

## BRITISH MUSLIMS

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Accompanying slides:

**Slide 1:** Ethnical Breakdown of Muslims in UK

**Slide 2:** Approximate Ideological Map of Muslims in the UK.

This slide will be the focal point of my speech today. It highlights key aspects of thought and practice among different sections of the Muslim communities. We need to establish an understanding of this stratification in the context of Britain.

The categories explained:

### Religio-cultural

This forms the largest grouping. The key indicators to identify this group are:

- Take Islam as part of the cultural transmission.
- Minimal commitment to religious norms and practices.
- Enjoy Western culture.
- Have varying but minimal interest in Islam.

### Traditional –Orthodox (Non-Political)

- Emphasise customised rituals and practices.
- Literalist and creed is held as sacrosanct.
- Focus on Religious symbols and artefacts
- Self purifications and saint worship. (Sufi)
- Very provincial mentality.

- Suspicious of modernity and the west in general.

#### Political –Religious

- Outwardly westernised in dress and language.
- Believe Islam is Politics, hence any Islamic endeavours will have a political agenda
- Interfere with Islamic creed.
- Interpret and re-interpret Scripture based on political view.
- Anti West and anti-secularism.
- Can ally with other Political elements (right or left) to further their aim.
- Very little interest outside Islamic world.
- Participation to the extent of what benefits them.

#### Extremists

- Mostly from a background of emotional turmoil.
- Aggressive in nature and emotionally charged.
- Short tempered.
- Intolerant and self-righteous
- Low level of Knowledge and confidence.

**Slide 3:** Key facts mostly from 2001 National Consensus.

#### **Main Speech**

Islam is a religion that promotes values of peace, security, human dignity, equality and freedom. It is a religion as diverse in many aspects of life and unites in certain aspects of creed and some rituals.

Until the beginning of the last century Islam was an entity constituted under the Ottoman Empire consisting of territorial contiguity, political unity; Islamic creed and etiquette being in theory the constitutive driving elements of both. The First

World War saw the final collapse of the symbolic state of the Ottoman caliphate and fragmented the Global Muslim community the “Ummah”.

The sense of belonging to a wider group of people “Ummah” is deep rooted in the Muslim mindframe, it gave comfort to a great number of Muslim’s who were weary of the encroachment of the European empires into their lands. New languages, modes of communication, administration, foreign practices, differing ways of education which completely changed the old order of things not only in the middle east but also throughout Southeast Asia and Africa. As a retreat many Muslims who were not familiar with the western values and suspicious of their aims retreated back to their religion as a resource to find an expression that they could regard as their own.

This is the background against which we need to look not only at the first generation of Muslim immigrants to Britain but also the second and third generation born in the country. Added to this of course is another dimension we cannot ignore which is the global events that feed into the British Muslim conscience.

The emotional attachment to Muslim fraternity has given ample opportunity to the Political radicals to push the idea of a single Ummah as a religious obligation. This has further allowed the Radicals to pursue their own Political agenda and thus threaten to undermine relations of the religio-cultural mass to the wider British society.

It would be unfair to say that all the demands that were made by the traditional orthodox in the mid-eighties and nineties were unjustified, as many print media would have us believe. Such as the battle for educational needs, dietary requirements, demands of accommodation of Islamic code of dress and modesty. But it would be equally unfair not to mention the global politics at play

in Britain's Muslim communities, which saw the Political Radical elements capitalising on genuine Muslim grievance.

The active support of Ayatollah Khomeini's Fatwah against Salman Rushdie and the ensuing affair is a important case in point. The Muslim Parliament's extremist pronouncements, which were not shared by many religio-cultural Muslims at the time, helped portray the deeply held view by certain section of the British press of the alien within.

The Rushdie affair managed to achieve two things in one go:

Firstly bringing the political and traditional-Orthodox Muslims onto a single platform of grief and anger against the publication of his novel the satanic verses. This single issue had managed to unite the cross sections of the Muslim communities from the religio-cultural to the orthodox and marked the decisive turning point in the rise of Political Radical agenda to the fore of inter-Muslim politics in the UK.

And secondly it has re-emphasised and reawakened the underlying fears of the British Establishment in relation to the Muslim community as a whole.

The second phase of change was characterised by an in-flux of international issues that concerned Muslims; namely the liberation of Afghanistan from the soviets, followed by the first Gulf war, in which many Muslims did not support the western allies in the quest of liberating Kuwait.

Political radical elements succeeded in maintaining the Rushdie momentum by providing an outlet for Muslims fed up with the limitations of the traditional orthodox, to vent their anger. The Asylum of political extremists such as Omar Bakri Mohammed, Abu Hamza, Abu Qatadah and Muhammed al-Massari among others accelerated this change.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict featured heavily in the new political dynamics and provided yet another podium for the Political radical exploitation. It is quite remarkable that Hamaas a political organisation would gain support by portraying itself as a religious outfit fighting in the name of Islam against Yasir Arafat's Fatah group who were also fighting towards the same aims. Added to that Kashmir, Bosnia and Chechnya where again reunifying grounds to varying degree for fusion between orthodox and political radicals.

These crucial shifts had gone largely unnoticed by the British establishment as the Muslim communities struggled in confronting the foreign political muscle of the radicals with limited resources available to them. The orthodox had underestimated the sophistication of the Radical groups and where resigned to the fact that political articulation and mobilisation of opinion of second generation British Muslims was not their sphere of influence.

All this goes onto show there is an underlying crisis of belonging amongst a great number of second and third generation British Muslims. While they are proud of their Islamic legacy they will openly question the wisdom of specific aspects of cultural import of religious orientation or parental heritage with may interfere with their freedoms. This critical attitude can be accredited to their British educational background to which many have benefited. Therefore one would have thought an attachment to the British heritage may have ensued from such a generation. However the reality is starkly different. As most view the environment of the British establishment being un-Islamic and find no tangible motivation for loyalty to the country. The presence of the extremist undercurrent further inflated this situation.

The challenge to us is to question those elements that keep pushing the idea that British society is a "Kufr" (infidel) system - a notion that has incubated organisation such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir, Al-Muhajiroun, al-Ghuraba etc. The London

bombings in 2005 left over fifty British citizen's dead, hundreds injured and a whole nation in shock – they are victims of ideological driven terrorists. It is incumbent upon us to forensically examine these ideas that not only promote segregation but also drive a wedge between the native society and Islam in Britain. It is this ideological challenge that we face today and tomorrow.

First of all we need to question the concept that British society visa-vie Europe are Kuffar i.e. infidel societies and Muslims cannot partake in such a society. We need to explore what is Islam and what constitutes Islamic societies? If Islam is simply a religion of certain rituals and pronouncements then the British society would not be a society whose foundations are based on values that Islam recognises. On the other hand if the foundations of the British society which are based on rule of law, equality, social justice, peace, security, human autonomy have an expression in Islamic scripture and literature then it is recognised by Islam. With different languages and perhaps differing emphasis, where people can live in harmony and benefit each other then it may not be a society that is founded on a religious line of say the Ottoman Empire or the first caliphate but it's a society where these values are practised. The least we could say is that Britain is a non Muslim society with values that are recognised in Islam and therefore as Muslims it is our duty to participate fully as it's citizens.

In fact the Quran tells us emphatically not to create Mayhem on the earth and to work with those who try to reform the society and to work for the betterment of all. Even in a society that is not recognised as Islamic or even a hostile society, the Quran guides its readers to participate in goodness, creating a harmonious society and refrain from creating chaos. Of course where the societies fundamental values have their expressions in the scriptures then its all the more important for the Muslims to do utmost for the betterment of all.

Clearly the current state of affairs is not acceptable, as it is not conducive to the future harmony of interethnic, intercultural and inter-religious relations in Britain. We need to challenge these ideas head on not only in Britain but perhaps a Europe wide effort by Muslims and non-Muslim's to question the inwardly diffident and outwardly expressive assertive attitude that is hollow at its heart and anti progressive in nature. This is the antithesis of Islam that was presented to the world 1400 years ago. Therefore if non-Muslims study the Quran and also raise the issues from time to time, it would help those Muslims who are working within the communities to break out of the strangle holds of radical ideologies. This in my view will be a remarkable achievement to the Muslim's communities in Europe but also to the ever growing, Muslims worldwide.

It is the Muslim orthodox that can be instrumental in breaking the shackles of radical and extremist ideology that suffocate Muslim communities in the UK. The question may arise that how this group can be effective in this regards when they are characterised by narrowing perspectives on issues related not only to the wider British society but to the diversity of Muslim communities. However it is precisely here that I feel real progress can be achieved for a number of reasons. It is this middle section that has the authority to reclaim the religious ground away from the radicals, whose legitimacy is reliant on the silence of the orthodox. Where as the Political radicals have an understanding of the Western philosophy, the orthodox communities have not yet been exposed to such knowledge in order to evaluate and form an informed opinion. With the exposure to critical examination and the confidence the orthodoxy can achieve a change in direction for Muslim communities in the UK.

Muslim's in order to express themselves would not need to give up their practices but would need to participate in wider society. Many Muslim's have little understanding of secular values. Islam is a non-hierarchical faith where knowledge and reasoning are the driving factors rather than authority or

influence. And this is the root in my opinion of conveying the message of humanity, temperance and respect through knowledge and education. Further and higher education establishments should be our starting points extending that to wider communities. It is an uphill struggle but with persistence we will triumph.

Zaragoza, 1 de diciembre de 2006