with twenty-one respondents (42%) indicating that friends were practicing the same religion – set against twenty-four who didn't actively respond to this line of questioning.

> *No, we don't all follow the same religion; I have a wide variety of friends, from different backgrounds, different religions. (Interview 18)*

Another twenty respondents (40%) indicated that the practices of friends were similar:

> *The ones who are Muslims – yes, we do practise…we do have similar beliefs and most of us are Sunnis, so we don't really have conflicts with any…disputes. (Inteview18)*

> *Leicester has a diverse range of Muslims, we stick to common practices. (Interview 40)*

> *Most of my friends are Muslim; they have the same or similar religious views. (Interview 46)*

> *Most friends are religious. Close friends practise the same religion and have same method of following the religion. (Interview 50)*

There were twenty (40%) non-responses here, as opposed to five (10%) that practices were explicitly dissimilar. There were only fourteen responses to questions that could be coded in terms of how practices differed, eight of which (16%) indicated that friends were of the same school of practice, four (8%) of answers were ambiguous, and two respondents reported that they attended the same mosque as their friends. While these responses indicating a social context of religiosity, there is still a sense of religion being a personal affair

– when asked, thirty-six (72%) respondents indicated that they do not talk about religion with young people, as opposed to thirteen (26%) who indicated that they do. When asked whether individuals felt as though they had to justify their religious orientation and/or practice outside of the Muslim context, only eleven respondents (22%) felt the need to do so:

> *More so now than in the past, due to the negative image of Muslims and Islam generally, through the media. And also, obviously, through the events of 9/11 and 7/7, it hasn't helped. (Interview 2)*

> *I think so, to an extent. If they ask, then I tell them. Or if they wonder why we do things in a certain way, then I'll tell explain. (Interview 4)*

> *I think you should. You don't have to, but you should, it's better. [I do] sometimes, it depends on the person. (Interview 17)*

> *Yes, because of pre-conceived ideas, we have to bend over backwards to convince them. (Interview 43)*

Twenty-three (46%) respondents felt that this was unnecessary:

> *Not really, I think Islam is very simplified, it's quite understandable. But yeah, we have to tell other people what we do and that. (Interview 14)*

> *I don't feel I have to justify it; but if anyone wants to learn about it, then I would tell them. (Interview 16)*

Sources for Understanding Islam

When asked where individuals were turning to gain religious knowledge, thirty-six of the respondents (72%) indicated that they do not use the internet as a source of religious information, as opposed to fourteen (28%) who do:

> *...I use it as a supplement source for knowledge. So if I've got any questions… I'll just type in Google a question, if I've got a question. (Interview 15)*

> *I try to find websites using authentic information about Islam... It's useful for some things but limited. There are many useful lectures online books. (Interview 41)*

> *As a supplement, but only authentic and trusted websites. (Interview 42)*

Thirty-four (68%) of these respondents felt as though the internet did not provide knowledgeable authority on religious matter:

> *[The internet] can be very useful, but [it's] full of rubbish too. [I] prefer books or audio tapes/CDs. (Interview 50)*

Sixteen (32%) of respondents, however did feel as though the internet was a useful source of authoritative commentary. Twenty-four respondents (48%) indicated that they would

go the imam if they were seeking religious knowledge, while fifteen (30%) would ask their partner, nine (18%) their friends, and only four (8%) indicated the internet:

I go to my friends first, my older friends; and then, if they don't understand, then I go to my parents. If they don't understand, I go to the imam at the mosque. (Interview 14)

I don't really ask anybody; I mean I have lot of questions about religion, but I tend to keep it to myself, I don't tend to ask. I tend to find that the more people you ask, the more different answers you're likely to get. (Interview 2)

Cultural vs. Religious Practice

When subjects were asked what aspects of Islam they found to be the most important, there was a clear mix of answers, ranging from "all" (ten, 20%) to a relationship with Allah (twenty-one, 42%). Faith only garnered five responses, practice only two, principles and morals only three, the five pillars four, and oneness of God and fear of God only one response each. When further pushed to distinguish the cultural element of Islamic religious practice from observance as strictly set out by the Qur'an, twenty-three (46%) respondents indicated that they felt many Islamic practices in Leicester were more cultural than religious, against thirteen (26%) who felt it didn't, and nine (18%) who felt that it did and it didn't:

...a lot of culture does play into Islam and it's become so difficult to differentiate between the two for a lot of people, because it's been inbred. And if you lack education, you'll always find it difficult to differentiate between the two. (Interview 2)

Some of the things that happen between people who come from those cultures are mainly to do with, you know, cultural beliefs instead of religious beliefs. (Interview 4)

When asked whether Muslims should separate religious observance and practice from cultural influences, twelve (24%) respondents indicated that they should:

On the whole yes, but not explicitly. Because there are good and bad points in every culture. (Interview 6)

I think they need to be a bit clearer about what religion is and isn't. So I think knowledge – be a bit more knowledgeable about the differences. (Interview 15)

Culture is fine as long as it doesn't go against the religion. (Interview 50)

Twenty-seven (54%) respondents felt that Muslims should not strive to separate faith and practice from identity.

Not as a first priority, because at the end of the day, culture still has a part to play. (Interview 9)

Not necessary, as long as culture doesn't clash with religion, there is no problem with it. (Interview 30)

At the same time, there was a prevalence of responses which felt as though Islam has been disassociated with practice as prescribed in the Qur'an (twenty-five respondents, 50% indicating that they felt this sense of disassociation, against nine, 18% who didn't).

Yes, I think it has. Loads of people learn Arabic and stuff, and so they try to do it in their own way. And they make their own stuff up. (Interview 14)

I think there's a lot of hypocrisy. I think we are moving away from what was…from the way that it is prescribed in the Qur'an. (Interview 15)

Yes, people follow their whims and desires. (Interview 40)

When further pushed to explain how the Qur'an defined religion, eleven respondents (22%) felt that it set out a way of life:

The Qur'an prescribes that everyone leads a simple life, God-fearing life, worships God and acts sensibly in his daily dealings. Yes, many people have gone away from it; it's nothing to do with religion, it's probably to do with society. A lot of corruption nowadays, a lot of malprac-tices. The Qur'an preaches …a person goes by it sensibly, who does their dealings lawfully, without corruption, without malpractice. Someone who's honest, just basic stuff. Some basic concepts we've lost over the years. (Interview 18)

Eight (16%) couldn't define a clear set of rules, six (12%) felt as though it indicated living in peace and harmony, and twenty-five (50%) respondents either indicated that they didn't know or didn't respond to this line of questioning:

…you can ask five people and they will give you different answers. (Interview 2)

I think Qur'anic interpretation should be left to people who really do understand Qur'an. (In-terview 3)

Islam talks about a lot of things; about the relationship to people, about respect to other people, to other religions. [Peace] I think that's what Islam talks about, not what other people think. People misunderstood it. (Interview 17)

All the same, thirty (60%) respondents felt as though the first generations of Muslims were key points of reference for their lives as a way to organise their lives and practice their religion:

We should aim to have their qualities, definitely. They were honest people, true men and wom-en. Good qualities about them, so we should definitely take the qualities and try and adapt them in our lives. (Interview 18)

We can live how the first generations lived…depends how we read the Qur'an, regard it and understand it. If we say we can't live how the first generations lived, we're just lying to our-selves, it's just an excuse, things have changed, you know? You have to deal with what's hap-pening now. And also especially where the dressing code [is] concerned. Because that's our on-ly identity and we are going Westernised. (Interview 19)

Five (10%) explicitly rejected this:

I would love to, honestly, I would love to. But, you know, you can't. It depends on the environment you're in. It's not very difficult, it's impossible. (Interview 17)

[It's] not possible in the modern world. (Interview 47)

Politics and Islam

When asked to unpack the perceived relationship between Islam and politics, there were a range of responses as to if and how Islam holds a political message. For eighteen (36%) of these respondents, Islam was inherently political:

[The] political message is to establish the worship of one God only. (Interview 29)

Islam holds a strong political message for those of understanding. (Interview 40)

Islam encompasses all aspects of life, including personal and political aspects. It teaches how to establish a perfect system of justice, as practiced by the early generations. (Interview 41)

There is a political element for the leaders. (Interview 42)

For eleven (22%) respondents, Islam was not political:

There's no political message, Islam is a religion, just as Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism are religions. (Interview 21)

For another two (4%) respondents, their response was ambiguous. There were also a large range of non-responses here (sixteen, 32%), potentially indicating either a lack of understanding of the question or a degree of concern in how to answer it. Beyond thinking about politicised Islam, and focusing instead on the political position of Muslims in the British context, thirty respondents (60%) felt as though the British Government did not understand the British Muslim experience:

It depends if there are Muslims in the government. Then they would understand it. But I think if you're talking about people that are non-Muslims in government, then they wouldn't understand it, no. (Interview 15)

I don't think it does. It is a sensitive subject at the moment; the way the press are going on, about negative portrayal of the Muslim community and I think that's ventured out and filtered through to the community and the government. And Muslims are seen as suspects and guilty, rather than innocent until proven guilty. (Interview 18)

No. They think all Muslims are terrorists. (Interview 21)

No. They just ask people who are extreme in their views; don't ask normal guys on the street with a family and kids. (Interview 43)

They would like to think so, but they never will. (Interview 47)

Only eight respondents (16%) reporting favourably that the Government did understand their experience:

I think the government does, and it's becoming more aware of the Muslim experience, but unfortunately it's been very negative, primarily. *(Interview 3)*

I think it does. If you talk about Leicester, there is a great population of Muslims and they practise and they have more than two mosques. So, I think yes. *(Interview 17)*

When subjects were asked what kinds of Muslim organisations and causes they supported and/or participated in, there were a range of answers, including Muslim Aid, Islamic Relief, Guantanamo Prisoners, Tablighi Jamaat, and anti-war sentiments about British participation in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I sympathise with the Palestinians, if that's what you mean. I sympathise generally with people who are oppressed, who lack the support of people in power. *(Interview 2)*

Well, you sympathise with people who are suffering, for a just cause. Guantanamo Bay especially. Those who are suffering in places like Chechnya, Iraq, Afghanistan…Palestine especially. You do sympathise with those people especially. *(Interview 18)*

The largest response to this question was no response, with twenty-three choosing not to respond. Furthermore, there was no consensus or general sentiment on who represents Islam in Britain or globally, with thirty-six respondents (72%) not choosing any representative individual of British Islam, and thirty (60%) not choosing any internationally representative individual.

I don't see a person I would say represents Islam the way I would like it to be seen. *(Interview 2)*

No one in particular. Islam is defined by the practise of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. *(Interview 29)*

The only person who merited more than three responses to either of these questions was King Abdullah, whom seven respondents (14%) found was representative of Islam internationally.

The Islamic State

Sympathy with Islamic causes or organisations did not translate into support for some sort of global Islamic political project. The majority of respondents rejected the idea of an Islamic state as a goal for Muslims (thirty-one responses, 62%):

This is what is causing the commotion, you see. It's not necessary. It wouldn't help the cause. What we should fight for is peace to the whole world, humbleness, to the almighty Creator. Respect for one another, and love for one another. *(Interview 19)*

Fourteen (28%) respondents indicated that they believed this was the goal for all Muslims:

Yes, in different ways. Everyone has their own role to play. (Interview 41)

[An Islamic state is] a long-term goal, but a lot needs to be done before working towards that. (Interview 50)

In terms of what constitutes an Islamic state, thirty-one (62%) felt that this meant some form of Shari'ah:

An Islamic state, from my understanding, is a state which is…predominantly, the population is Muslim. And it's run under the Shari'ah. Only through a democratic process where the majority of the population have chosen Shari'ah as the form of government that they would like to see. But I don't see an Islamic state where people have been oppressed or not given the opportunity to decide whether they would want an Islamic state or not…so if it's against the wishes of the people, then it's wrong. (Interview 2)

Basically, an Islamic state would be taken as where Muslims are living as just Muslims and following Shari'ah law. But, then again, it can be done within any other country; you just have to follow your…law…rather than make a whole Islamic state. (Interview 9)

An Islamic state follows the Islamic Shari'ah law and does everything according to that. (Interview 18)

A place where Islam can be practiced in its entirety, free from oppression and injustice. (Interview 41)

Another six (12%) respondents felt that this meant some form of Caliphate:

A proper state in which a caliph rules over the whole of the Islamic ummah [nation], with Shari'ah law in place. (Interview 8)

Eight respondents (16%) indicated that they did not know. When asked whether an Islamic state was actually achievable, seventeen respondents (34%) indicated that they did think this was the case, whereas twenty-two (44%) felt that it was not:

It won't be possible, it will bring catastrophe. (Interview 19)

No, because people want to live in all places. (Interview 21)

The people need to work on themselves first. (Interview 33)

Too much propaganda by the West, so not sure at this moment in time; but maybe in Pakistan. (Interview 35)

[It] will happen when people deserve it. (Interview 41)

All of these answers require qualification though, as many respondents who indicated that they felt as though it was possible gave qualified answers – such as it is possible, the population would first require education, or it is possible, but not likely:

I would say it's possible, but then the population needs to be educated first because the people implementing the…for example, the Shari'ah, an Islamic state, need to be educated to a high

level, because it can be very easily manipulated by people. And it can cause a lot of oppression to people it has been implemented on. (Interview 2)

I think it's possible to establish an Islamic state. I think it's easier to practise this in, say, Pakistan and Algeria. I think there's a lot more diversity in Turkey, so it would be hard to practise that there. In Britain, I think it would be very hard. But I think if you are a close-knit community, you can practise it in your community, but you can't impose that. (Interview 15)

Not in the current state of affairs. (Interview 40)

Yes, anything is possible. Just need people to implement Islam correctly. (Interview 41)

When further asked how such a state might be founded, thirty-six individuals did not respond to this line of questioning, and of those that did, eight indicated that they did not know, one said peacefully, four said through education, and one indicated by the will of God. Only two indicated that they thought it required forceful means, and twenty-eight (56%) indicated that they did not think it required any force at all:

No – it will just prove the point of the West that 'Islam will spread on the point of a sword', so what's the point? We can't do that. (Interview 8)

There's no need to employ forceful means. Because at the end of the day, you have to respect each other's opinions as well. It will only cause more division, so what's the point? (Interview 9)

No, I don't think you should employ forceful means. I think an Islamic state should be voluntary. (Interview 15)

No, it requires discussion and co-operation. (Interview 30)

Islam starts at home with the family. (Interview 35)

Again, however, there was a large non-response rate to this line of questioning (twenty-one, 42%). While the idea of an Islamic state may be familiar, to varying degrees, what is clearly indicated here is that there is little or no consensus of this idea as a political project. This is further supported by responses to the question of what the individual's role would be in forming an Islamic state, and twenty respondents (40%) indicated no role:

I don't have a role at all, to be honest with you. Personally, I would like to see people to be living happily side by side, regardless of what faith they belong to. But the common denominator is humanity. People should see each other as human beings and respect each other on that basis. (Interview 2)

I don't see my role as being very significant. (Interview 15)

Well, my goal is not to make an Islamic state, so I don't know. (Interview 18)

Sixteen (32%) did not respond, eight (16%) indicated that they felt it was necessary to be good Muslims in the state whatever its link to religion:

To portray Islam in the true sense to others and show that it is a just religion. (Interview 30)

Be a good, balanced person. (Interview 33)

Provide the best Islamic upbringing for my family. (Interview 35)

A Muslim living Islam. (Interview 37)

As a mother, teaching my children. (Interview 50)

A further four respondents felt that they had an obligation to follow the state as it exists at the moment, and two said that they weren't bothered as to what their role should/might be.

When questioned as to who were the enemies of Islam, thirteen (26%) respondents did not respond to this question, eight respondents (16%) indicated "anyone against us", seven (14%) Americans/freemasons, and seven (14%) felt the media were the enemy of Islam:

Most of the hysteria is caused by the media, to dictate and manipulate the population and to cause hysteria. From a Muslim point of view, from an Islamic point of view, there are few fanatics which have always been picked out by the media and have been portrayed as representatives of Islam, or Muslims. But they are far, far away from being what I would classify as true Muslims. And also being representatives of Muslims, from wherever they are. (Interview 2)

The media, because it twists a lot of stuff. (Interview 10)

The rest of the responses were split between Islamophobes, bad Muslims, everyone and the devil:

I think we can all be enemies of Islam; even Muslims can be enemies of Islam. So my answer to that one is: everybody is an enemy of Islam, but everybody is also a friend of Islam. And that goes the same for all religions. (Interview 3)

I think the main enemies of Islam are the Muslims themselves nowadays. (Interview 8)

The Muslims themselves – portraying Islam in a way that it's not. (Interview 9)

The enemies of Islam are those who oppress, who attack their way of life, who slaughter them, who take their human rights away basically. Especially those who attack Afghanistan and Iraq without justification…Palestine, without justification as well. (Interview 18)

Satan and his allies. (Interview 35)

Terrorists who misrepresent Islam. (Interview 43)

De-radicalisation Initiatives

The responses over the relationship between the British State and Muslim communities were also significant. Twenty-six (52%) of those who responded to the line of questioning over the power of stop and search and the British Government's Counter-Terror Strategy (CONTEST), responded that they felt that these policies were having a negative effect on

community relations, with many responses specifically mentioning that these policies were either 'racist', alienating, or victimising of British Muslims. Only three respondents (6%) felt as though they were having no effect, and another three responded that they did not know. Eight respondents (16%) felt as though these policies had the effect of making Muslims feel hostile towards the British state, while ten respondents (20%) felt as though these policies stigmatised British Muslim communities and created a context wherein these communities were subject to officially sanctioned discrimination. Another eight (16%) respondents did not differentiate between how CONTEST was either creating anger towards the state, or was being perceived as victimisation by the state, asserting generally the consequences of singling out Muslim communities was having negative effects. For several respondents (three, 6%) the policy was actually understood to have no tangible effect at all because it was ineffective. No respondents replied that they thought it had a positive effect for communities' perceptions of self, non-Muslim perceptions of Muslim communities, or in any way could be understood to have a positive or beneficial effect.

When asked how communities themselves should be involved in countering violent radicalisation, there was an overwhelming response that imams and leaders of mosques had a key role to play – with twenty-four (48%) of respondents giving unqualified support for the assertion that these leaders should be involved in counter violent radicalisation, and another seven (14%) giving a degree of qualified support, often couched as 'yes, but'. These 'yes, but' responses ranged from, 'yes, but violent radicals were unlikely to listen to these leaders' to 'yes, but it is not the fault of these religious leaders'. Many responses emphasised that religious leaders had an obligation and capacity to increase awareness and education – both within and outside of the Muslim communities, and that this was not only necessary, but an expected role for them to play. Seven respondents (14%) responded that they did not think this was the duty of religious leaders, because radicalisation was not an issue in their community or mosque. In fact, several respondents emphasised that this was a media issue rather than a Muslim community issue. When asked what role members (not leaders) of mosques should play, twenty-six (52%) of respondents replied with a unqualified acceptance that Muslims had a duty to confront radicalisation, and a further nine (18%) responded in a qualified, 'yes, but' manner. Many of these qualifications included that it was the duty of Muslims to confront violent radicalisation, but in conjunction with learned scholars, and within a rubric of education and engagement, rather than the sole responsibility of ordinary Muslims. Again, seven respondents (14%) responded that they did not think this was necessary for ordinary members of Leicester's Muslim communities, because this wasn't a problem, and because Muslims had other obligations, to pray for the weak, sick and vulnerable, rather than engage with a small minority that brought the wider community into disrepute.

6. Conclusions

The results here give a mixed picture of the role of religion in identity and political activity in Leicester. On the one hand, the role of Islamic faith, belief and practice is clearly important for the universe of cases, and broader context presented here. We have, as is reasonable practice in a small-n qualitative study, selected on the dependent variable, and not compared Muslim responses with non-Muslim responses in order to define the role of religion and/or religious identity. Instead, this study has sought to nuance and complexify the role of religion within our given sample. From this approach there are several key findings:

1) There is no immediately apparent causal linkage between degree of religious practice and violent radicalisation

2) Measures of religiosity, as a variable in the protocol to unpack either faith, belief or practice are difficult to assess given issues of gender and conceptualisation, and will require further examination

3) There are real perceptions amongst Leicester Muslims that focusing on Muslims as terrorist threats, and stigmatising religious identity and/or practice is leading to alienation, disengagement and senses of victimisation

The responses presented here broadly indicate that amongst Leicester Muslims, there is a wide context of religious practice, and that at times this practice may constitute a cultural exercise, rather than establish degrees of religiosity. While the observance of fasting indicates a high degree of practice, there is a much more mixed picture when individuals are asked to compare how religious they feel they are compared to others – especially older generations. This is echoed in the questions on how often subjects are reading the Qur'an compared to others. This means that while individuals may appear to non-Muslims or secularists as highly religious, this practice could be more about demonstrations of identity and adherence to social control within communities than a specific religiously inspired worldview within them.

Of course, one major issue with assessing degree of religiosity through factors such as mosque attendance as an indicator of religiosity/religious practice is that for several respondents, this question was an anathema. In many cases, women are not expected to attend the mosque. There is, furthermore, no consensus as to the obligation to attend mosque in a non-Muslim country. If a Muslim were living in a predominantly Muslim country where the *adhaan* (call to prayer) for congregational prayers are heard, and they failed to attend the mosque, they could potentially be categories as 'less religious'. This does not, however hold equally valid for a non-Muslim society, where perception of mosque attendance as an obligation changes. British Muslim communities perspectives can hold that the regularity with which an individual attends the mosque in the west is not necessarily

an indication of his/her religiosity. Traditionally or according to the South Asian culture, the elders (mostly of whom are retired) are known to frequent the mosque for every prayer – not the youth. Some scholars have even said that in the absence of hearing the *adhaan* the obligation of attending congregational prayer is lifted. This is one of the inferences drawn from a prophetic narration where a blind individual requested permission from the Prophet to conduct his prayers at his home. The Prophet initially granted him permission to do so, however, he then asked whether he could hear the adhaan. Upon replying in the affirmative, the Prophet then instructed him to comply with the call, i.e. attend congregational prayers. The inference is, in the absence of hearing the call to prayer, one is removed from the obligation of praying in the mosque(Fiqh-Council, 2001). In terms of attendance for Jumuah prayers, it is perfectly normal (and, often common practice) for Muslim males to attend the mosque once a week for Jumuah. This is an obligation where exceptions are made for the traveller who simply prays the Dhur prayer (2 units only as a traveller) (Githens-Mazer, 2009b). In this way, religious practice (as opposed to faith or belief) here needs to be contextualised within micro, meso, and macro level pressures to publicly indicate observance.

Put another way, outward expressions of religious observance in the Leicester context may not indicate degrees of faith or belief – and in fact may denote a practice of identity rather than religion (though such concepts are not mutually exclusive). The high adherence to fasting during Ramadan may indicate an expectation of practice, but for respondents may equally be accompanied by an assertion that they do not feel as religious as friends or family. In this way, there is a sense that there is a high degree of expectation of religious practice, but for many this has not translated into their feeling more religious in comparison to those around them. We could hypothesise, and further studies should unpack whether this means that for the Muslims that we interviewed, there is a sense that they could always be better grounded in their faith, belief and/or practice, and that they may not feel particularly practising in themselves. This has real implications for ways that we understand violent radicalisation. We must understand the limitations inherent in assuming that religious practice is a causal component and/or indicator of violent extremism. At best, and without further deeper examination, we could only begin to hypothesise that religious practice is, at most, an insufficient, but necessary condition for the occurrence of violence in the name of Islam, but can only definitively state that it is insufficient and unnecessary to understand wider processes of radicalisation and participation in violent extremism more generally (Roy, 2005; Roy, 2006; Taarnby, 2007: 175). Furthermore, it may well indicate that a key component for understanding recruitment/enablement to participate in violent radicalisation hinges upon an ability to convince potential recruits that they need to be better Muslims by linking religious practice to the perpetration of violence. The corollary is that through further religious education and engagement, candidates can be shown that violence does not equate to being a better Muslim.

The lack, however, of direct correlation between religiosity, especially as defined by practice, and violent radicalisation is furthermore supported in the current literature, where it has become increasingly clear that assumptions about high degrees of Islamic faith, belief and/or practice may actually have a negative correlation with violence. Often religiosity leads individuals and societies to strive to reject violence, and religious elites, practices and institutions which not only prevent 'radicalisation', but actively discourage exactly violent behaviour through the implementation of occasionally severe forms of moral, ethical and social sanctions far outweigh those who perceive religion as a basis for violence (Githens-Mazer, 2009b). Yet these same forms of sanctions may be brought to bear to ostracise those that do not implicitly support the tactics of political violence. This makes religion a potential site of contestation, rather than defining factor, wherein political factions try to hijack religious faith, belief and/or practice in order to bring about desired political objectives (Hafez, 2003b, c, d; Toft, 2007; Wiktorowicz, 2001, 2004, 2005a, b). From a bottom-up perspective, religion can provide individual moral and ethical bases for understanding how and why participating in religious inspired political violence is obligatory and rational, or forbidden (Fox, 2001, 2004; Keddie, 1998; McCants, 2006; Mukhopadhyay, 2007; Yates, 2007: 141). This was a sentiment which was clearly echoed by our respondents, who emphasised that higher degrees of religious knowledge and awareness were needed at elite and 'ordinary' levels if communities wanted to combat violent radicalisation.

If we cannot say 'religion causes radicalisation', then what can we say about the relationship between religion and radicalisation? At best, we can say that religion can shape the symbolic content and meaning of a movement, and that religion may bring an individual to believe that a movement is not only just, but also morally and ethically obligatory (Kuhn, 1996; Wiebe, 1981). An analysis of the causal relationship between religion and political mobilisation, let alone between religion and radicalisation or violent radicalisation, hinges on whether we take religion to mean a personal belief system, everyday practice, institutions and elites, or a broader cultural context (a paradigm in the Kuhnian sense) which helps structure interpretations of reality, morality, ethics etc. (Kirby, 2007; Modood, 2005) In a sense, this component was being assumed in the protocol here – such that we were asking questions about adherence to fasting during Ramadan, and then questions about support for an Islamic State, but in a sense not asking respondents to define what role Islam should be playing in wider British life – beyond their communities. At best here, religion can therefore be hypothesised as an insufficient and unnecessary cause of radicalisation, and we must be especially careful when associating violent radicalisation with Islamic 'culture', social structures and practices (Alexander, 2000; Bakir, 2005; Croft, 2007; Kepel, 2005a; Poynting, 2006). Individuals may argue that an obligation to participate in direct action is morally sanctioned and ordained by faith, belief and/or practice. This perception can be directly inspired by religious elites seeking to recruit and

groom individuals to participate in political violence. This does not equate, however, to the proposition that religion is *the* cause of radical violent takfiri jihadism.

Furthermore, the data collected here clearly indicated that the distinction of Muslim communities for being Muslim is creating real problems within and for Muslim communities themselves. In the post-9/11 context, Muslim minorities have been viewed as constituting a 'problem group' and a disloyal 'fifth column', Government and media have lurched between overplaying and underplaying the real nature of terrorist threats, and Muslims perceive themselves as being the targets of counter-terrorism legislation and activities in many countries (Bonnefoy, 2003; Croft, 2007; Jackson, 2005; Llorente, 2002; Volpi, 2007). One of the most significant problems to date in the study of radicalisation has been that analyses of relationships between Islamic belief and/or practice with political violence have 'othered' Muslim experiences through debates over, and the unquestioned use of terms such as 'jihad',' Ummah', 'Caliphate' 'the Islamic world', 'the West', 'the Islamic revival', 'political Islam', 'Islamism', 'extremism', 'radicalism', 'fundamentalism', 'religious terrorism', 'jihadists' etc (Merari, 2005: 79). One of the strengths of this protocol and the study as conducted has been that we have been able to problematise these concepts in an effectual way. For example, when we asked questions about broad support for an Islamic state, we were clearly able to distinguish between the ideal of its achievement, what this concept meant practically to the respondent, and whether this was understood as a romantic/idealistic concept or whether it represented a tangible political aim in contemporary Britain. The responses here indicated that while such concepts may have high symbolic resonance for the Leicester Muslims we interviewed, they represent ideal categories rather than a practical basis for political action.

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