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- AMSSG (GERMANY)
- ISLAMIC CULTURAL CENTRE OF IRELAND

Conference Notice

This conference sets out to coordinate and exchange the expertise and experiences of European Muslims in monitoring, analysing and assessing the state of education as it impinges on Muslims.

THEMES AND TOPICS INCLUDE:

- The environment in Muslim Schools
- Muslim Children in non-Muslim Schools
- Spiritual and Moral Development in Schools
- Trends and issues in Curriculum Development
- Equal Opportunities and Gender Issues
- Education and Employment
- Training Systems for Teachers and Inspectors
- Stereotyping Islam in Textbooks

For information contact:

Striving to Find Common Ground

Extracts from the Concluding Remarks given by Dr. Jeremy Henzell-Thomas, at the AMSS Third Annual Conference, "Unity and Diversity: Islam, Muslims and the Challenge of Pluralism" hosted by the Diplomatic Academy, at the University of Westminster, London, 20-21 October, 2001.

It could well be upheld that the very duality and polarity which underlies the fabric of the created universe, and which is the most obvious manifestation of diversity, is a handicap because it has given to mankind a chronically divided nature, a tendency to see reality in black and white, in competing paradigms, and at its worst in an us-and-them mentality, an either-you're-with-us-or-against-us clash of civilisations.

The tendency to dichotomise reality in this way appears to be inherent to some extent in the way the brain works, because if you saw simultaneously all the grey areas, all the possible contradictions to any position, every ambiguity, and every conceivable point of view, you would be paralysed, incapable of any decisive action, or overwhelmed by confusion. There has to be some selection of input and output. We are rightly suspicious of the stereotype of the armchair philosopher hopelessly

entangled in endless modifications of statements and counter-statements and never able to come to a conclusion.

I am reminded of the giant computer in Douglas Adam's *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* which spent six million years trying to calculate the answer to the question 'What is the meaning of life, the universe and everything?' and finally came up with the answer '42', much to the understandable disappointment and frustration of those eagerly waiting for the answer.

The normal human brain is different from a computer. I am always amused by that common visual joke about computers or robots whose circuits start burning and smoking and which eventually explode when they are given a logical contradiction or a paradox to process. This is one of the best ways to get rid of robots in science fiction movies. They simply can't do it. They fall apart

we have to accept that the tendency to debate and adversarial argument is ingrained in us because of our very existence in a world of duality, a world in which everything, says the Qur'an, is 'created in pairs' (51:49), and that this tendency is ironically reinforced by the gift of language, given to man alone by God, when He 'imparted unto Adam the names of all things' (2:31). On one level this is the capacity for differentiating, separating and defining things through the faculty of conceptual thought empowered through the names. On another level completely, 'the letter', as al-Niffari¹ says, 'is a veil' which separates us from unity precisely because it is a tool for manifesting and proliferating endless diversity and multiplicity.

But, unlike computers, human beings have the means to reconcile the opposites, to encompass creative paradox, to be comfortable with diversity and difference. That is because as well as being given the Names which enable us to differentiate, we are also endowed with *fitra*, that innate disposition which enables us to remember the unity of our primordial condition. And it is only through constant remembrance of God that we can purify our own hearts. In the words of the hadith *qudsi*, 'Neither the heavens nor the earth encompass Me, but the heart of my faithful servant does encompass Me'. It is only in the human heart that the opposites can be reconciled, that diversity and unity co-exist.

There is a story from a classic of Islamic spirituality about four travellers who were unable to understand each other because they spoke different languages. It goes like this:

Four travellers—a Persian, a Turk, an Arab and a Greek—were arguing about how best to spend a single coin which was the only piece of money they had between them. 'I want to buy *angur*,' said the Persian. 'I prefer *uzum*,' said the Turk.

I want *inab*, said the Arab.

'No!' said the Greek, 'it is *stafil* that we should buy.'

At that moment another traveller passed by and said: 'If you give me the coin, I will do my best to satisfy the desires of all of you.'

At first they were suspicious of him, believing that he intended to take the coin for himself, but eventually they decided to entrust it to him. He went to a fruit seller's shop and bought four small bunches of grapes.

'This is *angur*,' said the Persian.

'But this is also what I call *uzum*,' said the Turk.

'Thank you for bringing me *inab*,' said the Arab.

'This is none other than my *stafil*,' said the Greek.

The grapes were shared out amongst them and it dawned on each of them that the disharmony between them was simply due to his poor understanding of the language of the others.

Everybody is in a state of wanting, because there is an inner need existing in all of us, a basic urge to remember our original state of unity, but we give it different names and have different ideas of what it may be. The traveller-linguist in the story represents the sage, the man or woman of spiritual insight, the one who is able to show the other travellers that what they all yearn for is actually the same thing, even though their word for it is different. Such a person is also the harmoniser and peacemaker able to resolve the misunderstanding and strife that was developing between the travellers and fulfil all their needs with a single coin. The single coin is, of course, *tawhid*.

There is a special need at this time to highlight the common ground that exists between Islam and the Anglo-Saxon world.² The stream of thought that is common to both traditions has at its heart the principle of balance: balance between reason, observation and science on the one hand and faith on the other;

balance between individual freedoms and rights, and wider responsibilities within society; balance between utilitarian morality or pragmatism and the highest ideals; and balance between a practical concern with the immanent condition of mankind and a hunger for transcendence. At its heart too is the principle of fairness, the fair play so integral to the English conception of good character.

I am not intending to overplay and exaggerate the common ground which can be found in the Anglo-Saxon world and Islam, although it is high time, in the midst of all the rhetoric about the clash of civilisations, that we applied a corrective and issued a strong warning about the brutal consequences of exaggerating differences. More than ever, we need traveller-linguists who can translate from one 'language' into another to bring to light the convergence of people's deepest aspirations.

But we also need to be clear about where the ways did part. For one thing, it can easily be shown that the balance between the religious and the scientific outlooks inherited from Islam in Roger Bacon's philosophy began to be seriously disturbed with the onset of the scientific revolution in the seventeenth century, and we know what has happened now: a profound and pervasive loss of the sense of the sacred in Western culture wrought by scientific materialism, or scientism, and secularism.

We can see what was behind this too. The original balance between inward experience and external observation in Bacon's vision was destroyed by limiting science only to experimentation. The mind of Western man became externalised, focused only on observable and quantifiable realities. Inward experience, the source of a deeper science or wisdom, was no longer to be trusted; the capacity for its most developed form, contemplation, the source of spiritual insight, was lost,

Muslim scholars and students of Islam have been involved in deconstructing an image of Muslims and Islam that has presented an obstacle toward the future transformation of Muslim communities all over the world. Sep.11 while exposing volatile relations between the West and the Muslim world, thereby calling for a reassessment of these relations, made it even more imperative that the efforts toward building an agenda for change be resumed with greater vigor. Students of Islam and the Muslim world working towards a better understanding of the factors that led to Sep. 11 are encouraged to participate. Equally as important is the participation of individuals working on defining various challenges facing the Muslim world and possible answers to these challenges.

CONFERENCE SUBTHEMES:

- State-Society Relations & Democratization
- Culture Matters: New Directions?
- Political Economy, Globalization & Economic Justice
- Muslims & The Media
- Education & Future Generations
- American Muslims & American Politics
- Women & The Family
- Islamic Vision for the Next Millennium

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A Race Against Religious Discrimination

THE HISTORY OF RACE RELATIONS IN THE UK

INTRODUCTION

The genesis of post-millennium multi-cultural Britain lies in the chronic labour shortages that existed in the country after the Second World War. The late Fifties and early Sixties saw significant numbers of Commonwealth immigrants, mainly men from the Caribbean and Indian subcontinent, arrive on these shores. A second wave of immigration followed in the late Sixties and early Seventies as the male immigrants brought over their wives and children. These immigration patterns are significant in relation to the development of race relations legislation. They resulted in an influx of new cultures and religions and generated discourses of racist and anti-religious behaviour previously unseen. This in turn exerted pressure on Parliament and the Judiciary to intervene and protect the new ethnic communities. The development of racial discrimination law in this country over the past four decades is thus a reflection of the way in which Parliament and the courts have responded to the rise of new forms of racist (including religious) discrimination brought on by that initial influx of Commonwealth immigration.

It is vitally important to note that the proliferation of new discourses of discrimination was not generated exclusively by the primary act of 'arrival' into the United Kingdom. Further injections of racist discourse have resulted were the new ethnic communities have attempted to integrate (or simply interact) with the social fabric of the larger

populous. The development of statute and case law is thus, in part, a recognition that new modes of discrimination can arise many years (even decades) after that initial influx of immigration.

LIFE BEFORE THE FIRST RACE RELATIONS ACT

Prior to 1965 English law did not recognize either racial or religious discrimination and in general there was Parliamentary and judicial reluctance to intervene in racial discrimination cases.

Arguably, the most common form of racial discrimination that did come before the courts involved a 'colour bar' that was imposed by employers, landlords, hotels, social clubs and other places of public resort. Even if the courts did not always strike out such clauses, the post-war judgments do reflect the judiciary's belief that public attitudes were changing and that British people were beginning to find such practices distasteful in a way not previously felt. Factors effecting the change in public attitude no doubt included the Second World War and the accompanying implosion of discourses that were essential in order to facilitate the birth of the post-colonial condition and the demise of 'Empire'.

RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION CASE LAW

Cases of religious discrimination that came before the courts also mirrored anti-religious discourses that were prominent during that period in British social history. The

largest religious minorities were Catholics and Jews. Overt anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic prejudices were still commonplace and case law reflected this.

The case law tells us one further interesting aspect of racial and religious discrimination. Since most forms of religious discrimination were directed towards 'whites' (Jews and Catholics in the main), the distinction between racial and religious discrimination was an easy one to make. It was the influx of immigrants from the Indian subcontinent who were both racially and religiously different that caused this once clear distinction to become increasingly blurred.

THE RACE RELATIONS ACT 1965

The Race Relations Act of 1965 was the result of several years of intense pressure to protect the ever-increasing ethnic minorities from racial discrimination. When Parliament was finally persuaded to pass anti-discriminatory legislation in 1965, the Bill was drafted so as to protect persons of 'colour, race, ethnic or national origins'. The Act was intended mainly to combat the 'colour bar' mode of discrimination prevalent in places of public resort. Given the relatively clear distinction that existed between religious and racial discrimination at the time, we maybe forgiven for assuming that the exclusion of 'religion' from the wording of the statute was deliberate and that 'religious discrimination' was not intended to be covered by the Act. This is most probably an incorrect assumption. Lester and Bindman record that as late as 1968 leaders of Jewish organisations were repeatedly being reassured by Home Secretaries that they were covered by the Act.

The courts did not follow this reasoning. In combating the 'colour bar' mode of discrimination, the Act was socio-culturally specific. Like the judicial decisions of that era, the Act covered modes of discrimination that was prevalent at that point

in British social history. As we shall see, when discrimination is purely on religious grounds, 'race, colour, ethnicity or national origin' cannot be relied upon. Furthermore it did not possess the political bite to enter the legislatively sensitive fields of housing and employment (where use of the 'colour bar' was extensive). This was soon to change and three years later another race relations statute was passed.

THE RACE RELATIONS ACT 1968

Much happened between 1965 and 1968 to convince Parliament of the need for further, more wide-ranging, legislation. In April 1967 the independent research organisation, Political and Economic Planning (PEP) published its report on racial discrimination in Britain. The report revealed that there was substantial evidence to support the claim that landlords and employers were extensively using the colour bar mode of discrimination. There was a new willingness on behalf of the Government to be more politically receptive to such research and when the new Bill was drafted it took on board many of the findings of the PEP report.

The Government was further influenced by the highly credited 'Street Report' published in October 1967, which assessed the merits and impact of adopting anti-discrimination legislation in other countries, such as the United States and Canada.

Again, there was pressure within Parliament and without, by senior clergymen, for the new Act to expressly prohibit 'religious discrimination'. But given the external and internal pressure to outlaw 'religious discrimination', why did the Government fail to include it in the new Act? According to Lustgarten such an option was simply not politically viable. The inclusion of religion would have increased the pressure for application of the Act to the Northern Ireland situation. At the time, the Government was vehe-

mently opposed to such a policy.

When the new Race Relations Act was passed in 1968 it expanded upon the 1965 Act by further prohibiting discrimination in both public and private employment and in housing (subject to certain exceptions). The Act brought about an evolution in Parliamentary understanding of racist practices and a revolution in the type of legislation Parliament was willing to pass. It was revolutionary because this type of intrusion into the sacrosanct areas of housing and employment was in order to reflex a normative agenda on society. Parliament was sacrificing a sacred cow in order to realise an ethical ideal! The Act was to lay down the foundations for a new type of legislation, 'anti-discrimination law' (these would later include the Equal Pay Act 1972, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the Race Relations Act 1976).

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE 1968 ACT

There was much hope that the 1968 Act would successfully erode into the ever-increasing instances of racial discrimination. Yet it failed to be the catalyst by which racial discrimination in employment and other areas was seriously tackled. Plenty of examples of exceptions and loopholes where embarrassingly exposed in the courts. (Such as *Ealing LBC v Race Relations Board*, *Charter v Race Relations Board* and *Dockers' Labour Club v Race Relations Board*). Criticism also came from the Political and Economic Planning Group. Their study in the mid-Seventies revealed that levels of discrimination were still remarkably high. Arguably, the biggest weakness of the 1968 Act was its failure to address indirect racism, as was exemplified by discrimination against Sikh men with turbans in workplaces which insisted on wearing prescribed headgear that Sikh men wearing turbans could simply not comply with. Here discrimination had no roots in the 'colour bar' form of prejudice which

the 1965 and 1968 Acts were essentially designed to tackle.

The 1976 Act would provide these employees with a claim of 'indirect discrimination' against the employer unless, the employer could provide a proper justification for the discriminatory requirement.

The inspiration for incorporating 'indirect discrimination' came from the United States. In 1971 the Supreme Court responded to this deficiency by creating a further definition of discrimination whose key element was, 'disproportionate adverse affect, not mere intentional inferior treatment'. Or as McCrudden describes it, 'the unjustified use of criteria having an exclusionary effect though exclusion may not have been the intended effect of adopting those criteria'.

THE WHITE PAPER ON RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

The Government 'White Paper' that preceded the passing of the last race relations statute was humble enough to recognise the failure of the previous two Acts. This Act would be more comprehensive in its scope. The Paper also recognised that any new legislation had to take account of the continuing changes in racial demography, namely the demographic affects of that 'second wave' of immigration. The Paper had the foresight to recognise that a rise in 'British born coloured people' may give rise to new forms of indirect racial discrimination, such as inequality of opportunity.

THE ISSUE OF RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION

The Government still felt that any new law did not expressly need to recognise 'religious discrimination'. Many MP's were disturbed by the Bill's failure to include 'religious discrimination' and before the Bill was made law attempts were made to persuade the House that it ought to be amended so as to enclose the definition.

A number of different arguments were put forward by those who sup-

ported an amendment to the Bill.

Firstly, it was argued that there was no logical reason as to why religion should be excluded from the Act. It was as morally reprehensible as racial discrimination and as such should be outlawed by Parliament. William Clegg eloquently made this point when he asked Parliament, 'If an employer discriminates on grounds of religion, is that morally any better than discriminating because of someone's race?'

Secondly, if 'religion' were excluded from the Act it could facilitate an increase and legitimisation of 'religious discrimination'. Alison forwarded this argument by asserting that the failure to cover 'religious discrimination'; 'may prove to be a gap which allows an increasing amount of actual and overt discrimination to take place on the basis of religion'. Bruce George shared the same view and informed the House that, 'There are people who are looking at ways in which they can evade the responsibilities that will be placed upon us when this Bill becomes law'. He gave the example of how the National Front was distributing information and advice to organisations and trusts on how they could escape coverage by the Act if there were to justify their discrimination on religious grounds.

Thirdly, the new ethnic minorities actually considered 'religion' a more appropriate classification of their group identity than the definitions provided by the Act and as such Parliament should recognise this. As one MP commented, 'The commonplace and striking fact is that the religious feature of many of these groups is overwhelmingly more important to them subjectively and objectively.... than the titular distinguishing marks which the Bill advances'.

Fourthly, to exclude religion from the Bill would undermine the central aim of the race relations legislation, to facilitate the integration of the ethnic communities into Britain.

Finally, Parliament needed to include religion so as to reflect changing demographic patterns.

Finally, religion needed to be included in order to combat religious based prejudices that may arise in the future. Religious discrimination of groups such as Jews and Catholics had long been practiced in this country. Whilst such religious prejudices had significantly decreased in recent times, history taught us that they could quite easily re-surface.

Both the Government and its supporters however had serious reservations about including religion in the Act, such as the difficulty in defining 'religion', it was argued that religious discrimination had been reduced to a negligible amount and that it may even result in unforeseen and undesired consequences. In the end, the Government failed to be persuaded of the need to accommodate this controversial amendment and the Bill was passed without any mention of the word 'religion'.

THE 1976 ACT, COMMENTS AND OBSERVATIONS

The Government's aim to harmonise discrimination law meant that the 1976 Act was drafted in almost identical terms to the Sex Discrimination Act (passed a year earlier). The revolutionary concept of 'indirect discrimination' was incorporated into the Act without too much opposition. The category of 'racial group' was also extended to include 'nationality' and a new regulatory body, The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) was established to overlook most instances of racial discrimination.

Given the politically short period of 11 years, the evolution of racial discrimination legislation from 1965 to 1976 was remarkable. The category of discriminated was extended from originally including groups defined by reference to their 'colour, race, national or ethnic origins', to also include 'nationality'. The inclusion of 'nationality' is significant as it indicates that in defining 'race'

Parliament was not concerning itself with drafting a semantically or technically accurate definition of 'race'. On the contrary, it had adopted a pragmatic approach that concerned itself with rooting out and protecting a social minority that it felt was being discriminated against (or might be discriminated against).

The period from 1965 to 1976 also saw the category of discriminator expand. Initially limited to those who ran places of public resort, by 1976 almost every sphere of public life (with certain exceptions) was covered. Finally, the areas of discrimination that race legislation covered also expanded during the 1965 to 1976 period. This was of course, in part, a natural consequence of extending the categories of discriminated and discriminator. Just as important and significant was the daring recognition of 'indirect discrimination'.

The whole period between 1965 and 1976 thus saw Parliament adopt a pro-active approach to protecting minority rights that has never been matched (before or since). Essentially, the 1976 Act is the last major Act on race discrimination.

THE SECOND WAVE OF COMMONWEALTH IMMIGRATION AND THE RISE AND RISE OF BRITISH BORN ETHNIC CHILDREN

By the 1970's many of the male immigrants who migrated from the Commonwealth after the Second World War were bringing over wives from their country of origin and began raising families. The large-scale influx of Commonwealth women coupled with the rapid rise in British born ethnic minority children created new discourses of racial (including religious) discrimination. The first generation of Commonwealth immigrants suffered racial discrimination greatest in areas of housing and employment. Second and third generation ethnic minority citizens (now no longer referred to as Commonwealth immigrants) were most likely (although not exclusively) to suffer

similar and differing modes of racial/religious discrimination in areas of education and employment.

The 1976 Act was able to assist in combating some of these new modes of discrimination (the newly incorporated statutory concept of 'indirect discrimination' was particularly effective). But in other areas, the Act hopelessly failed to protect against the new forms of racial, and in particular, religious discrimination directed towards certain ethnic communities. The White Paper to the 1976 Act did acknowledge that there would be a significant rise in British born 'coloured people' over the next few years and that their arrival would herald new forms of racial problems. What it was unable to successfully predict was what these new forms of racial problems would be.

ETHNIC MINORITY CHILDREN AND THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH THE BRITISH EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE 1970'S AND 1980'S

Largely on account of differing languages and religions, it could be argued that it was children from the Indian sub-continent who experienced greatest difficulty in settling into the British education system. The problem was immediate. As English was not the mother tongue of almost all Asian children, it meant that most started school with little or no grasp of the English language. Matters did not end there and a number of cultural schisms quickly emerged. These cultural schisms were found to be most acute in three areas; gender segregation, diet and dress wear. The ways in which the host community and immigrant community reconciled these 'cultural clashes' provides us with a fascinating study of how the process of assimilation of the 'immigrant populace' into the 'host populace' is riddled with conflicts and compromises before some sort of social homeostasis can be reached.

It is of extreme importance to note that virtually all of these new dis-

courses of discrimination in the education system arose in circumstances where an article of religious faith of one or more of the Asian sub-communities came into conflict with a particular protocol of the school. The 'colour bar' mode of discrimination that these children's fathers had been subjected to, did not hone in upon the 'religious' component of the Asian immigrant's identity. So whilst it would be common practice for a proprietor, landlord or employer to bar an Asian immigrant because he was Asian, Indian or Pakistani. It was extremely unusual for them to be barred because they were Hindu, Sikh or Muslim. This type of racist language simply did not exist (or was extremely rare) before 1976.

The Case of *Mandla v Dowell Lee* was such a benchmark case. A young Sikh boy was refused a place at an independent school in Birmingham because his wearing of a turban violated the school's uniform requirements. The Sikh boy's father took the matter to court arguing that there had been a breach of the 1976 Act. The lower courts were not sympathetic and argued that the 1976 Act did not apply because he was refused admission on the grounds of his 'religion' (which was Sikhism) and not 'race'. In an historic ruling the House of Lords held that Sikhs were covered by the Act as they constituted an 'ethnic group'. The court held that in determining 'ethnic group' two essential factors had to be taken into account;

a) the group should have a long and shared history, of which the group was conscious and which distinguished it from other groups;
b) the group had a cultural tradition of its own, including family and social customs and manners—often but not necessarily, associated with religious observance.

In addition to these two essential characteristics, there were a number of other factors that could be taken into account in determining

whether a group could constitute an 'ethnic group' for the purposes of the 1976 Act. These included: c) a common geographical origin, or decent from a small number of common ancestors; d) a common language, not necessarily peculiar to that group; e) a common literature peculiar to the group; f) a common religion different from that of its neighbouring groups or from the general community surrounding it and g) the characteristic of being a minority or being an oppressed or dominant group within a larger community.

In conclusion, the White Paper to the 1976 Act did acknowledge that the ethnic minority population (especially those born here) could face new modes of racial discrimination in the future. It was hoped that the new 'indirect discrimination' clause could work alongside the 'direct discrimination' clause so as to provide complete protection against any new form of racial discrimination, but this ended up being providing, the complainant falls within the 1976 Act's racial classification system. As *Mandla* illustrated, this is no easy feat (he had to take his case to the House of Lords to get this done) because most of the new forms of 'indirect discrimination' concentrated on the religious component of the ethnic minority student's identity. 'Religion', was of course, deliberately omitted from the statute. Those MP's who supported the inclusion of 'religion' feared that its omission could lead to future problems. Their prophecies appeared to be coming true!

NEW DISCOURSES OF RACIAL/ RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION IN THE EMPLOYMENT SYSTEM— THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY

Whilst for the Sikh community *Mandla* operated as a key that opened up access to the 1976 Act, for the Muslim community, *Mandla* would act as a lock that denied them access to the 1976 Act. By laying down specific criteria that

denied ethnic group for the purposes of the 1976 Act, the Lords created a situation whereby certain discriminated religious minorities would have protection under the law, whilst others would not. So for example, in addition to the Sikh community, the courts have also recognised that Jews constitute an 'ethnic group'. Rastafarians do not fall within *Mandla*'s orbit. Neill LJ pointed out that the group does not fulfil the 'long shared history' requirement, since their history only dates back some 60 years.

Muslims also face difficulties in fulfilling the Lord's list of essential characteristics and relevant characteristics that define an 'ethnic group'. It is clear that any group that hopes to meet that criterion must be 'culturally homogenous'. Islam is the second largest religion in the world. It has over a billion adherents, with significant numbers of followers on every continent. The Muslim populace comprises a whole array of races and nationalities that display a multitude of differing customs, traditions, languages, diet, dress-ware etc... Such observations point to a heterogeneous existence. As such, any lawyer would have extreme difficulty in persuading a court that Muslims possess a shared history and that they have their own cultural tradition (the essential characteristics of an 'ethnic group'). It is also obvious that 'Muslims' fall outside many of the relevant characteristics of an 'ethnic group'. They do not come from a common geographical origin, share a common language or have a common literature. Case law has backed up these observations and held that Muslims are not covered by the 1976 Act.

Such 'judicial abstinence' was illustrated in relation to issues of prayer (*Ahmed v Inner London Education Authority*, *Safouane and Bouterfas v Joseph Ltd and Hannah*) and religious festivals (*Nyazi v Rymans Ltd*) where the judicial system sided with the employer against granting employees rights to prayer and to a

day off to celebrate Eid.

A useful precedent was however set by *J H Walker v Hussain and others* number of Muslims employees (all originating from the Indian sub-continent) were dismissed for attending the Eid prayer. They were able to successfully argue 'indirect discrimination' and managed to convince the court that their religious tradition is also a racial or ethnic one.

More recently there have been instances where some Muslim women have successfully persuaded a tribunal that the wearing of a *hijab* is a cultural tradition of their ethnic community (e.g. such as their Pakistani ethnic origins) and as such ought to be covered by the 1976 Act. But there are other examples where such arguments have failed.

LOBBYING TO OUTLAW 'RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION'

Not surprisingly, matters have not gone unnoticed in the Muslim and non Muslim community. In 1993 a Muslim 'umbrella' organisation published a report urging the government to rectify the 'lacuna' that now existed in the race relations legislation. Likewise the 'Commission for Racial Equality' in a review of 1976 Act concluded that a failure to outlaw 'religious discrimination' was a potential problem and that reform may be necessary. They stated '...it cannot be any more acceptable to stir up hatred against people because they are seen to be Muslims than to do so because they are seen to be Pakistanis'.

The absence of 'religion' from the Act has also caused other serious deficiencies in legal fields other than employment. Jepson for example, has discovered that in the past few years militant racists in the London Borough of Merton have become involved in stirring up racial hatred through anti-Mosque campaigns. When a racist activist is caught, the CPS decline to prosecute the matter; 'The basis of refusal being inter alia, that the material may use religious

terminology to stir up racial hatred, but the term 'Muslim' relates to religion rather than race'.

THE IMPACT OF ISLAMOPHOBIA ON BRITISH MUSLIMS

Of the religious groups that are not covered by the Act, Muslims appear to be suffering the most. Since the late Eighties many Muslim groups and organisations have been stressing that the situation is getting worse. They cite the rise of a phenomenon called 'Islamophobia' as being responsible for an increase in instances of 'religious discrimination' against Muslims. Islamophobia is a dislike, fear or hatred of Muslims and Islam. Many Muslims argue that Islamophobia has become deeply entrenched in British institutions such as the media. These institutions constantly propagate images of Islam that portray Muslims as fanatics, fundamentalists, terrorists etc. Instances such as the 'Satanic Verses Affair', the 'Gulf War' and terrorist acts by Muslim groups both feed into and fuel the negative stereotypical imagery that the British public are being exposed to. Such exposure can only serve to have an adverse effect on the relationship between the British Muslim population and the rest of British society. What is most frustrating, is that little is being done to counter-act this negative stereotyping, even from those sections of society that had always championed the cause of multi-cultural Britain. Modood has been prompted to ask the question, 'Why is there a cleavage growing between liberal left opinion and the country's million plus Muslims who up to now have enjoyed, at least rhetorical, political support from the former under the banner of racial equality and multi-culturalism?'

In 1996 the Runnymede Trust set up a commission to investigate this supposed phenomena. The Commission's conclusions echoed much of what has been said above. They also warned that unless the government was prepared to intervene to tackle

this social disease, the UK Muslim population would become increasingly alienated and disenfranchised. The report recommended that discrimination on the grounds of religion be made unlawful and pointed out the failure of the Public Order Act 1986 to outlaw incitement to religious hatred and violence.

THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS ACT 1988

The Human Rights Act is arguably the most important piece of legislation that the New Labour project passed during its first term in government. A sort of 'ethical domestic policy' to compliment their 'ethical foreign policy', the Act gives UK citizens a series of rights that most EC citizens have enjoyed for decades and us 'Brits' could only previously access through the European courts.

Enshrined within the Act is 'Article 9' which grants the right to 'Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion':

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

ARTICLE 9(1)

The 'right' is not absolute; it is subject to conditions of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

ARTICLE 9(2)

In essence, the Human Rights Act contains a whole plethora of legal provisions that can be used by victims of religious discrimination. As such, effective judicial implementation Article 9 and Article 2 (of Protocol 1) ought (in theory) to provide much protection for groups such as Muslim schoolgirls who wish to wear the *hijab* at school.

SHORTFALLS OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Even if the English courts apply a liberal interpretation to the statute (and there is no guarantee that such an approach will be adopted), the Act, at its best, provides limited assistance to eradicating 'religious discrimination'.

The statute only applies to Public Authorities, and the Act cannot cover acts of religious discrimination by private individuals and private employers. If it is accepted that the public sector has a greater tendency to implement equal opportunity policies than the private sector, then 'religious discrimination' will still be allowed to flourish in areas where it is most prominent.

Another major failing of Article 9 is that it is not an 'equality doctrine'. It does not allow the applicant to argue that they are being treated less favourably than another because of their religious background; it only allows the applicant to argue that the liable party has breached their right to freedom of religious practice.

THE FUTURE

After much lobbying from Muslim and other religious organisations, the Government finally agreed to set up a research commission to look into the phenomena of 'religious discrimination'. The results of that research were published earlier this year in two Home Office reports on religious discrimination.

The first report was titled 'Religious Discrimination in England and Wales'. The study found that unacceptable levels of unfair treatment were reported by virtually all of the minority faiths in this country. The main victims of religious discrimination were Muslims.

The second report titled, 'Tackling Religious Discrimination: Practical Implications for Policy Makers and Legislators' examines the main options that are available to policy makers and legislators for tackling religious discrimination.

CONCLUSION

In summary what this article highlights is how wider social discourses on race and ideological paradigms of assimilation and multiculturalism have come to be reflexed on legal discourses and subsequent race relations law in the United Kingdom.

The lack of explicit inclusion of religion in legislation, however, has resulted in a failure to protect some religious groups from religious discrimination. Whilst some religious communities, such as Sikhs and Jews have been able to gain access to wonderful 'new rights', because these religious group also specifically constitute an ethnic group, the legal container remains semi-porous with regard to religions such as Islam which are multiethnic.

The rest are left to watch and observe from the outside. Their frustration with our legal processes are only going to ferment their ever-increasing disenchantment at not being treated as equal members of society. The potential consequences of this cannot be understated.

We need look no further than what was said in the White Paper to the 1976 act and then remind ourselves of the increasing singling out and vulnerable visibility of Muslims following the riots in the North of England and the horrific events of 11 September. ☞

Shahzad Aziz

Shahzad Aziz is a Barrister in private practice. He graduated in law from Brunel University and then went on to complete a postgraduate degree in criminology at Cambridge University. He was called to the Bar in 1997.

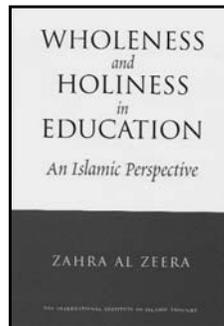
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and the very idea of revelation, of a Book, as the Qur'an says, 'for those who believe in the Unseen' (2:3), beyond the reach of human perception, was denied. The displayed Book of Nature, too, was divested of its significance, in the sense that its workings were no longer seen as signs of majesty and beauty and of the due measure and proportion invested in creation by the Creator.

That said, and despite the challenge that secularism poses to people of faith, we have to strive to find that common ground. This is the paradox we have to face, and this is the challenge of pluralism.

We have to strive to find that common ground while at the same time accepting humbly that we can never see the whole picture—only God is All-Seeing, and above all we have to pray that He may grant us greater understanding of His plan for mankind so that we may see it, in all its aspects, as a Mercy which covers everything.

In striving to find common ground, I would urge the following priorities:

First, we cannot begin to find it if we, as Muslims, are always disputing amongst ourselves. The Qur'an (8:46) says: 'And fall not into disputes lest ye lose heart and your power depart...' and the Prophet (saws) said: 'Mankind will not go astray after having found the right road, unless from disputation.' It is the exhibition of disunity and parochial limitation which will also turn away the best minds and hearts from Islam, and even turn away people of intelligence and vision within Islam from working with Muslim organisations.

Secondly, we must *engage*, and thirdly, we must be more *creative*. The challenge now, at this moment of extraordinary opportunity for a new world order, is for Muslims to engage creatively with the whole of mankind.

According to Walid Saif, the pre-occupation of many Muslims in 'protecting a threatened identity'

tends to define the collective self in terms of 'differences and contrasts' resulting in 'enclosure and exclusion'. A truly secure Muslim is able to be inclusive and to focus on common and shared principles and values, to use common resources to tackle common problems and to contribute to solving them for the well-being of humanity. 'Moral messages gain more credibility and communicate themselves more persuasively when they are put in the service of the people, without exclusion and without proselytism.'

Several years ago I had the privilege to be involved in the reconstruction of the Primary Music School in Ilidza, Sarajevo. At a presentation in their ruined concert hall, which had been burnt down through hatred of that dynamic and creative multicultural society which had made Sarajevo a bridge between East and West, hundreds of children who had been pupils at the school and who had come from all over Bosnia, stood in ranks along the ruined walls of the building and sang a song which moved us all to tears. The words were, in Bosnian, 'Na rata ne bude', 'Let there be no war'. And it cannot be repeated enough that the Prophet (saws) made it very clear that he was not sent to 'curse the infidel' but as 'a mercy to all mankind'.

And the appeal of these children distils the challenge of pluralism for all of us. We must build, contribute, participate, produce, engage, enrich and be enriched, envision a positive, peaceful and merciful future, create something for our children, look outwards to all the peoples of mankind as well as into our deepest selves, and open our minds and hearts to all the peoples of mankind. In the words of our beloved Prophet (saws): 'All God's creatures are His family; and he is the most beloved of God who does most good to God's creatures.' ﷺ

¹ *The Mawaqif and Mukhatabat of Muhammad Ibn 'Abdi 'l-Jabbar Al-Niffari,*

translated and edited by Ali Ibrahim, Cambridge University Press, 1935, p.111.

² See 'Alija 'Ali Izetbegovic, *Islam Between East and West*, American Trust Publications, 1994, and in particular the chapter entitled "The Third Way" Outside Islam', pp.271-286, for a discussion on the resemblances between the Anglo-Saxon 'middle way' and the 'third way of Islam'. See also *British and Muslim*, a paper by Abdal Hakim Murad which appeared in the *American Muslim Network* No. 7 (November 2001) and which is based on a lecture given to a conference of British converts on September 17, 1997. Here, the convergence between 'Islamic moderation and good sense with the English temper' is also highlighted.

³ Walid Saif, *Reflections on Muslim-Christian Dialogue: Core Values and Common Responsibilities*, Encounters, Journal of Inter-Cultural Perspectives, Vol. 7, No. 1, March 2001, page 93.

Dr. Jeremy Henzell-Thomas

Dr. Henzell-Thomas is Chairman of the Book Foundation. He is also a member of the AMSS (UK) Executive Committee.

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The Muslim College

Interview with Professor Zaki Badawi, Principal and Founder

Could you tell us something about the Muslim College?

The Muslim College was founded in 1987 and is a religious academic institution specialising in the study of Islam, its culture and history. It offers three separate MA and PhD programmes in Islamic Studies: an independent one of its own; one jointly awarded with Al Azhar University in Cairo; and one accredited by Birkbeck College, University of London. As well as awarding Master and Doctorate degrees in Islamic Studies the College also offers part-time courses leading to a Certificate/Diploma in Islamic Studies. These are run in co-operation with the Faculty of Continuing Education, Birbeck College.

How was the Idea of a Muslim College Born?

When I came to the Islamic Cultural Centre in 1978, we called a conference for all Imams in Britain to acquaint myself with them and see how we can cooperate. I found that few of them spoke English. After much discussion, it was also discovered that many of them did not know much about Islam in the wider sense or anything about other religions. Their knowledge of Islam, what little they had, was really restricted to one *madhab*. Some of them had very limited knowledge in the school of thought they claimed to be following! A village imam being imported into Britain is a very disastrous thing, particularly for the youth here. While I felt that these

Imams were doing a good job with Muslims of the first generation here, the future of the ummah would be harmed if we relied entirely on them. Therefore, I thought the solution to that problem was to establish a college in this country. After working hard to secure funding a building was bought in 1984. I was placed in charge of hiring staff and the first criteria I set was that they should be from very well-recognised Islamic universities, particularly Al-Azhar. Secondly, they had to have had a Western education. The College began functioning in 1990.

Tell us a Little Bit About the Students and the Courses at the College?

We have students that are medical doctors, dentists, lawyers, philosophers, astrophysicists and a few from Al Azhar. We train Imams in public speaking, to give sermons which are relevant and entertaining, as well as training them in counselling and other skills. We admitted women from the start and diversified beyond Imam-training. In order to ensure that students have professional as well as religious skills we introduced journalism, mass media, teacher-training etc. into the syllabus. The core courses however consist of deep and broad Islamic studies. Deep because they go deep into real Islamic studies, and broad, because the course material is not sectarian. We present all schools of thought whether in matters of *Aqeedah* or Shariah. As well as sitting for exams or writing dissertations we expect our students to go out and

PROFESSOR ZAKI BADAWI is Principal of the Muslim College in London. He is also Chairman of the Imams and Mosques Council, UK, and a member of the AMSS Executive Comm. He began his studies at Al-Azhar in Cairo and obtained a PhD from the University of London. He has taught at Al-Azhar in Cairo; King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah; Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria; and also at the University of Malaya in Singapore. He frequently writes and broadcasts on Muslim affairs.

study the community. We want our students to know about the problems and characteristics of the community as it is now.

How would you Describe the Difference between the Muslim College and SOAS?

Religion-wise the courses at the Muslim College are much deeper and intensive. We have a different target and aim, we want all rounded students, not just graduates with a speciality in one area.

What are your Personal Plans for the Future.?

I have been around the world looking for someone to take over the Muslim College. I have wanted to retire for a long time. Preferably someone who has had experience in running a university. I don't want this project to disappear once I disappear. I would continue to teach but I would like to have some time to write books. If you know of anyone, be sure that I am the first to know! ☺

Modernising the Terms of Debate

Trevor Phillips, who was Chair of the Runnymede Trust when the Commission was set up, recalls its background and aspirations, including the hope of developing new terms and concepts.

When, in the mid 1990s, the Runnymede Trustees sat in an office perched high above London to consider the Trust's future, two things were evident. First, that after nearly 30 years of being in the vanguard of race relations thinking and research, it was time to take a reality check on our own understanding of the British people. Second, that the growing diversity of the UK, particularly in cities like London, presented a major new challenge for all those concerned with race and ethnicity.

For me, as a working journalist who wrote and broadcast often about these issues, there was a further problem. The language of race was largely borrowed from the United States, and looked increasingly appropriate. We spoke of black and white in a nation where people of South Asian origin felt uneasy about being bracketed with others of very different backgrounds. We argued about race in a country where new faith communities—particularly those of the Muslim faith—were flexing their muscles. We

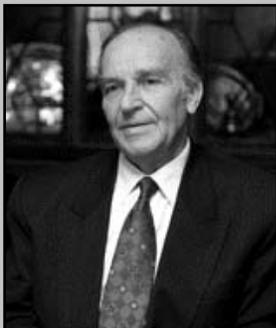
reported on ghettos in cities where very few districts have a majority of any ethnicity minority household.

I felt that if we could achieve one single thing, it would be to modernise the terms of debate about the British people themselves. The team assembled by Bhikhu Parekh is high-powered, and the debates which I attended were both profound and open-minded. These are rare qualities in any discussion of race and ethnicity. I believe that the effort they put in has been rewarded. This report ('The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain'), tackles some fundamental questions, and I hope will put diversity in a new, less narrow context. I think it will provoke a timely and important debate.

■ *Trevor Phillips is a Trustee of the Runnymede Trust, and Chair of the Greater London Assembly, 2000.*

■ *Article first appeared in The Runnymede Bulletin, issue no. 323, September 2000.*

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In recognition for a distinguished career and service to the field of Islamic thought and international politics, the AMSS (UK) is honoured to present its 2001 Lifetime Achievement Award to Alija Izetbegovic.

As well as former President of Bosnia-Herzegovina Alija Izetbegovic is also a respected scholar and writer. He is best known for his book *Islam Between East and West* which was originally published in 1984 when he was a political prisoner in Communist Yugoslavia. The book has gone on to become a European bestseller and hailed by many as a landmark analysis of the the human condition and the West's relationship to Islam.

British Muslim Women and September 11: From Margin to Centre

Whilst 2001 can be described as *Annus Horribilis* for British Muslims, 2002 has not started off that well either...

January saw excited news headlines about the young men from Tipton found to be amongst Al-Qaida suspects held by the Americans in Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. They, apparently, were 'normal' lads enjoying 'normal' activities such as drinking, smoking cannabis, clubbing, playing football, girlfriends and leading secular lifestyles. Then they 'discovered Islam' at which point they began to grow their beards, abandoned their Western clothes for Arab garb, stopped speaking to non-Muslims and gave up their 'normal' lifestyles before materialising in Afghanistan as fully fledged 'Islamic terrorists'. We also heard much speculation as news of two female al-Qaida suspects were arrested in the UK followed by the death of a Palestinian woman 'suicide-bomber' in Israel and questions raised as to whether her suicide marked a new phase in the current Palestinian Intifadah or whether her actions were those of a lone female.

For Muslims located and residing in the West, the reporting of events post-September 11 has made for some uncomfortable reading and listening; media biases were abound prior to September 11 as far as Muslims were concerned, but the proliferation of articles and stories that display anything but profes-

sionalism and insight has been alarming. A quick analysis of the reporting around the 'British Taliban / al-Qaida' suspects shows how easily journalists fall into the now tired but fixed dichotomised discourse of the 'modern, Westernised and secular' versus 'traditional, fundamentalist, religious extremist' when discussing Muslims. This dichotomy is especially prevalent when Muslim women are the subject of journalistic and academic scrutiny.

Against this backdrop then, what does it mean to be a 'Muslim Woman' in Britain today? In any context, academic or otherwise, the very term 'Muslim woman' is a loaded concept and now particularly so since September 11. The British imagination, encouraged by agendas set by the Western dominated media and academia, has always held a certain fascination with Muslim women—exotic, erotic, licentious, seductive, mysterious, visible but frustratingly unavailable, oppressed, repressed, subaltern, victim—the variety of adjectives used to conjure up images of Muslim women swing from one extreme to another. Is it any wonder then that located within various competing gendered, racialised and regulating discourses such as religion, colonialism and imperialism, representations of Muslim women in Britain appear, for the most part, to be unsurprisingly 'fixed'?

Both historical and contemporary encounters continue to embody Muslim women through cultural and religious constraining frameworks as essentialised oppressed figures of victim-hood and despair but also as sexualised and fetishised 'Others'. Neither representations offer the possibility of empowerment through social or political agency. Typically and most famously noted by Edward Said (1995) these Orientalist discourses rely upon the construction and legitimisation of binary relationships which situate non-Western belief systems and cultures as 'inferior' and 'backward'. Within a diasporic context, these embodiments are no less prevalent as popular fiction, media, documentaries, narratives and academic endeavours reproduce these processes of objectification under the guise of social and political frameworks (such as anti-racism and multiculturalism) that also rely and focus on reductive depictions of religion and culture.

Since September 11 the huge media interest in the British Muslim community and their responses to the atrocities against the United States have sprouted a number of experts, analysts and surveys, all of which have a lot to say about Muslims. Some seek to genuinely understand Muslim frustrations and educate against irrational prejudices and stereotypes against Islam and Muslim communities, whilst others have sought to focus on the extreme elements, playing on fears of 'Islamic terrorism' and the 'enemy within'.

Discussions about Muslim women since September 11 have either continued with a 'victim' focus or have sought to explore the nature of 'Islamic feminism' or empowerment through an increasing number of articles profiling younger, professional British Muslim women.

Muslim women, veils and burqas (often perceived as one and the same) and the subjugation of women in Afghanistan, have featured heavily in an increasing number of accounts with virtually everyone expressing an opinion. 'Liberal fundamentalists' such as journalist Polly Toynbee (self-confessed 'Islamophobe'), the acerbic and deliberately provocative columnist Julie Birchill (who once described Islam as 'shit' and burqas as 'mobile prisons'), and even the British Prime Minister's wife, Cherie Blair, who, following the lead of George Bush's wife Laura, spoke of the burqa as a symbol of women's oppression, have all had something to say about Muslim women.

At this time more than ever, with so much being written about us, and yet, so little being published by us, we need to ask ourselves the question, 'where are the voices of British Muslim women?'. Note the distinction: to what extent do we, as British Muslim women, still remain objects of curiosity for the Western media and are still denied the operational license to define ourselves in our own words? This may well be a very academic discourse to launch into but, in speaking to a number of emergent and prominent Muslim women post-September 11 and after reading and listening to a number of newspaper articles and radio and TV debates, and even having participated in some of these myself, it has become recognised as a question of power and ultimately, who controls the power to define ourselves.

The most obvious and most disturbing interruption into the lives of British Muslim women came within hours of news of the attacks on September 11. Muslim women, especially those visible because of the *hijab*, were victims of indiscriminate physical and verbal assaults as a direct result of media hype and

speculation pointing fingers towards so-called 'Islamic terrorists'. How quickly they all forgot the dangers of unsubstantiated conjecture after the Oklahoma bombing. As pictures of a small number of Palestinians celebrating and handing out sweets in response to news of the terrorist attacks were rapidly and repeatedly broadcast across the globe, Muslim organisations across the UK and elsewhere in the Western world, began to hear appalling reports of a rapid anti-Muslim backlash. There were numerous incidents of buildings, mosques, Muslim homes, and Muslim people being physically and verbally attacked, receiving telephone and email threats. Even non-Muslims like Sikhs, became the targets of ignorant racists for simply looking 'Arab' or 'Muslim'. Working for a brief period from the offices of FAIR (Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism), I was privy to a number of cases involving attacks on women. Other organisations such as the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) and the Muslim media such as The Muslim News and Q-News—themselves targets of abuse—were also receiving reports of a marked increase in the number of assaults inflicted upon innocent Muslims in revenge for the attacks on the World Trade Centre once the full scale of the atrocities became apparent and as speculation and anger mounted.

Visible, *hijab*-wearing Muslim women, were amongst the most vulnerable. Women wearing headscarves in the UK are generally used to stares of curiosity as they go about their daily business, but now they noticed how expressions had changed to looks of hatred and mistrust. At its mildest, this change in attitude has manifested itself in the form of verbal abuse and threats, to women being refused entry onto

buses, being spat at in the street, or having their headscarves pulled off. More sinister cases were attracting the attention of the British media such as the case of the young woman who was attacked by youths with baseball bats and required hospitalisation following severe head wounds, or another woman who was attacked by a fellow passenger on a bus smashing a beer bottle over her head.

Homes were firebombed, Muslim schools and Muslim schoolchildren threatened and bullied in the playground. An Afghan taxi-driver was himself viciously assaulted by some passengers and left paralysed from the neck down. A report published by the Islamic Human Rights Commission at the start of this year showed that many instances of religious hatred went unreported to the local police—people for the most part, expected some level of anti-Muslim sentiment, but also knew that there was little the police could do. A climate of fear was in the making. Fearful of future attacks and assaults, some Muslim women began calling organisations such as the Muslim Women's Helpline (MWH) asking if, in the interim, it was permissible to remove their headscarves in an effort to keep a low profile.

Whilst the increased religious bigotry has represented one facet of the ways some Muslim women's lives have changed, acting ironically, to curtail the very freedoms of movement for women that the Taliban had been accused of inflicting, another change has been occurring. The curiosity I spoke of earlier has manifested itself in numerous thought provoking articles on Muslim women and feminism. Behind these is no doubt a genuine effort to seek an understanding about Islam and to de-mystify 'Muslim women'. It can also be

argued, that muslim women as 'spokespeople' have proved to be far more effective in promoting positive inter-faith relations.

Since September 11, the defiance of a vocal minority of radical Muslims (almost exclusively male), who were previously dismissed for being 'more talk than action', are now a cause for concern. Their refusal to condemn the attacks on the States outright, their persistence in maintaining that large numbers of British youth are being trained to fight alongside the Taliban, their open support for bin Laden and their insistence that the West is at war with Islam, have, it can be argued, contributed to the rise in hostility against Muslims. Newspapers and politicians have demanded that British Muslims prove their loyalty to the State as age-old suspicions about 'militant Islam' grow (as evidenced in some rushed in amendments to the Anti-Terrorism Act) and the views of an extreme (male) minority are blasted out across the networks.

While the extremists have lapped up the oxygen of publicity they so desperately crave, and contributed towards the negative stereotyping of British Muslims as the 'enemy within', representatives from the larger, established Muslim organisations in Britain have indirectly contributed towards a patriarchal, fixed image of Islam. Almost exclusively male-led and dominated, self-appointed, and frankly, senior in years, many younger British-born and educated Muslims have wondered who these organisations claim to represent. This has left something of a vacuum as far as representations of Muslims goes. The views and experiences of Muslim women have only recently begun to be featured, but very often, either as victims or as objects of curiosity.

When mainstream Muslim organi-

sations have called upon women to join committees, it is often perceived as a tokenistic gesture; the 'big' media work is left to the men with few exceptions. Even then, superficial issues around representation (e.g., *hijab*-wearer or non-*hijab* wearer) can sometimes outweigh the content and quality of a contribution. However, British Muslim women, whilst eager to confront stereotypes, are also wary of alternative agendas with many preferring to avoid self-promotion and the lure of television cameras. This is, strangely, a difficult concept for non-Muslims to grasp, who will almost automatically assume that the absence of women is indicative of male imposed restrictions. For instance, last November (2001), the BBC conducted a telephone survey of British Muslims' attitudes to the war in Afghanistan, but instead of focusing on the results of the survey, more attention was paid to the fact that only 30% of the respondents were Muslim women! It seems that categories such as 'Muslim woman' have, as a result of the essentialising of 'difference', become 'erased' and abstracted. The Algerian sociologist Marnia Lazreg argues that by adopting pre-determined and over-arching religiously defining paradigms that shape and regulate discourses used to describe the experiences of 'Muslim women', Western feminists (and others) assert authority over 'their' objects, attaching their own interpretations of religious meaning into the everyday lives of Muslim women. These paradigms in turn, become so deterministic and dominant they negate the opportunity for other frames of reference and offer little thought as to why, when and how religion intersects with women's lives.

So where does this all leave us? For some such as academics like myself, our careers have undoubted-

ly benefited—a bittersweet way to gain recognition and notoriety, but also a huge burden of responsibility to shoulder. But the 'war against terrorism' is not over. We are currently watching, and waiting nervously for news of the situation in the Middle East, Kashmir, and threats of extending the 'war on terrorism' to Iraq (and other 'Axis of Evil' countries), whilst the bombing in Afghanistan continues and innocent lives continue to suffer. ♪

Fauzia Ahmad

Fauzia Ahmad is a researcher based at the Department of Sociology, University of Bristol. She is also a member of the AMSS (UK) Executive Committee.

THIS IS A SUMMARY OF A PRESENTATION GIVEN AT THE CENTRE FOR ISLAMIC STUDIES, SOAS, ON 30 JANUARY 2002.

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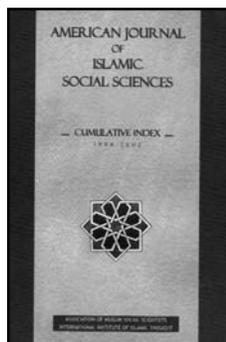
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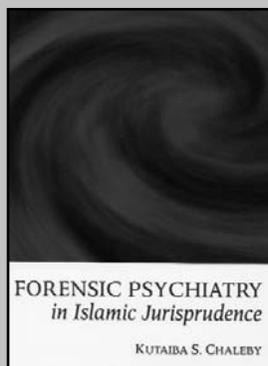
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