
Islamophobia and Muslim Recognition in Britain

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Over the past decade, Muslims in Britain have been the focus of increasing public attention. One widespread form of such attention has been highly negative: Muslims have been portrayed in all kinds of media in very derogatory and vilifying ways. Among the effects of such depiction, which has contributed to what is now widely referred to as "Islamophobia," Muslims in Britain have been subject to considerable discrimination and even violence. At the same time, however, another form of public attention has been much more positive. Muslims have made very significant strides in achieving multiple forms of recognition and accommodation in a variety of public spheres and institutions in Britain, right up to representation in the House of Lords. How are these two simultaneous yet opposite trends to be understood?

Background

For more than two hundred years, a variety of South Asian religious traditions were present in Britain, mainly through the presence of small numbers of sailors, students, and emissaries. However, such presence did not have much public profile or social impact. Prior to the Second World War, small pockets of Muslim men, particularly Yemeni and Bengali sailors, were found in port cities such as London, Cardiff, and Glasgow. Islamic practices were maintained in a more or less formal manner, but for the most part the Muslim presence in Britain was inconspicuous. It was only during the years following the war that a large, permanent, visible, predominantly South Asian, and—eventually—politically active Muslim population grew in Britain.¹

The growth in the numbers of settled and largely South Asian Muslims began with the rebuilding of the British economy following the Second World War. This restructuring called for an infusion of unskilled and semiskilled labor in industrial sectors that were poorly paid and otherwise deemed undesirable by many indigenous Britons. Such was the case in many kinds of factories surrounding London and in the Midlands, and especially in the textile towns of the north (such as Bradford, Leeds, and Manchester) where new machinery necessitated round-the-clock shift work.

In many areas of the (at that time recently decolonized) South Asian subcontinent, a variety of men had forged links with Britain by way of colonial administration, military service, merchant seamanship, or even trips as itinerant peddlers within Britain itself. These individuals acted as bridgeheads for "chain" migration flows to follow, while some

British companies advertised directly in India and Pakistan for workers to come to Britain and gain employment. Throughout the 1950s, citizens of the British Commonwealth had almost unrestricted right of entry into Britain.

Chain migration—by which individuals migrated and subsequently brought over relatives and friends, who, in turn, brought over their own relatives and friends—characterized the influx of South Asians through the late 1950s into the 1960s (that is, until well after various kinds of legislation were introduced to limit immigration). The first, “pioneer” immigrants found jobs and accommodation in some industrial towns, with subsequent immigrants called over to join them. In this way, settlements of persons from the same family, village, or district became established in a single neighborhood of a British city. Concentrations of immigrants from specific parts of South Asia thus grew in specific parts of Britain. With respect to the Muslim population, the north of Britain is largely settled by Pakistanis, especially from the Mirpur district of Azad Kashmir. Bangladeshis from the area of Sylhet are most numerous in East London, Gujarati Indians live in large numbers across the Midlands, and all groups are dispersed throughout north and west greater London.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the bulk of the South Asian population of Britain was composed of men. These workers had left their wives and families behind with the goal of working and saving money in Britain for a number of years before returning home to contribute to the material well-being of their immediate families and to help enhance the general prestige of their overall extended families. Islamic practice among the immigrants in these years was limited to individual daily prayers, often performed alongside factory machinery. Eventually, some collective prayer was held in makeshift prayer rooms or in houses roughly converted into mosques. No large formal religious undertakings, purpose-built mosques, organized religious education, or sermons by Imams were part of the scene for most Muslims in Britain at this time.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, successive immigration laws basically ended the primary flow of South Asians to Britain. However, by this time, many had decided to settle in Britain on a permanent, or at least a longer-term, basis; this, therefore, entailed the reunification of South Asian wives and children with their men in Britain. Coincidentally, in the same period, the “Africanization” policies in some East African countries drove out the once well established Indian (mainly Gujarati) communities. Tens of thousands, including substantial numbers of Indian Muslims, therefore arrived as refugees in complete family units. The new and growing presence of complete South Asian Muslim families, together with their intention of remaining in Britain, dramatically transformed both the extent and the nature of the Islamic presence throughout the country.

The rapid development of Muslim organizations in Britain can be observed in the proliferation of mosques, *madrasas* (religious supplementary schools), and Muslim associations. Like the general size of the Muslim population, the number of such institutions rose rapidly in the 1970s. This growth doubtless is linked to the reunion of families (and the arrival of other families from East Africa) during this period. The increasing presence of families stimulated thoughts of permanent settlement for the immigrants and refugees. This, in turn, raised awareness of the need for a variety of forms of communal religious expression: mosques for collective prayer, *madrasas* and Qur’anic schools for religious education of the young, formal associations for local and national coordination with regard to funding, and liaison with government authorities to lobby for

religious accommodations and safeguard collective rights. The growth of such institutions also reflects the fact that by the early 1970s, immigrants had gained greater familiarity with local British administrative structures relating to, among other things, planning permission, charitable status, and allocation of public resources.

Although the first known mosque in Britain was established in Woking in 1889, the religious landscape of Britain really began to change only after the beginning of postwar migration. In 1963 a total of 13 mosques were registered in Britain; this number increased to 49 mosques in 1970, 99 in 1975, 203 in 1980, and 338 by 1985.² These figures, however, represent only those mosques officially registered. Many more have been established by Muslims in Britain, particularly very small ones based in converted houses (often unapproved by local government). One recent survey suggests that there are at least 849 mosques in Britain, registered and unregistered, and an additional 950 British Muslim organizations.³ These mosques and organizations now serve a sizeable Muslim population.

According to the 1991 census, of a British population of 55 million, South Asians constitute 1,479,645; of these, 840,255 are Indians, 476,555 are Pakistanis, and 162,385 are Bangladeshis.⁴ It is estimated that of this total South Asian population, perhaps 44 percent are Muslim, two-thirds of whom are Pakistanis.⁵ A sizeable proportion of each of these groups, it should be noted, is made up of “East African Asians” (and smaller numbers of Indians from Mauritius, Fiji, and the Caribbean) whose social, cultural, and economic patterns may differ from those of their counterparts who came directly from the subcontinent. Estimates of “community” numbers vary widely. While Muslim groups themselves estimate that there are about two to three million Muslims in Britain, academic guesses range from one to one and a half million.⁶ In any case, Muslims are the largest religious minority group in Britain. Religious affiliation is especially difficult to derive, however, since official sources such as the census have not included a religion question.

Many estimates of the number of Muslims in Britain are made by counting persons who were born in largely Muslim countries or who belong to households headed by such.⁷ For persons originating from countries that are not wholly Muslim, such as India, the proportion of Muslims in the country of origin is taken into account with regard to the population from that country now resident in Britain. However, such a method of counting may be quite misleading, given different regional origins, migration strategies, and settlement histories among persons of different social-religious backgrounds. This method of estimating the number of Muslims by country of origin is also unsatisfactory because it considers only persons of a general Muslim heritage. It counts as Muslims those who may not consider themselves practicing (many Iranians, for instance, left Iran after the Islamic revolution specifically because they were not religiously inclined) and does not count a large number who do (including British converts or Muslims coming from countries often not considered to have much of a Muslim presence, such as Indian Muslims from Fiji, Mauritius, Trinidad, and Guyana). Therefore some observers make a distinction between “active” membership (which is almost impossible to enumerate) and “community” membership (which is based on gross counts based on place of origin).⁸

The differing regional and linguistic origins of each religious community within the British South Asian population account for ongoing social and cultural complexity.

Certain beliefs and practices (including specific rites, roles, texts, lore, calendars, and patterns of worship) characteristic of local contexts in the subcontinent have been reproduced in Britain, especially where large numbers of persons from these contexts have settled. These include Sufi-derived practices and collectivities centered on specific *pirs* (saints or holy men) among Mirpuri Muslims. Further, several sects or schools of thought and teaching within Islam are now found in Britain, including Barelwi, Deobandi, and Ahl-i-Hadith traditions.⁹

In the 1950s and early 1960s, the British South Asian population consisted mainly of pockets of men whose day-to-day existence was centered solely on working and saving money. Religious life was little organized, mostly individualistic, and often drew believers from a range of differing regional, linguistic, or other backgrounds. With the settlement of family groups in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a variety of Muslim organizations rapidly proliferated. Each South Asian religious group in Britain has now organized itself (including considerable efforts at fund-raising) and has negotiated with local government bodies for specific forms of accommodation. Finding appropriate places of worship usually has been the first item on the agenda. Catering to the needs of specific ("sectarian," linguistic, even extended-family-based) local Muslim communities, the proliferation of organizations has created a context in which mobilization of Muslims into a unitary movement have been extremely difficult to achieve. Lack of unity among Muslim groups and associations has significantly hampered the processes of public recognition and accommodation, both locally and nationally, for many years.¹⁰

Arguably the most successful effort at Muslim unification in Britain came in November 1997 with the inauguration of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB). MCB is an umbrella organization of some 250 local, regional, and national Muslim institutions. It came as the culmination of various steps taken during the 1990s by the United Kingdom Action Committee on Islamic Affairs. (UKACIA was set up by British Muslim professionals to present a moderate Muslim public image, while lobbying for the recognition of various minority rights, in the wake of the Rushdie Affair of the late 1980s.) It became clear that such an umbrella organization was needed when in 1994 the then (Conservative) Home Office secretary demanded that Muslims form a single representative body or he would not even speak with them.

The aims of MCB include promoting consensus and cooperation in the community, giving voice to issues of common concern, removing disadvantages and discrimination faced by Muslims, fostering a better appreciation of Islam and Muslim culture, and working for the good of society as a whole. With a view to representing all British Muslims, MCB lobbies government departments (especially the Home Office), organizes public events attended by key figures (including the prime minister), holds consultations with public bodies such as the Metropolitan Police and with newspaper editors and journalists, issues press statements on a variety of contemporary issues, publishes a regular newsletter, and maintains a multilevel website (www.mcb.org.uk). Its primary aims are to change negative public images and attitudes toward Muslims and to campaign for an end to the myriad forms of religious discrimination that characterize the notion of Islamophobia.

To what does Islamophobia in Britain refer, then, and how do various organizations such as MCB propose to combat it?

Islamophobia

In the mid-1980s, certain confrontational statements about the accommodation of minorities in British state schools were made in a right-wing journal by Ray Honeyford, headteacher of a Bradford school. This stimulated much public debate over the place of minorities in British society, strategies of assimilation or cultural pluralism, and whether an apparently racist headteacher should be in charge of a largely Asian/Muslim school.¹¹ Throughout the debate, Bradford Muslims held demonstrations calling for his removal. The case was important insofar as it raised consciousness and the will to voice concerns among Muslims in Britain (and particularly in Bradford¹²) about issues of stereotyping, discrimination, and treatment of Muslim needs within public institutions.

"The Honeyford affair" was soon surpassed in terms of public attention by "the Rushdie Affair."¹³ Although it broke some time after the book was actually published, the "Affair" rapidly broadened and in a way eventually concretized the place of Muslims in the public sphere. The nature of media coverage surrounding the Rushdie Affair transformed the dominant view toward Muslims in Britain.¹⁴ The book burning in Bradford on January 14, 1989 (orchestrated by Muslim groups as a media event, yet without much forethought as to its 1930s' Nazi allusion), was seized on by the press as evidence of an "uncivilized" and "intolerant" Muslim nature. The February 1989 *fatwa* of Ayatollah Khomeini, calling for the death of Salman Rushdie, was taken as further evidence of this intolerance, which was portrayed as a worldwide Muslim threat that had infested the body Britain. Little attention was ever given to the Muslims' own perceptions and feelings of offense and hurt beyond the public demonstrations. Media treatment of the Rushdie Affair, which did include some irresponsible and inflammatory statements by alleged "Muslim leaders," created or bolstered an image of a Muslim population that was homogeneous in its antimodern values and dangerous in its passions, posing a challenge both to nationalist ideologies of "Britishness"¹⁵ and to liberal notions about freedom and human rights.¹⁶

Not long after the Rushdie Affair died down, the Gulf War again focused public attention on the British Muslim population. Because British Muslims were portrayed generally as somehow linked to a worldwide antiwestern, Islamic fundamentalist movement, their loyalty to the allied cause against Iraq was questioned.¹⁷ Since then, newspapers have given considerable attention to a great variety of Muslim-related matters. These include education, and especially the battle for government funding of the Islamic school in Brent; various mosque disputes; and almost anything to do with the so-called Muslim Parliament, which was an unsuccessful attempt under the controversial leadership of Kalim Siddiqi in the mid-1990s to unite British Muslims after the Rushdie Affair.

The late 1980s and 1990s have also been characterized by public concerns, on an international scale, with an undefined global movement called "Islamic fundamentalism" characterized by terrorist methods, antiwestern rhetoric, and antimodern, antiliberal sentiments.¹⁸ Essentialist notions of culture—by which all persons of a particular descent are considered to have the same social relationships, behaviors, and values—foster the view that there is such a thing as "the Muslim community." Further, this community must in essence be of the same nature as those "fundamentalists" seen in North Africa or the Middle East. So-called Muslim fundamentalists make political demands that pose a threat

to western established social and philosophical order. Because British Muslims increasingly make political demands, "common sense" logic argues that they must pose a parallel, if not identical, fundamentalist threat. Yet, when one examines the kinds of demands made by British Muslim organizations and spokesmen, it is apparent that for the most part they are asking only for an exercise of liberal rights according to wholly British procedures and standards. But, because the demands are made by Muslims, tarred with the same brush as Middle East extremists, they are usually not seen that way.

Throughout the 1990s, this kind of logic has been fueled by national events like the Rushdie Affair, and international developments, including terrorist activities by political Islamicists such as the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Tanzania in 1998. There has been a noticeable increase in derogatory images of Islam, patterns of anti-Muslim discrimination in employment, institutional intolerance of Muslim values, and occasional acts of physical violence against Muslims in Britain. All this is cited both by the Muslim press and by left-leaning newspapers such as the *Guardian* as evidence of a growing "Islamophobia" in Britain.

In 1996 the Runnymede Trust, an independent charity concerned with research and social policy surrounding race and ethnicity, established the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia. The following year the Commission published its report, entitled *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*.¹⁹ The key functions of the Runnymede Commission, expressed in its report, were media analysis and extended interviews with a range of British Muslims regarding their experiences of discrimination. It justified the neologism Islamophobia on the grounds that "anti-Muslim prejudice has grown so considerably and so rapidly in recent years that a new item in the vocabulary is needed so that it can be identified and acted against." For the purposes of the Commission, "Islamophobia" refers to "unfounded hostility towards Islam," as well as to "the practical consequences of such hostility in unfair discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities, and to the exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social affairs."²⁰ The Runnymede report contains sixty recommendations that address numerous policy domains. It was launched in a public meeting with the Home Secretary, and 3,500 copies were distributed to metropolitan authorities, race equality councils, police forces, government departments, unions, professional associations, think tanks, and universities across Britain.

The Runnymede Commission describes various dimensions of anti-Muslim prejudice in Britain, relying especially on numerous statements and images that have appeared in recent years in the media. The Commission observes that certain "closed" views of Islam that generally support a "clash of civilizations" perspective pitting "us/the West" versus "them/Muslims" are widespread in Britain. These include false assumptions that Islam is monolithic and static, has little in common with values and practices of other (especially western) culture and thus is inferior to western culture, is violent, aggressive, undemocratic, and supportive of terrorism, and therefore represents an enemy. The report of the Runnymede Commission subsequently describes anti-Muslim prejudice in the media, aspects of Muslim exclusion in employment, politics, administration, and health, violence against Muslims in Britain, issues concerning Muslims and the education system, and the role and state of law concerning aspects of Islamophobia.

Among its sixty recommendations, the Commission proposes that various national and local institutions undertake the following: review equal opportunity policies and

guidelines on good practice in employment, service delivery, and public consultation to ensure that these refer explicitly to religion, as well as to race and ethnicity; include religion in mechanisms of ethnic monitoring and ensure there is a question about religion in the 2001 census; review the procedures for the provision of state funding to religiously based schools; scrutinize measures and programs aimed at reducing poverty and inequality, with special reference to their impact on Muslim communities; urge all citizens to routinely report to the Press Complaints Commission when media coverage concerning Muslims is felt to be distorted; and urge the Press Complaints Commission itself to review its code of practice to strengthen statements about avoiding racial and religious discrimination.

By way of advocating greater recognition of British Muslims, the Runnymede Commission asks political parties to increase the likelihood that Muslim candidates will be selected for winnable seats and proposes the appointment of Muslims to the House of Lords. The key recommendation made by the Runnymede Commission, however, is for the introduction of some form of new legislation that recognizes violence and discrimination based on religion, alongside existing legislation that focuses on racial violence and discrimination. This reflects the campaigns of Muslims and others over many years for legislative remedies to Islamophobic discrimination and violence.

Among leading non-Muslim liberal intellectuals at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, the main issue in the notorious Rushdie Affair was freedom of expression for authors, although this was often affirmed without reference to the responsibilities of the authors themselves. To British Muslims, the issue at stake was not freedom of expression but, really, blasphemy. They were concerned with the kinds of offenses that were included under the British law of blasphemy and, most important, which religions it covered and whether offenses to religious groups such as slander and incitement to hatred were similar to offenses relating to "race" and ethnicity. The rise of specifically anti-Muslim forms of racism has been particularly marked since the Rushdie Affair, which has led to calls for new or extended legislation.²¹

In Britain, Muslims—qua-Muslims are not protected from discrimination by law. An important ruling by the House of Lords in 1983 (*Mandla v. Dowell-Lee*, following a head teacher's refusal to allow a Sikh boy to wear a turban in school) established that Sikhs—and, by extension, Jews—are considered an ethnic group and therefore are protected by the 1976 Race Relations Act. However, the court in 1988 (*Nyazi v. Rymans Ltd.*, concerning the refusal of an employer to allow an employee time off to celebrate *Eid al-Fitr*) ruled that Muslims do not constitute such a group and therefore are not protected by the act, since their regional and linguistic origins are more diverse.

The implications of this 1988 ruling were evident in a 1991 case (*Commission for Racial Equality v. Precision Engineering Ltd.*) after an employer stated that he refused to employ Muslims because he considered them extremist. While his anti-Muslim sentiments were not brought into question by the court, the employer was found guilty of indirect discrimination against Asians since most British Muslims are of such descent. The same ruling was made in the 1996 case of *J. H. Walker Ltd. v. Hussain*, when an employer refused an employee leave of absence to celebrate a Muslim festival. There have also been unsuccessful claims by Muslim workers in Yorkshire mills, who have alleged that Muslims are treated worse than other employees in terms of assigned tasks, pay rate, and holiday benefits. Recently numerous incidents of discrimination have been

highlighted by the Muslim press, which suggests that many employers (including, for instance, McDonald's) exhibit hostility toward Muslim women employees who refuse to remove their headscarves at work.

With the support of Muslim organizations and Muslim newspapers, the Commission for Racial Equality has advocated measures to redress the situation.²² These include a call for legislators to consider enacting special laws (as in Northern Ireland) against religious discrimination and incitement to religious hatred, similar to existing laws that pertain to all of the United Kingdom with regard to racial discrimination and incitement to racial hatred. The CRE also sees the need for changes in law concerning blasphemy; at present, only Christianity is protected under such law. The CRE and others believe that either the blasphemy law should be extended to other faiths or that it should be abolished altogether. Many Muslims prefer the former option, since this, they say, would remove *The Satanic Verses* from British bookshops. In its Second Review of the Race Relations Act 1976, the Commission concluded that

while the blasphemy law is concerned with certain forms of attacks on religion as such, a law of incitement to religious hatred is concerned with stirring up hatred against persons, identified by their religion. Arguments that freedom of speech should include the right to stir up hatred against persons inevitably seem limp, and the more so when this is done on grounds of religion, since the freedom to practise the religion of one's choice is itself recognised in international law. No country can be said to guarantee the freedom to practise the religion of one's choice if, at the same time, it permits others lawfully to stir up hatred against those doing just that.²³

In July 1993, the United Kingdom Action Committee on Islamic Affairs (UKACIA) issued a memorandum entitled "Muslims and the Law in Multi-Faith Britain: Need for Reform," which it submitted to the secretary of state at the Home Office. The document called for legislation in three areas that affect Muslims. There is pressing need, it said, for laws concerning (a) vilification of religious beliefs and practices, as well as group defamation, (b) incitement to religious hatred, and (c) discrimination on religious grounds. Such legal frameworks would likely do much to protect Muslims from certain emergent forms of "anti-Islamic racism," although their effect on local, everyday spheres of social, economic, and political life would probably be minimal. In 1994 the then Conservative home secretary was unmoved by the submission, rejecting the call for extended legislation on grounds of "lack of hard evidence of discrimination against individuals on religious rather than racial grounds."

In 1994, the CRE, in an attempt to collect evidence of cases of religious discrimination, conducted a survey of 2,047 agencies such as Race Equality Councils, Law Centers, Citizens' Advice Bureaus, and individuals such as lawyers and academics. Response to the survey was low, and the CRE received specific information on only thirty-eight cases of alleged religious discrimination. It noted that this finding was unsurprising, given the lack of monitoring mechanisms regarding this topic.²⁴ In 1995 the CRE established a Project Group to develop work further in this area and eventually concluded that "the overwhelming majority of those who participated in the consultation believed there was a need for legislation outlawing religious discrimination."²⁵

These issues have remained on the agenda of many concerned public bodies. Under the auspices of the Department of the Environment, Transport and Regions, in 1996

the Inner Cities' Religious Council published a statement, "Challenging Religious Discrimination: A Guide for Faith Communities and Their Advisors," which points to a number of policy areas surrounding religious discrimination and underlines relevant aspects of race relations legislation. In 1997, the CRE also issued a leaflet, *Religious Discrimination: Your Rights*, which calls to the attention of the public ways in which unfair treatment on the basis of religion can be redressed by way of existing legislation on grounds of indirect racial discrimination.

Once more in 1998, the extent of antidiscrimination law was probed. A High Court case involved a branch organizer of the British National Party who distributed "Rights for Whites" stickers and leaflets campaigning against Muslims and the conversion of an old dairy into a mosque. He was brought to court under section 23 of the Public Order Act and charged with possessing material that stirred racial hatred. The Queen's Council told the judge: "There has been a campaign in which offensive posters and stickers have been placed in and around the area of the mosque and in the civic centre. Muslims going to prayer at the mosque have been subject to verbal abuse and spat upon."²⁶ However, the Crown Prosecution Service concluded that, while the law was unclear, Muslims were a religious, rather than an ethnic, group and therefore not covered by the Race Relations Act or other race protection laws in the Public Order Act. One lawyer involved with the case concluded, "You're left with the absurd situation that you can be as rude as you wish against Muslims but you're not allowed to abuse Jews or Sikhs."

The change of government from Conservative to New Labor has been welcomed widely by campaign groups as a chance to increase awareness and action surrounding the plight of British Muslims. In 1998, a Religious Discrimination and Remedies bill was presented in Parliament that called for the outlawing of discrimination on grounds of religion and of incitement to religious hatred. John Austin, the Member of Parliament who introduced the bill, reiterated (1) that it is anomalous to have religious discrimination unlawful in one part of the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland) and not in another, (2) that employers are free to discriminate on grounds of religion but not race, and (3) that Jews and Sikhs are protected by law, but Hindus and Muslims are not.

In October 1999, however, despite arguments put forward by the new Muslim peers Lord Ahmed and Baroness Uddin, the call for an extension of the Race Relations Act to cover religious discrimination was rejected by Lord Bassam, Home Office minister in the House of Lords. Bassam, like the home secretary of the previous government, argued for yet more and clearer evidence that such anti-Muslim discrimination exists. He suggested that, when perpetrators attack Muslims, they do so not because of hostility to the tenets of Islam but for racist reasons. Bassam concluded that existing legislation is sufficient to protect Muslims and others from discrimination.

Despite this setback—or, rather, because of Bassam's reasoning—the Home Office has commissioned a research project at the University of Derby to survey the existing situation, look for evidence of religious discrimination, and suggest a range of possible policy responses. The Derby Project's Interim Report²⁷ first attempts to conceptually clarify a number of dimensions. Echoing the range of issues described in the report of the Runnymede Commission on Islamophobia, Derby's report includes distinctions between "religious prejudice" (stereotyping that leads to discriminatory behavior), "religious hatred" (attitudes that can result in intimidating and violent behavior), "religious

disadvantage" (lack of access to a range of social institutions or lack of equal provision in public institutions), "direct religious discrimination" (deliberate exclusion from opportunities, employment, or services on grounds related to religious belief, identity, or practice), and "indirect religious discrimination" (exclusionary effects of decisions, structures, or patterns of behavior and organization that can unintentionally result in discrimination, such as nonrecognition of dietary requirements).

Reviewing the state of legal responses to questions of discrimination against Muslims and other religious minorities, the Derby Report suggests that court rulings of "indirect racial discrimination" are highly unsatisfactory, especially since they are made very inconsistently. Further, the Report points out that even where courts may uphold an aspect of religious identity or practice by way of reference to ethnicity, judges and tribunal panels may nonetheless be reluctant to proscribe legal protection if it is seen to inconvenience the majority. For example, the Report recounts:

In *Ahmad v. Inner London Education Authority* the applicant, a teacher employed by the Authority, alleged that the Authority's refusal to allow him time off to pray amounted to constructive dismissal. In rejecting this on behalf of the Court of Appeal, Lord Denning argued that to give the Muslim community "preferential treatment over the great majority of the people" on the basis of a freedom to practice their religion would be counterproductive, provoking discontent "and even resentment" amongst Mr. Ahmad's colleagues.²⁸

So, despite numerous campaigns and high-profile activities by prominent public bodies, there is considerable frustration among British Muslims (again, as described by organs such as *Muslim News* and *Q-News*) that most instances of everyday discrimination remain unchallenged. It would be highly misleading, however, to suggest that the Muslim presence in Britain has gone unrecognized and unsupported. Over the past ten years especially, quite the reverse has been the case.

Muslim Recognition

Well before the Rushdie Affair, Muslim communities in Britain had become increasingly organized and articulate in their calls (mainly on the local level) for the recognition of minority rights, fair treatment, and political representation in a variety of public arenas. Muslim mobilization has called for the broad acceptance and accommodation of practices, values, moralities, and legal systems quite different from long-standing British traditions. The struggle to achieve these accommodations has consolidated and galvanized many local Muslim groups, associations, and umbrella organizations.²⁹

Over the years and in different cities, public accommodation of Muslim needs and concerns has included permission to establish facilities for ritual slaughtering of animals for food; to set aside areas of local cemeteries for Muslim use; to provide *halal* (permitted) meat in public institutions such as schools, hospitals, and prisons; to designate prayer facilities or time for prayer in the workplace and to allow time off for religious festivals; and to broadcast public *azan* or call to prayer from mosques over loudspeakers (though often at monitored decibel levels no louder than church bells).

Other accommodations also have been successfully campaigned for regarding Muslim concerns in the education system (issues described later). Now, particularly in cities

with large Muslim populations, such matters are not only often permitted routinely, but Muslim organizations are regularly included in local government consultations about matters concerning community relations. In some cities, they have effectively linked to provide a common front in dealing with local and county authorities, for example the Bradford Council of Mosques and Leicester's Federation of Muslim Organizations.³⁰ It has been on this local level that Muslim political engagement has emerged most strongly. Nielsen observes that "the decade until 1988 had witnessed a major change in the way in which Muslim organizations took part in public life. They had previously been marginal and often timid; they had tended to implicitly present themselves as ethnic minorities as they sought to fit in through the community and race relations structures. By the end of the decade many had laid claim to participation in the public space; they had effectively integrated into the organizational politics of the local scene functioning like most other special interest groups, standing out only by the express Muslim identity."³¹

One reason for this shift is doubtless the greater familiarity with and confidence felt by Muslims in engaging with formal structures such as government agencies. Part of this familiarity and confidence came through the emergence of a younger generation of Muslim community activists and organizers who had been raised and educated in Britain. Another reason for the shift is likely linked to the changes in the late 1970s and early 1980s, with the expansion of local government funding of minority groups.³²

The formal political route has been of increasing importance for British Muslims. Direct party political methods have not been successful. In 1991, for instance, the Islamic Party of Great Britain contested its first seat but did not receive much support. Although that situation has not changed much, Muslims do figure importantly in the strategies and concerns of mainstream political parties. Local politicians are always sure to meet with designated Muslim leaders who promise to deliver "the Muslim vote." It is the Labor Party that has traditionally received the bulk of Muslim support in Britain; this is particularly evident in the success of Muslim candidates for Labor in local government elections. In 1981 only three of Bradford's ninety councilors were Muslim; by 1992 there were eleven Muslim councilors, including the deputy leader of the ruling group. Bradford also boasted the country's first Asian, and Muslim, Lord Mayor in 1985-86. The city of Leicester has produced not only a number of Muslim councilors but also a Muslim chief executive, as well as a Muslim chief police superintendent. In June 1994, Waltham Forest produced the first Muslim woman to be elected mayor. Muslim representation in local government continued to expand considerably throughout the 1990s. At present there are some 150 Muslim councilors in local government across Britain.³³

Nationally the Labor landslide in the election of 1997 brought with it the first Muslim Member of Parliament, Muhammad Sarwar, representing the seat of Glasgow Govan. Unfortunately, Sarwar was soon thereafter suspended, though eventually acquitted, following charges of electoral fraud. Soon after coming into government, Labor also appointed three Muslims as life peers in the House of Lords: Lord Ahmed, Baroness Uddin, and Lord Ally (although Ally is often not recognized by British Muslims as their representative because he is openly gay). This was represented in much of the press as evidence that the prime minister and his New Labor party were making significant public gestures to recognize Islam. Further, in February 1998 the prime minister gave a warm speech at the first annual function in the House of Commons for 'Id al-Fitr, an event also instituted to give more public recognition to the valued place of Muslims in Britain

(although, demonstrating a still awkward relationship between official institutions and Muslims, ham sandwiches were served).

Ahmed, Uddin, and Ally joined an already existing Muslim hereditary peer, the eighth Earl of Yarborough, a Conservative who subsequently lost his right to sit in the House of Lords in a reorganization that meant the abolition of the right of most hereditary peers to sit and vote. The first British Muslim recently elected to the European Parliament comes from the Conservative Party. Other prominent public appointments of Muslims include a special police policy adviser on Muslim affairs and a Muslim deputy assistant commissioner of the Metropolitan Police. A new position of national Muslim prisoner adviser has also been created.

Public media have also developed a greater awareness of British Muslim concerns. During Ramadan, for instance, features regularly appear in the mainstream press such as the *Times* and the *Guardian* (the latter publishes a Ramadan timetable supplied by the Muslim Council of Britain) and in a special series of programs on BBC television. Realizing the media's potential for hardening Islamophobic attitudes, the BBC World Service has committed itself not to link the terms "extremist" or "terrorist" with Muslims or Islam. In 1999 the Broadcasting Standards Commission published a set of guidelines, "Religious Language and Imagery in a Multi-Cultural Society." Producers are urged to be aware how their words and representations might cause offense, especially to groups like Muslims, who are described as "inordinately sensitive at the way Islam is portrayed in English-speaking culture."

Media operated and controlled by Muslims have developed considerably in the past ten years. Key examples include monthly Muslim newspapers such as *Q-News* and *The Muslim News*. The latter often includes exclusive interviews with political figures, including the prime minister and ministers from the Home and Foreign Offices. Further, there are now at least fifteen "Ramadan radio" stations in places such as Birmingham, Bradford, Glasgow, Luton, and Manchester, granted licenses to broadcast for various periods of the day.

Schools and education have provided a focus of much Muslim mobilization over the past twenty years or so in Britain. Most concerns and actions have aimed to ensure that Muslim pupils need not act in ways, or participate in activities, contrary to their and their parents' religious beliefs and cultural traditions. Key areas of concern for Muslim parents include:

Preference for single-sex education, especially for girls

Modesty in dress and in physical education activities (such as swimming, showers, and changing rooms)—again, especially for girls. All schools in Britain have been sent guidelines by the Department for Education and Employment urging that schools be sensitive to making "arrangements for Muslim girls, who are required by their religion to dress modestly, providing they wear appropriate clothing in school colours." However, cases still regularly arise of schools at which Muslim girls are told to remove their *hijabs* (headscarves).

Prayer times and religious holidays in the school timetable and calendar

Halal food in school cafeterias

Sensitivity to the interests of parents in aspects of curriculum, including sex education, forms of art, dance and music, and religious education

Exemption from school fundraising activities involving lotteries and gambling

Recruitment of more staff members and governors of schools from minority/Muslim communities

Such concerns for establishing sensitivities, accommodations, and provisions concerning Islam in the educational systems have led Muslim organizations to call for state support for separate Islamic schools. In Britain there are already some 60 independently funded Muslim schools. Citing inequity, Muslim activists have pointed to long-standing state financial support for 30 Jewish schools, 28 Methodist schools, and 2,160 Roman Catholic schools. Over the past fifteen years or so, advocates have insisted that the state should demonstrate equal treatment for Muslims and their schools. The case of the Islamia School in Brent, west London, has provided the litmus test for this campaign. Islamia's well-publicized requests for state financial support, made especially by Yusuf Islam (formerly the pop singer Cat Stevens), were repeatedly refused by the Conservative government throughout the late 1980s and 1990s. Finally, in 1997, the Labor government approved state funding for Islamia and another Muslim school in Birmingham (along with two Sikh schools, a Seventh-Day Adventist school, and a Greek Orthodox school).

Many other areas of concern for recognition and public accommodation of specific practices, values, and traditional institutions have been voiced or defended following some form of public condemnation in Muslim communities in Britain. In recent years, cases have arisen in which these issues were debated in court, in Parliament, in local government, or in the media.³⁴ These cases have dealt with the following kinds of concerns:

Polygamy, practiced by some Muslim communities. Polygamous marriages are, on the whole, banned for persons domiciled in Britain.

Talaq, a form of Islamic divorce initiated by men. The call for acceptance of this in British law is still highly contested.

A wide range of forms of arranged marriage practiced by a variety of South Asian communities. These are generally accepted in the eyes of British authorities, unless considerable coercion (on occasion evidenced by kidnapping or deceit) is demonstrated.

Marriages within various degrees of relationship—for instance, among first cousins. This is widely practiced among Pakistani Muslim families in Britain.

Time off work for religious purposes (such as going to mosques for Friday prayer) or appropriate prayer facilities in the workplace. Some employers are addressing such demands; in factories with large numbers of Muslims, prayer facilities are often allocated. The CRE has been approached on several occasions where discrimination is suspected in cases of refusal of demands in this area.

Beards: since meetings with MCB representatives, the Ministry of Defense allows Muslim military personnel to wear trimmed beards.

Chaplaincy in prisons and hospitals. Following consultations with Muslim representatives, the Prison Service and the National Health Service have drawn up guidelines surrounding the provision of Imams in these institutions.

Provision of *halal* (sanctioned) food in public institutions such as prisons, hospitals, and schools.

Islamic ritual slaughter (*dhabh*), which is abhorred by many non-Muslims since it is often interpreted as prescribing that the animal remain conscious when its throat is slit. The most vocal opponents of *halal* food provisions and *dhabh* emerged as the unlikely pairing of animal rights activists, who were against the method of slaughter, and right-wing nationalists, who were against accommodating seemingly alien customs of minorities. According to the terms of the Slaughter of Poultry Act of 1967 and the Slaughterhouses Act of 1979, Jews and Muslims may slaughter poultry and animals in abattoirs according to their traditional methods. The right to engage in ritual slaughter in inspected abattoirs was maintained, largely through the political lobbying of Jewish, rather than Muslim, groups.

Matters surrounding burial, such as gaining designated areas of public cemeteries for specific religious communities, obtaining permission for burial in a cloth shroud instead of a coffin, and urging issuance of death certificates for burial within twenty-four hours (MCB has held consultations with the Coroner's Office and the Association of Local Authorities regarding these matters).

Taking oaths on scriptures. Under the Oaths Act of 1978, Muslims may swear on the Qur'an (although, when Lord Ahmed requested a Qur'an as he was sworn into the House of Lords in 1998, nobody could find one).

Altering work and school uniform codes to allow Muslim women to wear traditional forms of dress, especially headscarves (this is still one of the most contested issues among Muslims. Almost every issue of the monthly *Muslim News* highlights cases of discrimination, especially among employers, against Muslim women wearing *hijab*).

Beyond mere accommodation of practices, values, and traditional institutions, however, many members of Muslim communities have called for explicit legal measures to protect their rights and to help safeguard against discrimination. Each effort in mobilizing and lobbying—whether successful, unsuccessful, or still in process—has brought new experience and, thereby, new confidence in Muslim organizational efforts. In recent years, this, in turn, has encouraged activity concerning access to resources and social service provision. Examples of such activity can be seen in applications by Muslim women's groups seeking public funding for education and community activities, the rise of Muslim housing associations and employment advice centers, and calls by Muslims for special promotion of health awareness campaigns and programs and the provision of suitable hospital facilities.

In these ways, the local and national mobilization of British Muslims has developed by way of voicing a range of values and concerns. Many significant institutional accommodations and modes of public recognition have been achieved. Such successes in affecting a number of policy domains and gaining a hold in public space have come about over the past ten to twenty years—at the same time as the purported growth in Islamophobia.

Some observers argue that Islamophobia in Britain has not actually increased in the past decade but that, instead, we have merely witnessed a growing public scrutiny of it. This is akin to the argument that racist crimes have not actually increased over the years; rather, there has been simply more vigilant monitoring of them. There is likely some truth to this view, but it obscures other processes arguably under way.

It is possible to interpret the rise in Islamophobia in Britain alongside advances in Muslim recognition through a kind of linked or circular operation. In one process, as

a result of the increased vilification of Islam in the media and discrimination against Muslims in everyday spheres (both fueled by assumed connections between British Muslims and international Islamic extremism), a variety of countermeasures—including changes to legislation, various institutional guidelines, and public policy adjustments—have been advocated by Muslim groups, Muslim media, and public bodies composed of Muslims and concerned others such as interfaith groups and antiracists.

In a kind of reactionary process, anti-Muslim sentiments have swelled as part of a greater xenophobia, as many white non-Muslims in Britain object to changes in “their” schools, public policies, and social services that have been made in order to accommodate the perceived inferior ways of “outsiders.” As Islamophobia further increases, so does the now well-mobilized call for even more far-reaching forms of recognition. As the public sphere shifts to provide a more prominent place for Muslims, Islamophobic tendencies may amplify.

While “recognition” carries varying informal and formal/legal meanings in different national contexts, it generally implies a provision of equal and positive public place for the unique identities, interests, and needs of specific groups.³⁵ In one sense, recognition refers to the granting of certain freedoms or minority rights, including freedom to organize, to exercise certain religious practices, and to pursue education independently. It may also refer to the ability to gain access to public resources for associations, cultural centers, and places of worship. Recognition also refers to access to institutional mechanisms of direct representation, in the sense of empowering individuals to voice collective interests with respect to different policy domains, including directly elected politicians, appointed members on sitting bodies, and participants in consultative forums.³⁶

In yet another sense, following the seminal argument of Charles Taylor,³⁷ recognition may mean redressing serious forms of discrimination and inequality that arise from prior *withholding* of recognition of certain minority groups. Further, their misrepresentation or false depiction can be a form of oppression. This certainly applies to British Muslims, for whom frequent maligning of image has contributed to forms of discrimination and even violence directed against them. As a kind of corrective, Nancy Fraser proposes a different way to characterize recognition, namely as “upwardly revaluing disrespected identities and the cultural products of maligned groups” with the specific aim of “positively valorizing” them.³⁸

Therefore, public recognition by way of (a) securing legitimate rights to be different, (b) giving representative status in decision-making institutions, and (c) promoting a readjusted public image can be seen as key ways of seeking at least to remedy past or ongoing patterns of injustice. The circular process involving the accommodation of Muslim interests and the rise of reactionary Islamophobic attitudes can and should be broken once Muslims and Islam have gained the public standing—in terms of rights, representation, and image—that is due any such group of citizens.

Notes

1. See, for example, Colin Clarke, Ceri Peach, and Steven Vertovec, eds., *South Asians Overseas: Migration and Ethnicity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Kim Knott, “Bound to Change? The Religions of South Asians in Britain,” in *Aspects of the South Asian*