

SUNNI MUSLIMS IN BRITAIN

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Abstract

In this paper, I contextualise the Muslim presence in the UK, beginning with examining the significance of the concepts of 'migration', 'Diaspora' and 'transnationalism'. I then consider how Islam has been institutionalised in Britain as part of the different stages of the migration process, dwelling in particular upon ethnicity and the influence of reformist and traditionalist movements transplanted to the UK, both in terms of the construction of religious beliefs, practices and identities amongst Muslims, and the representation of Islam to non-Muslims in national-level umbrella organisations, which have been unable to entirely transcend intra-faith and intra-ethnic polemics.

Keywords: Migration, Britain, Reformist, Traditionalist Muslims.

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Introduction

If we describe Sunni Muslim groups in Britain as 'reformist' and 'traditionalist'¹, the former includes movements from the Middle East and the Indian Subcontinent (Salafi, Wahhabi, Muslim Brotherhood and Jama'ati Islami, respectively); whereas the latter could be Deobandis and Barelwis from the subcontinent. This category is in terms of maintaining traditional forms of religious system including education, authority, *ijtihad* and *taqlid*.

Both traditional and reformist movements claim legitimacy by contesting the right to present true Islam and transmit their methods and teachings to indigenous-born young Muslims (see Geaves, 2009: 102). Traditionalists basically advocate the virtue of the past with strong adherence to four Sunni schools of law, whereas the reformists always claim to purify religious belief and practices influenced by customs and mystics in order to return to pure Islam practiced by the first three generations. The intra-Muslim relations amongst these Sunni movements sometimes become more complex that such sub-groups of Sunni Islam radically fight each other in terms of excluding one another from the main branch of Islam, even accusing one another for being infidel (*kafir*). For instance, Salafi thought in Britain is well-known with its enmity towards Sufi practices, and thereby the Barelwis are found in the centre against not only reformist rhetoric from the Arabs but also from their own ethnic Muslim fellows from the Indian Subcontinent, i.e the Deobandis and Jama'ati Islami, (see Geaves, 2000: 53-4; 2005: 5). All these groups exist within Sunni Islam, and either conflicts or dichotomies all revolve around issues, which emerged with modernity.

In the context of Britain, according to Geaves (2009: 102), traditional Islam is under threat from better organised reformist movements that differ from each other in their agenda and, hence, cannot form any unity. Pre-modern reform movement Wahhabiyya (Birt, 2005), twentieth century reformists including Salafiyya (Meijer, 2009) and the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as more radical groups, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir and al-Muhajirun (Taji-Farouki, 1996; Wicktorowicz, 2005; Gilliat-Ray, 2010)

¹ See the works of some analysts including Fazlur Rahman (1979), modernist, fundamentalist and reformist; William Shepard (2004), secularism, islamism, and traditionalism; John L. Esposito (1991), secularists, conservative, neo-traditionist, and Islamic reformist; Youssef M. Choueiri (1990), revivalism, reformism, and radicalism; John O. Voll (1994), adaptationist, conservative, fundamentalist, and the personal and individual; and Charles Kurzman (1998), customary Islam, revivalist Islam, and liberal Islam.

become a significant and increasingly important phenomenon in that context, with interesting crossovers as well as conflicts between them.

These latter two marginal groups, as the main instruments of “global Islam” (Roy 2004: 177), target the second or third generation, indigenous-born, native-language speaking Muslim youth motivating into ‘neo-Wahhabi’ tendencies (Geaves, 2009: 102). Thus, they criticise Sufi-laden traditional Islam or dominant religious identity of the first and second generation Muslims in the West. According to Oliver Roy’s analysis, in the aftermath of political Islam’s failure (Roy, 1994), ‘neofundamentalism’ has taken on an active role, its ideologues specifically seeing this failure as “an opportunity, not a loss”, targeting the Muslim youth in the West to create a “universal religious identity” disconnected from any specific culture or far from any traditionalist tendency of religious identity. In summary, the reproduction of ethnic and sectarian rivalry between the reformist and traditionalist movements prevents any contribution to potential development of a uniquely British or even Western form of Islam (Geaves, 2009: 105).

Colonial connections were at the heart of the economic migration of “over twenty million” Muslims (Nielsen, 2004:161) to Europe in the postcolonial period, with the social, cultural, ethnic and religious diversity of Diasporas constituting a microcosm of the global Muslim community (*ummah*). This paper contextualises the Muslim presence in the UK, beginning by examining the significance of the concept of ‘Diaspora’ which is important because its terminological scope widened with later additions, such as ‘guest-workers’, ‘immigrants’, and so on (Vertovec, 1999). I continue by reviewing the migration process and how Islam has been institutionalised in Britain, dwelling in particular upon the dynamics of reformist and traditionalist movements, including their ongoing influence on the representation of Islam in national-level umbrella organisations, which have been unable to entirely transcend intra-faith polemics.

Muslim Migration to Britain

In the post-colonial era, economic globalisation has been one of the most influential factors shaping the inter-relationships of Muslims with other countries. There has been massive migration from Muslim lands to Europe, for example from the Indian subcontinent to Britain, from Algeria

to France, and from Turkey to Germany. Since the 1960s and 1970s the terminology surrounding migration has increasingly been expanded. In addition to the term 'migration', which simply suggests movement from one location to another, 'Diaspora' and 'trans-nationalism' have also come to prominence since the 1990s especially (Tölölyan 1996; Cohen 1997; Vertovec 2000; Baumann 2000). Sean McLoughlin (2005a: 527) examines the historical usage of such terminology, and argues that social groups such as 'immigrants', 'ethnic minorities', 'exiles', 'expatriates', 'refugees', 'guest-workers' and so on, have all been re-imagined as 'Diasporas' today. However, Diaspora is best understood in terms of continuing consciousness of an ethno-national homeland. Furthermore, in a globalized age, rapidly changing communications technology enables people (including Diasporas) to maintain contact with others around the world more quickly and easily than in the past. Under these conditions, he states, "Diasporas can become '*trans-national*'" (2005a: 527), that is simultaneously rooted in more than one place across the borders of nation states through circulations of people, goods, money and ideas. As compared to container models of the nation-state, Mandaville argues that:

Transnationalism provides a better way of understanding social formations organised across or beyond various territorial polities, it also provides a better account of Muslim politics under globalising conditions. (2007: 276)

Religions may not constitute Diasporas themselves, but being 'cognate phenomena' in the theory of Robin Cohen (1997: 187), they provide 'additional cement' and serve to enhance the social cohesion of ethnic groups which remain crucial to the understanding of Muslim minorities.

In the context of Britain, Geaves (2007) studies the relationship between religion and ethnicity further, and points out the three major categories requiring elaboration: 'ethnic culture' (for example, Pakistani, Indian, and so on), 'Qur'anic Islam' (and Islamic 'orthodoxy' more generally) and 'British culture'. The interaction of these three categories, produces various outcomes and tendencies shaped by generation and other factors. Furthermore, Geaves states:

In the first stages of migration, the major interactions take place between British culture and ethnicity. Islam principally plays a functional role as a marker of identity as first-generation Muslims engage in micro-politics focused on community building. However, the second generation find themselves drawn towards British identity as a natural allegiance of birth and as a result of

socialisation processes. However, the tensions that can exist between the loyalties of parents towards ethnic identity at the place of origin and the social norms of the new culture can be very difficult to negotiate. Thus, we find British-born Muslims beginning to move away from the engagement between ethnic cultures and to develop a discourse based on religion as their primary identity (2007: 18).

Thus, “religion as passive instrument of ethnic identity” (Knott, 1992: 5) has shaped and continues to shape ‘British-Muslim’ identity but the dynamics are changing. Reformist and traditionalist movements find a new voice among those religiously serious second- or third-generation British-born Muslims. Nevertheless, the increasing emphasis on religious identity itself produces quite different Muslim orientations, rather than one single Muslim community of Britain.

As McLoughlin (2005a: 540) has pointed out, the particular contexts of migration and settlement have a number of consequences in the Diaspora. Muslims initially came to Britain as sailors and travellers in the sixteenth century, and a century later, it is reported that more than 40 Muslims were residing in London and working as tailors or shoemakers (Ansari 2004). These early migrants were from Ottoman territories, and their presence was a direct result of interaction between the British and Ottomans. In addition, the British extended their power over those Muslim lands in South Asia and, with the opening of Suez Canal in 1869, in the Middle East and Africa (Ansari, 2004: 27-8). Seamen from Muslim colonies such as Yemen, Somaliland, Malaya, and India (Ansari, 2004: 36) travelled to Britain, as did servants, nannies, soldiers, and so on. Muslims stayed mainly in port cities such as Liverpool, Cardiff, Glasgow, or South Shields. In between the two world wars, former seamen and soldiers especially moved into the Midlands, Yorkshire, and Lancashire, finding jobs in textile mills as unskilled or semi-skilled employees (see Ansari, 2004: 47; Gilliat-Ray, 2010: 42-3). It was these pioneers who formed the bridgeheads for later settlement, especially amongst South Asian Muslims.

In the second half of the twentieth century, labour migration from Muslim lands was the most significant movement into Europe: Turks to Germany, North Africans (especially Algerians) to France, and South Asians (Pakistanis, Indians and Bangladeshis) to the UK (Nielsen 2004: 161). All migrated in order to fill the labour shortage in these industrialised European countries. In Britain, the immigrants, often peasant farmers, were generally from rural regions such as Mirpur in Pakistani administered ‘Azad’ Kashmir and Sylhet in Bangladesh (Ballard, 2002: 5).

Operating as international commuters, men came to industrial cities for a number of years to earn money and send remittances home before returning there only to be replaced by a kinsman.

Roger and Catherine Ballard's migration model (1977: 51) illuminates that, following the pioneers and the international commuters, migrants began to bring their wives and children to the UK and this process continued until the 1980s. Gradually, this process encouraged Muslims to see themselves as 'settlers' rather than 'sojourners' (Lewis, 1993: 37). However, the need was still existing for "networks and institutions which would allow them to carry on practicing religion and culture" (Joly, 1995: 7). Hence the close connections between homeland and diasporic institutions and organisations emerged. Thus there is a tendency to emphasise 'tradition' over 'translation', 'ethnicity' over 'hybridity' (McLoughlin, 2005a:540). Initially, in the early days of migration and in locations where the numbers of Muslims remained small, mosques were shared, as a process of 'fusion-cooperation' temporarily over-rode ethno-cultural and sectarian origins. However, as numbers grew, so did the reproduction of ethnic and sectarian affinity or 'fission-fragmentation' (Lewis, 2002: 56; McLoughlin, 2005a: 540), as can be seen in the settlement of Muslims in Leeds.²

While "disunity because of ethnicity" (Mandaville, 2007: 297) has been a major issue for Muslims from within their own communities, they have often felt themselves as 'other' in Britain, often being employed at the lowest level of the labour chain and encountering "considerable racial discrimination" from wider society. In seeking to transcend exclusion, Islam has become a key focus for the identity of Muslims in Britain especially when they have been criticised or attacked by others on the basis of their religion, such as over the Rushdie affair, and later '9/11' and '7/7'.

The Establishment of Islam in Britain

When the Prophet Muhammad migrated from Makkah to Madina in 622 AD, the first task for Muslims was to build up a mosque, which would bring believers together for religious, social, educational, and political purposes.

² See Bayram, Aydin, *Sunni Muslim Religiosity in the UK Muslim Diaspora: Mosques in Leeds compared*. The University of Leeds, PhD Thesis, 2013.

Muslims in Britain adopted the same methodology, initially using houses converted into mosques. The first arrivals were not so much interested in the establishment of religious institutions since they expected to return to their homeland with their earnings (see Geaves, 2007: 15). Later on, as the community developed and families joined the migrants, there was a proliferation of religious institutions throughout Britain. Even purpose-built mosques appeared on the streets of metropolitan cities. The first purpose-built mosque in Woking, the Shah Jahan Mosque, was founded in 1889 (www.shahjahanmosque.org.uk Accessed on 25 Feb. 2013).

Mosques and Islamic schools were a sign that Muslims desired to preserve their religious identity. By 1985, the number of registered mosques was 314, and that figure had risen to 452 by 1990 (Nielsen, 2005: 46). Nowadays, it is estimated that there are about 1500 mosques (Charity Commission, BMG Surveys of Mosques, 2009), serving Britain's 2.7 million Muslims.³

As McLoughlin (2005a: 540) states, "the idea of congregation can become more significant than in the homeland, as public meetings for worships provide an opportunity for socialising." In similar vein, Stephen Barton (1986: 179) reports that the mosque he studied in Bradford was a refuge for Muslim immigrants from the stresses of life in British society. In addition to the conventional functions of the mosque (prayer, preaching, religious education), some other roles such as "library, publishing, resolution and consultation centre, social gatherings, marriage, and so on" (Joly, 1995: 75) have been added in Britain. Mosques have also become a sort of representative political medium between local authorities and Muslims, linking with various departments of social services, such as schools, prisons, the police, and hospitals, as well as maintaining interfaith-dialogue with other religions. Consequently, mosques in Britain have become a nerve centre of community life for Muslims in Britain, functioning as a place of worship, a supplementary school for both children and adults, as well as a meeting point for socio-cultural events.

Another important institution is the religious school (*madrassa*) or seminary. In the formative stage of institutionalisation, imams were found among migrants or imported from migrants' countries of origin to work

³ This figure is according to the 2011 census data given by Office For National Statistics (ONS). http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?newquery=*%&newoffset=25&pageSize=25&edition=tcm%3A77-286262 (Accessed on 13 December 2012)

in Britain. Although this continues under the watchful eye of government by “tightening entry controls” (see Birt, 2006: 694-5), community leaders have established educational institutions (Islamic seminaries) for training students in the traditional Islamic sciences with a view to producing British-trained imams and religious teachers. There are now at least 25 seminaries in the United Kingdom, one having been established in the 1970s, three in the 1980s, eighteen in the 1990s and three in the 2000s (Birt and Lewis, 2010: 94). Seminaries are organised in terms of South Asian sectarian traditions. Seventeen seminaries belong to the Deobandi tradition, five are Barelwi, one Azhari, one Nadwi, and one Shi’a. Only five provide education for girls. The age criteria in these seminaries for all students is up to 16 (ibid, p.94). The curriculum and capacity of students who graduate each year can be summarised thus:

Discounting the numbers of women being trained, there are nearly 2,500 young men studying in such seminaries. Considering that roughly half of these students normally go on to pursue the full alim [Islamic scholar] course of six years after completing the memorization of the Qur’an (hifz), and that the dar al-ulums established after 1997 have yet to produce full graduates, a reasonable estimate is that currently around 140 `ulama graduate in Britain every year, a small proportion of whom having come from abroad will return home to serve their communities. The potential capacity of the sector is approximately 250 a year, which could be achieved by 2010. (Birt and Lewis, 2010: 96)

Despite this capacity, “85% of the estimated 2,000 British imams are foreign born” even today (Birt, 2006: 694). The graduates take positions in the “prison and hospital chaplaincies” (see ibid, p.698-700) but are sometimes thought too expensive or independent minded to be popular with congregations.

Sunni Muslim Religious Movements Transplanted into Britain

In the post-modern period, the religious life of Muslims continues to be shaped by a number of reform and traditionalist movements and having reviewed the background of ‘traditionalist’ Deobandis and Barelwis and the ‘Islamist’ Jama’at-i Islami and Muslim Brothers in the previous section, I now focus on their institutionalisation in Britain.

As in British India, so the traditionalist Deobandis “tried to be as independent as possible of the British state” (Modood, 1992: 145). Thus,

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they focused their effort internally on education by establishing religious seminaries [the overwhelming majority of seminaries, 17 out of 25, belong to Deobandis (see Birt and Lewis, 2010: 94)] throughout Britain. As early as 1967 the Deobandi *'ulama* founded the Majlis Ulama UK (Geaves, 1996:163), an organisation designed for organising conferences, planning tours of visiting preachers, printing calendars and posters to establish correct times for prayers, and so on. Through the *dar al-'ulums* and graduates from these schools, the Deobandi movement has contributed disproportionately to the supply of imams and religious teachers. Modood (1992: 145) notes that 'through active proselytization they build up a mass following as well as an international reputation in Islamic learning'. In other words, through the work of their sister-organisation, Tablighi Jama'at (their work is not only at a local and national level, but also transnational), the Deobandi movement has become globalised. In national level, however, Yahya Birt states that:

The main challenges for the movement have been firstly to appeal to a younger British-born constituency that is actively disembedding 'pure' religion from what is seen as the composite religio-cultural Islam offered by their parents, and secondly to respond to emergent Salafi and Islamist critiques of following religious scholarship (taqlid) and failing to take Islamic politics seriously. (2005: 184)

Despite sometimes being characterised as 'isolationist' (Lewis, 2002: 219), in the last decade especially through a new generation of activists the Deobandi movement has expanded its interaction and cooperation with the wider society, working with local schools and colleges, promoting community liaison with the police, MPs and policy makers, publishing Islamic literature, public lecturing on Islam, making interfaith and having a support group for drug and alcohol abuse (Birt, 2005: 189). The other traditionalist movement, the Barelwis, are representatives of the traditions of Sufi mysticism from the Indian subcontinent. In Britain, those associated with the movement in some way are probably amongst the largest of British Muslim working class constituencies: "the majority of Pakistanis in Britain are Barelwis" (Modood, 1992: 145). Flexibility is a feature of their behaviour, as is a more positive attitude to the state (Robinson, 1988: 10). The Barelwis do not see living under a non-Muslim state as a threat. Modood states that:

unlike the Deobandis, they are not apolitical [but] they, unlike the fundamentalists, have no political grand plan; under the Raj they cooperated with and were favoured by British rule...Their

religious passion is usually aroused when their doctrines and forms of worship are denounced by Deobandis and fundamentalists as un-Islamic historical accretions. This intense sectarianism has led to and continues to lead to serious violence in Pakistan and there are not many towns in England which have mosques and have not witnessed such a clash. (1992: 146)

In Britain, the Barelwis are divided into several regional groups and in terms of networks associated with particular *pirs* (Sufi masters) and orders such as the “Qadiris, Chishtis, and Naqshibandis” (Geaves, 1996: 101). Geaves quotes one of the leading figures of the movement in the UK, Mawlana Shahid Raza Khan, who hints at why the Barelwis are so fragmented and have struggled to organise themselves as effectively as the Deobandis:

though the ulama believe in tariqas, all is not well within those institutions: existing pirs who came here frequently from Pakistan and other parts, they do not hold moral and spiritual values like their ancestors, they want to build school or spiritual centre and uneducated people respond to them warmly, furthermore pirs have lack of Islamic knowledge (1996: 102).

In Britain, three factors have sometimes worked together to temporarily overcome the usually disparate nature of the Barelwi tradition:

Reaction to the publishing of Salman Rushdie’s book, the Satanic Verses; fears for the future of the younger generation; the arrival in Britain of resident charismatic pirs who are forming powerful groups of Barelwis amongst British Muslims (Geaves, 1996: 105-6).

However, fragmentation and division continues to be a hallmark of the movement.

Thirdly, of all the South Asian Muslim movements, the most comprehensive structure and ethos belongs to the JI, despite its small numbers. However, “with Saudi money and support it is better nationally and internationally, organised than the other two” (Modood, 1992: 147). Until the 1990s, when Middle East origin movements began to have an impact on the UK, reformist and Islamist orientations in Britain were most associated with elite JI-related organisations. Eschewing the project of an Islamic state in the British context, nevertheless “it was the student and young professional migrants of the JI-related organisations who

developed a *da'wah* (mission) strategy based on the creation of a revivalist counter-culture" (McLoughlin, 2005c: 62).

The JI is represented in the UK mainly by four organisations: "The Islamic Foundation (IF), The UK Islamic Mission (UKIM), Young Muslims UK (YMUK), and The Muslim Educational Trust (MET)" (Nielsen, 1989: 232). First, the UKIM, founded in 1962 (www.ukim.org), concerns itself with mosque facilities (prayer, sermons) throughout the country and provides training programmes (*tarbiyah*) for members and associated members to train mentally and spiritually to carry out the work of the movement (Geaves, 1996: 200). Second, the IF which was founded in 1973 (www.islamic-foundation.org.uk) and is currently located in Markfield, about nine miles outside of Leicester, functions as "a training and educational institution; a research organisation; and a publishing house" (ibid, p. 202). For the wider society, it also provides programmes and courses such as a Home Office-endorsed Cultural Awareness Training programme on Muslims in Britain for non-Muslim professionals, and post-graduate degrees in Islamic studies in the Markfield Institute for Higher Education (MIHE), validated by Loughborough University (McLoughlin, 2005c: 58). Third, there is the YMUK (www.ymuk.net), formed in 1984 on the initiative of 27 young Muslims representing various local youth groups who met in Spencer Place, in Leeds, to form a national organisation (Geaves, 1996: 206). The membership, made up mainly of university undergraduate and post-graduate students in Britain, is involved in activities campaigning for universal aspects of Islam by asserting that Islam is not the property of any particular culture. Fourth, the MET, established in 1996 (www.metpdx.org/index.html), is dedicated to monitoring the requirements of Muslim children in the British school system. Its activities range from providing materials for teachers to give Islamic Studies lessons in English to Muslim children in state schools; publishing books and posters on Islam; to issuing guidelines to that effect on such matters as sex education, diet, dress restrictions and participation in sports (ibid, p. 207- 8).

Having outlined the establishment of the South Asian background movements in Britain, I can now go on to describe some prominent movements originating from the Middle East that have been influential in shaping Sunni Muslim identity in Britain. Either through migration flows or *da'wah* (mission), reformist movements in Britain target a wide range of the ethnic composition of the Muslim communities.

In Britain, as Gilliat-Ray (2010: 71) has claimed that, from the 1970s onwards, Saudi Arabian-backed projects have been presented in terms of 'mission' (*da'wah*), such as the building of mosques and Islamic centres and the large-scale publication of books propagating Wahhabi thought. Madawi al-Rasheed (2005: 156-7) points out the role of important religious institutions financed by Saudi Arabia in London, such as The Islamic Cultural Centre and al-Muntada al-Islami, and their impact on British Muslims. Furthermore, Birt (2005: 168) argues that, in academic circles, less attention has been given to the implications of the link between the al-Saud family and the Wahhabi '*ulama* for the export of Wahhabism abroad. The Wahhabi '*ulama* were encouraging worldwide mission (*da'wah*) to spread the 'one and true correct Islam' elsewhere. The *da'wah* mission has been supported by British-born graduates from the Islamic University of Medina gaining special training at the faculty of *da'wah*. When they returned to the UK, they formed the Jam'iyat Ihya' Minhaj al-Sunnah (JIMAS) in 1984 as an instrument to disseminate Wahhabism (Birt, 2005:172). Wahhabism is often used synonymously with Salafism,⁴ the way of life and religious practices of the first three generations of the Muslim community. Birt argues that in recent times all Islamic movements in the UK have had to respond to the challenge to interpretations of Islamic orthodoxy that Wahhabism represents.

Salafiyya and Muslim Brotherhood (MB, *Ikhwanu'l Muslimin*) are other Middle Eastern originated movements operate in Britain. The usage of the term 'Salafi' from pre-modern times onwards is a broad-based Islamic thought that refers to those who try to emulate the first three generations of Muslims. Thus, the term is pervasive in the revivalist and reformist discourses. It cannot be confined to any particular movement or group, given that almost every reformist thought desires to return to a pristine Islam. A Wahhabi, a member of the Jama'ati Islami or Ikhwan'ul Muslimin, or a Deobandi can claim that (s)he has *salafi* thought. "So while *salafis* share a broadly similar ideological orientation, they differ markedly in terms of their methodological strategies" (Gilliat-Ray, 2010: 68).

It can be recalled here that the hallmark of 'Islamist discourse' is a call for a return to the practices of the ancestors (*salaf u salihin*), and reform (*islah*) of religious practices. Subsequently, the Salafi thought influenced

⁴ Reformist movements, such as Jama'ati Islami and Muslim Brotherhood, also claim that their thought is Salafi or they aim to return to pristine Islam (see Gilliat-Ray, 2010: 68). Throughout this thesis, this claim is also evident from the discourses of these movements.

the reformist movements both in the Middle East –the MB- and in the Indian subcontinent – the JI (Gilliat-Ray, 2010: 70).

The aforementioned reformist movements from the Middle East share *Salafi* thought in their activities in Britain. The demand for ‘authentic’ Islam (Gilliat-Ray, 2010: 71) among British Muslims is similar to the experience of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries’ reform movements. Furthermore, Gilliat-Ray states that social influences have played a role in this regard:

There is rarely meaningful overlap between secular education in mainstream schools, and religious education in makatib, sometimes delivered by ineffective religious leaders from the South Asian villages and towns of their parents and grandparents. This dissonance can cause some degree of educational confusion. Similarly, the conservative traditions of parents and grandparents are no defence against the direct or perceived experience of Islamophobia (2010: 72).

In the midst of all the ethnic and sectarian complexities of religious life, there is “the Salafi thought articulated by charismatic religious authority figures” (ibid, p.72). The target of Salafi thought is the younger generation of Muslims from the South Asian background, preferably British-born, who seek a ‘cohesive Muslim identity’, and potential converts who search for a ‘rationalized Islam’ (Hamid, 2009: 392). The usage of English as a medium plays a pivotal role in that process. Sadek Hamid further states:

Asian Muslim young people tired of “cultural Islam” and a religious leadership that was distant and unable to communicate with them found in the Salafi perspective a “de-culturalised” Islam, an approach to religious commitment that seemed to be intellectually rigorous, evidence-based and free of perceived corruptions of folkloric religion or the “wishy washy” alternatives offered by rival Islamic tendencies (ibid, p.390).

In seeking ‘authentic Islam’, cultural and transported factors in interpreting religion amongst South Asian movements motivated young Asian Muslims to accept Salafi thought. Salafi thought in Britain has also emerged with a particularly virulent anti-Sufi rhetoric, opening up the historic conflicts between the Barelwis and the Deobandis imported from the subcontinent (Geaves, 2000: 53-4).

As for the MB, as Gilliat-Ray (2010: 76) has pointed out the movement “does not officially exist in Britain”. Nonetheless, there are some

organisations that derive their inspirations from it. The Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) and The European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR), were both founded in 1997, the former for the political representation of Muslims, and the latter for claiming religious authority for European Muslims. The MAB became prominent in 2002 by engaging with the 'Stop the War Coalition', and led to the establishment of the British Muslim Initiative and the Cordoba Foundation in 2006 (Gilliat-Ray, 2010: 76). In the inaugural meeting of the ECFR in London, more than 15 scholars from around the world attended and approved a draft constitution (www.e-cfr.org, accessed on 12 March 2010). The current president is Dr. Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, a Qatar-based Muslim scholar with a reputation gained through satellite TV programmes on Al-Jazeera TV.

Finally, some radical political organisations in Britain, such as *Hizb ut-Tahrir* and *Al-Muhajirun*, also share a background in *Salafi* thought. Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) was founded in Palestine in the 1940s. The founder, Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani, described HT as a political party with Islam as its ideology and with the goal of resuming an Islamic way of life by establishing an Islamic state which will implement Islam and propagate it worldwide (Taji-Farouki, 1996). HT was banned from British university campuses by the National Union of Students in the 1980s and 1990s and is banned from many European countries today (Abbas, 2007: 3-14). A UK splinter group, Al-Muhajirun, was founded by Omar Bakri Muhammad in 1996. He had much success in maintaining the HT's political ambitions and infiltrating university Islamic societies in Britain before its actions began to be viewed with suspicion. Eventually, al-Muhajirun was disbanded by its leader in 2004 (see Wiktorowicz, 2005).

Briefly comparing these movements and their orientations in the UK, it is possible to say that South Asian traditionalists especially have maintained 'isolation strategies', which has sometimes led to them to be hopelessly adrift from contemporary life (Geaves, 2007: 23-4). Differences in the details of religious life are still reproducing a culture of polemics, with one group accusing another of deviating from orthodoxy. For example, the Barelwis identify themselves as Ahl-as Sunna wal-Jama'at (Geaves, 2009: 102), the people of the Prophet's way and community, claiming legitimacy and authenticity and being true representatives of Sunni Islam in the UK. This allows them to counter the reformists' central criticism that their Islam is impure and full of innovations and cultural accretions. By contrast, the Barelwis accuse other reform groups such as the Deobandis and Jama'at-i Islami as being Wahhabi.

Nevertheless, there have also been elements of co-operation and alliance-making in evidence. Going back to the 1970s and 1980s, Modood (1992: 149) argued that JI was in receipt of Saudi money to advance a shared project of *da'wah* (mission). More politically engaged than its traditionalist counterparts (McLoughlin 2005c), JI has nevertheless understood the importance of a working relationship with the Deobandis, a larger constituency with whom it shares a conservative agenda. As for the Deobandis, Birt (2005:174) states, too, that “they have encouraged the younger British-born *‘ulama* to accept aspects of the Wahhabi critique of Sufism”.

Thus, it is important to note that the categories of traditionalist and reformist overlap sometimes, and the situation on the ground is more complex than that suggested by typologies. For example, the Barelwi and Deobandi movements strictly encourage their members in following a particular school of law, the Hanafiyya (Metcalf, 1982: 141). In that sense, both share a traditionalist attitude. Both also have something in common in imitating *Chisti*, *Qadiri* and *Naqshbandi* Sufi orders (see *ibid*, p.158 for the Deobandis; and Geaves, 1996: 101 for the Barelwis). However, the Deobandis differ from the Barelwis, and oppose some Sufi practices, such as celebrating the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad and visiting Sufi shrines. In this regard, the Deobandis approach the Salafi-Wahhabi attitude against mysticism and popular Sufism. Similarly, the JI and the MB share the same thought with the Deobandis, but the JI and MB are against *taqlid*. They insist on disregarding the whole gamut of Islamic thought and practices accumulated over thirteen centuries, as we have already noted above.

Who Speaks for British Muslims?

In Britain, the first official Muslim representation can be traced back to the establishment of the Liverpool Mosque and Institute (LMI) in 1891. Ansari (2004: 122) notes that its activities, which included lectures and talks, as well as social solidarity (almsgiving to poor and homeless people, regardless of their religion), gradually extended to a national and international audience through subscriptions to its publications from Europe and the Muslim world. This success culminated in the appointment of the LMI's founder, William H. (Abdullah) Quilliam, as *sheikh al-Islam* (religious authority) of the British Isles by the Ottoman sultan (Geaves, 2010). The outbreak of the First World War was a

deterioration in the relationship between Britain and the Muslim world, and this adversely affected the LMI and Muslims in Britain. However, as mentioned above, the first purpose-built-mosque in Woking and its offshoot, the Muslim Society of Great Britain, became the symbolic centre of British Islam until the early 1960s, as Ansari (2004: 341) has argued.

As we have seen, when families joined migrant workers in the UK post 1960, there was a mushrooming of mosques and educational institutions in line with ethnic and religious orientations (for example, Indian Deobandi, Pakistani Barelwi). Institutions from the home country were reconstructed in Britain and ethnographic works by Barton (1986), Gilliat-Ray (1994), Lewis (1994), Joly (1995), Geaves (1996), McLoughlin (1997), and Werbner (2002) document this process very well. Ansari (2004: 343) has claimed that external factors also reinforced migrant's emphasis on ethnic distinctiveness: "from 1960s to the 1980s British governments, both local and national, saw migrants primarily in ethnic terms." This contributed to the processes whereby Muslim organisations became concentrated in racial and ethnic ghettos. Given the complexities of collective identities and the different contexts in which people live their everyday lives, the common bond of Islam has not always been uppermost for Muslims in Britain. Nevertheless, in seeking to represent a common front 'beyond sectarianism' (Lewis 1994) to local councils and wider society, local umbrella organisations such as the Bradford Council for Mosques were established from the 1980s to pursue claims for public recognition in arenas such as education. The Rushdie affair in 1988-89 projected such questions onto the national level for the first time, reflecting both the impact of global Islamic revival upon British Muslims and also frustration with a race relations industry that refused to see Muslims as 'Muslims' (McLoughlin 2005c): religion was being emphasised as "a major identity marker around which to organise" (Morey and Yaqin, 2011: 46).

However, if mosques were well established in various local UK contexts, the Rushdie Affair underlined the weakness of Muslim organisations on a national level (McLoughlin, 2005c). The Union of Muslim Organisations of the UK and Eire (UMO founded in 1970) was largely ineffective and came before its time, while the UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs (UKACIA, founded in 1988 as an alliance of some Deobandis and JI in response to the Rushdie Affair) struggled to find a government that was willing to listen in the 1990s. The case of these two organisations illustrated not only that to be successful they would need a receptive audience but also that Muslims would find it difficult to overcome

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entrenched ethnic and religious difference. The UKACIA, for instance, was in competition with other Muslim organisations such as Kalim Siddiqi's Muslim Institute. In 1992, he established the Muslim Parliament "as an independent national forum on which all Muslims, irrespective of denomination or racial origin, can meet to pursue their common objectives."⁵ Such discrete voices and claims of Muslim organisations to represent the whole Muslim community in Britain led to the intervention of the British government. "Conservative Home Secretary, Michael Howard, advised Muslim activists to speak with one voice" (McLoughlin, 2005c: 60).

This intervention prompted the UKACIA to form a National Interim Committee on Muslim Affairs, and the committee then consulted more than 1000 organisations on the need for a new umbrella body to represent Muslims, similar to the Board of Deputies of British Jews (ibid, p.60). Eventually, the committee inaugurated the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) in 1997. Having more than 500 affiliations⁶ throughout the country, and with the backing of a New Labour government more receptive to Muslim calls for public recognition at the national level, for a time the MCB served as "the Muslim community's interlocutor with the British government," (Mandaville, 2007: 295).

However, in the aftermath of 9/11, "the MCB fell out of favour when it did not support the so-called 'war on terror'," (McLoughlin and Abbas, 2010: 549), and since then, the relationship between the British government and the MCB has been problematic following various press exposés of the reformist Islamist heritage of some MCB activists in JI and MAB.⁷ In 2009, for instance, Communities Secretary, Hazel Blears, suspended all communication for about a year when the MCB's deputy general secretary (Dr. Daud Abdullah) was signatory to a declaration of support for Hamas's military actions against Israel (Morey and Yaqin, 2011: 84). As Philip Lewis (2007: 67) has argued, other significant Muslim groups also felt uncomfortable with the MCB's "conservative rhetoric with the dominance

⁵ <http://www.muslimparliament.org.uk/history.htm> (Accessed on 10 April 2012)

⁶ See the MCB's 2009-10 Annual General Meeting report, available on http://www.mcb.org.uk/uploads/AGM_REPORT%202009_2010.pdf (Accessed on 18 March 2012).

⁷ The establishment of the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) in 1997, mainly consisting of Arab Muslims with "historic connections to the Muslim Brotherhood" (McLoughlin and Abbas, 2010: 549).

of Deobandi tradition". This culminated, though not very successfully, in the establishment of the British Muslim Forum (BMF) and the Sufi Muslim Council (SMC) in 2005 and 2006, respectively. These two have largely become "home to Barelwis and other Muslims with Sufi networks" (ibid, p.67) but they have not yet sufficiently overcome internal divisions to prove as effective as the MCB on a national level.

It is clear from the above that ethnic and religious diversity is at work here. The common bond of Islam amongst the Muslim community in Britain is often lost in the complexity of ethnic and cultural priorities and political ideologies that engender other unities on a particular matter. To some extent, the British state has sought to do what Muslims could not achieve, by establishing an advisory council that comprises all the groups mentioned above, plus the Shi'a, in the form of the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB) (founded in 2006) (Mandaville, 2007: 295). Its executive board consists of members from the MCB, the MAB, the BMF, and the al-Khoei Foundation (an umbrella Shi'a organisation).⁸ In spite of the fact that this organisation is mainly involved in mosque maintenance and management issues, and in training imams to be able to meet the demands of British Muslim society, it could prove a significant space of intra-Muslim dialogue although not on theological issues. Putting aside 'sectarian' differences, it aims to meet the needs of British Muslim society. However, on the evidence of this research, the MINAB has faced 'ethnic' and 'sectarian' challenges which the previous national umbrella organisations experienced.

Religious Beliefs, Practices, and Authority of Sunni Muslim Communities in Britain

Migration is not a new phenomenon for the Muslim community, for even in the early days of Islam Muslims fled from Mekka to Ethiopia and later to Medina in order to emancipate themselves from the oppression of the Mekkan people. In the European context, the mass migration was supposed to fill the labour shortage. Most migrants sought to earn money and enjoy a better way of life by coming to Europe. It must be highlighted here that:

⁸ <http://www.minab.org.uk/about-us/executive-board> (Accessed on 16 March 2012)

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Islamic sources allow a Muslim to live in a non-Islamic environment depending on the believer's intention and under three conditions: to be free to practice, to bear witness to the message and to be useful to Muslims and society as a whole (Ramadan, 1999: 170).

The three conditions contain important aspects of Islam-freedom in practicing religion, representation of Islam, and positive contribution to both Muslim community and non-Muslim society- that ideally are expected from the Muslim communities in Britain. In reality, although the first condition is secured with some other rights,⁹ for the last two conditions, as we will witness through the following chapters, in the case of Leeds' Muslim communities the situation is substantially different.

The diversity in belief and practice among Muslims is interesting for me in that within the Sunni branch of Islam, there are some differences in religious life, such as identifying prayer times, combining two prayers at the same time, the celebrations of *eid* (the religious festivals: *eid al-fitr* and *eid al-adha*) on different days even though living in the same city, and so on. Furthermore, as regards belief matters, the debates raging in nineteenth-century India (Metcalf, 1982:301) have been reproduced in the British context (Lewis, 1993; Geaves, 1996).

Such diversity among the groups mentioned above forms a kind of polemic among Sunni Muslims, who are accusing each other of being deviant from orthodoxy. The tendency towards representing the views of others as inaccurate or false is the typical discourse between these groups. For example, the Barelvis identify themselves as Ahl-as Sunna wal-Jama'at (Geaves, 2009: 102), the people of the Prophet's way and community, claiming legitimacy and authenticity and being true representatives of Sunni Islam in the UK. This allows them to counter the reform groups' central criticism that their Islam is impure and full of innovations and cultural accretions. By contrast, the Barelvis accuse other reform groups such as the Deobandis and Jamaati Islami of being Wahhabi. The background of the South Asian Muslim communities in India and their institutionalisation in Britain was studied by Ron Geaves (1996) – Sectarian influences within Islam in Britain with reference to the concepts of 'ummah' and 'community'- by reflecting the 'sectarian' features of the Deobandi, Barelwi, and Jama'ati Islami. On the one hand, such conflicts are

⁹ Tariq Ramadan has pointed out that in European societies, at least five fundamental rights are secured: "the right to practice Islam, knowledge, establish organisations, autonomous representation, and appeal to the law" (1999: 136-7).

still going on between these groups; on the other hand, some events, such as the 'Rushdie Affair' and the 9/11 and 7/7 bombing events, have urged Muslims to negotiate not only with other Muslims but also with the wider society at the local and national level. The Bradford Council for Mosques (Lewis, 1994:143) and the Leeds Muslim Forum (see Chapter 5) as local representatives, and the Muslim Council of Britain as a national umbrella body can be mentioned in that regard.

Conclusion

Having outlined the ethos of reformist and traditionalist movements from the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East, I can argue that their presence in the same territory, in Britain, is an opportunity for Muslim communities from different parts of the world to know and understand each other better, and gain an experience of intra-religious pluralism. However, certainly there are sectarian influences directing Muslims, for the purpose of ideological aims, to convince the British Muslim audience to adopt their own rhetoric and way of life. Disagreement on almost every socio-religious issue is a common outcome among Muslim communities in Britain.

Meanwhile, there are also elements of co-operation among them. The close relationship between the Wahhabi and South Asian ones (Deobandi and the JI) has been revealed. As Birt (2005:174) states, "for Deobandis, they have encouraged the younger British-born *ulama* to accept the aspects of the Wahhabi critique of Sufism". As regard the JI organisations, Modood (1992:149) has argued, "the JI established them well with Saudi money" for the sake of *da'wah* mission.

If we make a distinction between the aforementioned movements, whether of a traditionalist or reformist tendency, these overlap sometimes, and thus the situation has become more complex. For example, from the South Asian movements, the Barelwi and Deobandi movements strictly encourage their members in following a particular school of law, the Hanafiyya (Metcalf, 1982: 141). In that sense, both share a traditionalist attitude. Both groups have also something in common in imitating *Chisti*, *Qadiri* and *Naqshbandi* Sufi orders (see *ibid*, p. 158 for the Deobandis; and Geaves, 1996:101 for the Barelwis). However, the Deobandis differ from the Barelwis, and oppose some Sufi practices, such as celebrating the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad and visiting Sufi

shrines. In this regard, the Deobandis move into the Salafi-Wahhabi attitude against mystic or popular Sufism. The Jama'ati Islami and the Muslim Brothers share the same thought with the Deobandis, but the members of JI and MB are against *taqlid*. They insist on disregarding the whole gamut of Islamic thought and practices accumulated over thirteen centuries, as we have already noted above.

It is the fact that, during the migration process the movements brought existing institutions into Britain by emphasising 'ethnic' and 'sectarian' factors. Although the nineteenth and twentieth century movements provided forms of religious expression and supplied information on religious life, they maintained 'isolation strategies', while 'otherness' rhetoric led to them being hopelessly adrift from contemporary life and riven by sectarian differences (Geaves, 2007: 23-4). Living in a non-Muslim country prompts a number of questions: how do Muslims practice their religious life including prayer, commercial and family relationships in terms of implementing Islamic law (*Shari'a*)? What is the source of religious authority over Muslims in Britain? Where do Muslims get legal opinions (*fatwas*) while living in a non-Muslim country?

Leeds University's Community Religions Project (CRP) has investigated a number of researches regarding the minority religions. One such study, the seminal work of Stephen Barton (1986), *the Bengali Muslims of Bradford: a study of their observance of Islam with special reference to the functions of the mosque and the work of the imam*, documents the place of the mosque and the role of the *imam* amongst the Bengali Muslim community. Philip Lewis (1996) further contributes to the literature by examining, *the functions, education and influence of the ulama in Bradford's Muslim communities*.

The focal point for religious authority is the local mosque along with its imams and religious experts. The circle then expands with Shari'a courts, ¹⁰ fatwa centres like the ECFR, and information and advice found on the internet.

¹⁰ There are about 85 *Shari'a* courts operating across the UK, and some of them (such as in London, Birmingham, Bradford, and Manchester) have been granted official rights to enforce the rulings with the full power of the judicial system, while some others are still operating unofficially. They are dealing with a number of cases ranging from divorce to inheritance. (The Times, 14 Sept. 2008, www.timesonline.co.uk accessed on 31 March 2010) A recent work by Samia Bano (2004) shows how *Shari'a* courts work as a mediation and reconciliation mechanism in British society.

Britain's Sunni Muslim reformist and traditionalist movements have had big impacts on the forging of Sunni Muslim religiosity, including beliefs, practices, and religious authority. The persistence of ghetto-type settlement fosters ethno-religious affinity of Muslims in practicing their religion. The local mosque functions as an assembly point for religious and socio-cultural activities as well as being a religious authority in identifying prayer timetables, the start and end of Ramadan, and religious festivals ; and providing a *fatwa* service. Typically, alienation from other Muslim communities and prejudices towards them under various labels, such as 'Deobandi', 'Barelwi', 'Wahhabi', 'reformist' and 'radical extremist', is a common phenomenon. For the younger Muslims, however, the awareness of other Muslim faith ideas and practices begins on the university campuses, since Islamic societies contextualise a diverse Muslim student population from different backgrounds.

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