



CENTRE OF ISLAMIC STUDIES, CAMBRIDGE

The Centre of Islamic Studies seeks to develop a constructive and critical understanding of Islam in the modern world. Its priority is to develop high-quality research and outreach programmes about Islam in the United Kingdom and Europe. Through its roster of scholarship, symposia, reports and interactive educational events, the Centre is committed to engaging with academics, policy-makers and wider society.

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CONTEXTUALISING ISLAM IN BRITAIN II

PROJECT LEADER PROFESSOR YASIR SULEIMAN

Director, HRH Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Centre of Islamic Studies, Cambridge

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

in Association with

THE UNIVERSITIES OF EXETER AND WESTMINSTER

JANUARY 2012



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CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	7
<i>Introduction</i>	11
<i>Executive Summary</i>	14
THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE COMMUNITY	31
The Concept of the Individual	31
The Concept of the Individual in the West	31
The Individual Self in Islamic Thought and Spirituality	32
The Individual and the Community	33
Competition and Collaboration	33
The Need for Rebalancing	34
The Decline of Independent Interpretation	35
A Broad and Inclusive <i>Umma</i>	36
Cyber-Communities	36
Coercive Aspects of Community Membership	37
Harmful Attitudes and Practices	37
Supporting Young British Muslims	40
Support Services	40
Sensitive Listening, Caring and Sharing	41
GENDER – EQUALITY, IDENTITY AND SEXUALITY	44
Gender Equality and Justice	44
The Challenge of Modernity	44
Feminism and Islam	45
The Totem of ‘Women in Islam’	46
The Silencing of Muslim Women	48
Equality and Difference	48

Patriarchy and Masculinism	50
Patriarchy	50
The Control of Muslim Women: Sexuality and Marriage	52
Muslim Family Law	54
Inequality in Access to Mosques	57
Masculinism and the Devaluation of the Feminine	58
Interpretive Approaches to 'Problematic' Texts	59
Sexuality and Sexual Orientation	62
Sexual Diversity	62
Sexual Orientation and Islamic Theology	63
Personal Suffering and Harm	65
Respectful Disagreement	66
EDUCATION	67
Rethinking Islamic Education in a Secular Context	67
Muslim Educational Settings	67
An Alternative Model of Madrasa Education	70
'Secular' Extremism and Religious Illiteracy	72
The Multiple Benefits of Religious Education	73
Meeting the Needs of Muslim Pupils in Mainstream Schools	74
The School Community as a Neutral Space	76
Achievement and Underachievement	78
The Importance of Knowledge, Learning and Enquiry in Islam	79
Islamic Education as Holistic Education	80
Opportunities and Challenges within School and Family	82
Critical Thinking	82
Values Education within a Community of Enquiry	83
Rote-Learning vs Comprehension	84
Creative and Expressive Arts	85
Introspection, Reflection and Contemplation	86
Observation, Perception and Direct Experience	87
Education in the Humanities	87
Nature and Environmental Education	88
Community Service and Stewardship	89
The Crucial Role of the Family	89

WIDER SOCIETY AND THE COMMON GOOD	91
The Secular Context	91
The Secular State and Liberty of Conscience	91
Procedural and Ideological Secularism	92
Political Participation	92
Objectives and Dimensions of Political Participation	92
Problems of Post-Diaspora Muslims	93
Disadvantage, Deprivation, Public Hostility and Alienation	94
Social Crisis, Polarisation and Scapegoating	96
Restrictive Assumptions and Myths	97
Identity Politics	99
Emerging Confidence	100
'Big P' and 'small p' Politics	101
Including 'Middle England'	103
The Way Forward	104
Civic Engagement and Social Activism	105
The Inclusion of Religious Voices in the Public Sphere	105
Active Citizenship, Community Spirit and the Common Good	106
Navigating the Secular Public Space: An Islamic Counter-Narrative	109
Spiritual Responsibility and Progressive Social Activism	110
Equality, Impartiality and Universality	111
Political Freedom and Peaceful Dissent	113
Non-Violence	113
The Sanctity of the Natural Order	114
A New Islamic Public Theology	115
<i>Glossary of Arabic Words</i>	<i>117</i>
<i>Endnotes</i>	<i>119</i>
<i>Symposia Questions</i>	<i>127</i>

Preface

YASIR SULEIMAN

This report represents the collective thinking of a group of British Muslims in the second phase of 'Contextualising Islam in Britain': a project that began in 2008. The first phase culminated in our report *Contextualising Islam in Britain: Exploratory Perspectives*, published in October 2009. In this first report, the project participants set out to answer a central question: what does it mean to live faithfully as a Muslim in Britain today? They did so by considering Muslim views in relation to secularism and the secular nation state, citizenship as a form of political and civic engagement, pluralism, human rights and the Islamic Sharia as a path of moral living.

The present report sets out to answer the same question and to build on the findings of its predecessor. However, it does so by engaging with a new set of issues that impact on the following areas of Muslim belief and practice (appended as questions at the end of this report): (1) the individual and the community, (2) gender: equality, identity and sexuality, (3) education, and (4) wider society and the common good.

In debating these issues, the participants in the second phase of the project delved into whether the balance between the individual and community among Muslims in Britain is in favour of the one or the other. Calling for a rebalancing of this relationship in favour of the individual, the report recognises that commitment and service to the 'community', in its narrow or wide sense, is not at odds with the rights of the individual. For individual rights to be ecologically stable, they must be practised in the full recognition that healthy and sustainable communities can underpin the individual in his or her aspiration to develop and prosper in society. Rampant individualism is not the answer, but neither is a domineering community that expunges informed dissent and opposes responsible progress, even when it is not inconsistent with the fundamentals of faith in Islam.

Investing in the individual and community requires a coherent approach to education that is open to spirituality as well as to the promotion of knowledge in the arts, humanities, social sciences and sciences. Relying on the fundamentals of their faith and past practice in their long and contextually varied traditions, Muslims can be at the vanguard of this holistic form of education which aims to nourish the mind, heart and soul in equal measure. There is in fact a great yearning among Muslims and non-Muslims for a spiritually informed education that can counterbalance the dominance of value-loaded secular learning in a way that can enrich public life with vitality and diversity. The report does not pit spirituality against secular education, but argues for crafting overlapping spaces that offer individuals and communities intersecting paths rather than parallel lines of existence and exclusion.

The issues at stake here are choice and respect for difference and diversity, not just for Muslims but for all. Fears that spirituality would lead to a return to a backward past are unfounded. Education can never be value-neutral, nor should it be. The question then is: what values do we wish to promote through education? There is bound to be more than one answer to this question. In spite of this, it is certain that many will have a substantial common core which can generate convergence towards a common path in a way that underpins the inevitable diversities arising between communities and among members of the same community.

The participants in the project recognised that no discussion of Muslim life in Britain can be complete without engaging with the perennial issues of gender, equality and sexuality in Muslim communities. The report offers a nuanced discussion of these issues, reflecting a variety of views and perspectives that all seek to affirm consistency with what their proponents believe to be the tenets of Islam. The participants agreed that forced marriages and domestic violence have no place in Islam. Forced marriages deny the victims the right to free choice on something absolutely fundamental to their lives. Domestic violence cannot be justified by invoking textual evidence if the Sharia is accepted as a path of moral living, or if Muslims accept the obligation to follow the example of the Prophet who never mistreated his wives or members of his family.

While Muslims may disagree with homosexuality and consider it to be forbidden in Islam, this does not justify treating members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) community with disrespect or violence. Muslims in fact must ensure that members from this community are free of harm. They must also be prepared to debate the issue of sexuality with Muslims and non-Muslims in a non-prejudicial way while holding fast to their beliefs and convictions. This orientation was typified in the debates that took place among participants in the project. Strong views were expressed on all sides, but this was done in a spirit of mutual respect

even when the views expressed clashed with what many participants considered to be unalterable issues of faith.

The project returned to the issues of secularism, the state and civic engagement which had been debated in the first phase. Participants asserted their support for procedural secularism as a form of civic engagement that protects the rights of all faith (and non-faith) communities in the public sphere. Civic engagement is further underpinned by a view of citizenship as a social contract between the individual and the state in which rights and obligations are irrevocably intertwined. A citizen cannot avail himself or herself of the privileges and benefits of citizenship without accepting the responsibilities and obligations that must be exchanged in return. This does not imply a denial of the individual's right to object to state policy or to organise peacefully in favour of his views. On the contrary, active citizenship means the holding of power to account by individuals and groups who use all the legal channels available to them to criticise and offer alternative answers and solutions. Violent extremism is a denial of this contract in democratic states. The majority of Muslims in Britain subscribe to this reading of citizenship. The marginal voices that argue against it do not speak for this majority.

The project was conducted under Chatham House rules. A complete record of the proceedings was produced to use in writing this report. It must however be pointed out that the views expressed in this report cannot be associated with any one participant or with the Project Leader whose name appears on the cover of this report. These views are a compilation of different positions. While they may reflect broad agreements among the participants in some cases, in others they do reflect differences of opinion on some fundamental issues of belief and practice. The report airs, rather than masks, these differences.

The project on which this independent report is based was commissioned in April 2010 and funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government and managed by the Centre of Islamic Studies at the University of Cambridge, in association with the Universities of Exeter and Westminster. As Project Leader, I would like to thank these organisations for their support while, at the same time, pointing out that they do not take responsibility for the content of the report. I would also like to thank the Steering Group of the project for their stewardship and work on developing the questions that guided the symposia, and for choosing the speakers for each symposium. Participants in the project, whose names appear at the beginning of the report, generously contributed their time and ideas. It must however be noted that, while some members attended all four symposia of the project, others attended some of the symposia and not others. To each and every one of them I offer my most sincere thanks. The contribution of the Centre of Islamic Studies at

Cambridge underpinned the process from start to finish. I would like to thank Dr Saeko Yazaki, Outreach Officer at the Centre, for helping organise parts of the project. The Møller Centre hosted the symposia and I thank the staff of the Møller Centre for their contribution to its success. Shiraz Khan designed this publication with her usual care and attention to detail. I thank her for this and for being a loyal friend of the Centre of Islamic Studies since its inception. These thanks extend also to Dr Anas Al-Shaikh-Ali for 'lending' Shiraz to us on many occasions.

But my sincerest and heart-felt thanks are due to Dr Jeremy Henzell-Thomas who compiled the report. In fact, Jeremy did more than compile the report: he gave it form and texture, producing multiple drafts in response to the comments he received from members of the project. In addition to offering his own ideas and constructing an orderly discourse out of the diverse and, at times, meandering debates in the project, Jeremy provided the Glossary and all the endnotes to enhance the accuracy and readability of the report. He did so on all fronts with characteristic understated efficiency, exquisite sensitivity and total commitment to collegiality no matter how many times sections of the report had to be redrafted. The fact that Jeremy did all of this at a difficult time for him and his family makes his achievements all the more remarkable. As Project Leader, I am hugely indebted to him for his dedication, perseverance and, above all, humanity and friendship.

INTRODUCTION

Contextualising Islam

One can be only too aware in these times that any report of candid and probing discussions amongst Muslims seeking to contextualise Islam in Britain needs to be approached with the recognition that every community within Britain has strengths that can contribute positively to the common good. Every community also has to contend with problems and deal with contentious internal issues, some of which may be uniquely associated with a section of that community. Within any community, and within wider society, such a process of honest self-examination may bring to light the need for urgent changes in attitude and practice, so as to correct what is not in harmony with the authentic principles and values it claims to espouse.

All communities have a responsibility to examine themselves, so as to live up to the values and principles that they claim to represent. This is as true of wider British society and the national narratives it may claim to follow as it is of minority communities, whether Muslim or otherwise. A broad alliance of people of goodwill across all communities can play a vital role in helping to renew the core values of pluralism, fairness, moderation, decency and civility which are often upheld and admired as distinctively British.

At the same time, both Muslims and non-Muslims need to explore with integrity and insight how their core beliefs and values converge as shared human values for the benefit of all. Such active mutual engagement is the essence of pluralism, a truth-seeking encounter going far beyond the unchallenging mediocrity of mere tolerance of diversity. The Qur'an tells us that diversity exists so that we may come to know one another, and by so doing to compete with one another in doing good.

Such a vision of the positive benefits of diversity completely transcends that negative caricature which misleadingly associates pluralism with a society of divisive ghettos, defensive fortresses, adversarial and self-interested pressure groups, non-intersecting

lives, and a Tower of Babel of mutually exclusive and incomprehensible perspectives and belief systems. While indifference and even veiled hostility may sometimes exist between elements of all communities, this should not be seen as representative of the entire community, nor should it sully the gift offered by a plural society for the improvement of all.

There is one factor of great importance in any discussion about the place of Muslims in Britain today, and that is the centrality of faith in the lives of Muslims. Faith-based perspectives on policy need not raise the spectre of theocracy. Yet it is inevitable that Muslim voices, like the voices of any faith community, will be motivated and inspired by their religious beliefs and values in the same way as the concerns of those wedded to humanist ideals will reflect the altruism and moral clarity associated with their ethical and philanthropic principles. So much the better, for the renewal of civilisation and the universality of human values that underpins it depends on an alliance of all people of goodwill across diverse traditions within and between all communities.

It is important to note that the discussions reported here do not represent any single position, perspective or affiliation. The views captured may be variously 'progressive' or more 'traditional', and may also contradict the false assumption that one cannot be both progressive and traditional at the same time. This is not a matter of sending 'mixed messages' but of honouring the intent of the project to capture the richness of prolonged and nuanced discussions amongst a varied group of British Muslims. The project also sought to make the most of the opportunity to explore conceptual spaces that do not conform to rigid definitions or predetermined expectations, either from the inside or the outside. It is that resistance to preconceived agendas and one-dimensional terminology which rightly characterises the disinterested pursuit of truth at the highest level of discourse.

This does not of course mean that the outcome of such discussions is a hotchpotch of contradictory opinions that can offer no enlightenment or direction to Muslim communities nor any insights to other communities on how to conduct a systematic process of self-examination. On the contrary, many recurrent themes emerged throughout the course of the four symposia devoted to the project, and included the following priorities:

- active pluralism, political and social activism, and positive civic engagement for the common good;
- raising the standard of discourse so as to deal effectively with prejudice of all forms;
- an internal critique of culturally determined attitudes and practices that may cause harm and distress;

- better understanding of the problems and needs of young Muslims in contemporary society;
- the restoration of a culture of critical thinking and dialogue, and an associated etiquette governing the civilised handling of disagreement;
- recognition of the value of procedural secularism as an advanced political system that separates freedom of conscience and the assertion of religious beliefs from conduct that contravenes public law;
- the renewal of a comprehensive vision of human faculties and how this might be realised in a broad, holistic education for personal development within school and family.

Above all, what is essentially portrayed in this report is not the angst of a victimised or navel-gazing community, even though it necessarily records valid concerns about disadvantage, exclusion and alienation. Rather, what it points to is the enormous potential held by Muslims as a creative minority within Britain, by virtue of the vital contribution their faith-based principles and values can make to contemporary spiritual, ethical, social and educational renewal for all our people.

The realisation of that potential necessarily depends on the renewal of authentic Islamic principles within Muslim communities themselves. It is also empowered by the readiness of all communities under responsible leadership to engage with each other in recognition of the inestimable benefits to be gained from that pluralism which brings to light shared human values and extends horizons beyond 'tribal' or parochial interests.

Islam once inspired in the West an intellectual enlightenment and scientific revolution through the spirit of enquiry fostered by the Qur'an. The contribution of Muslims to the development of Western civilisation should not, however, be confined to the annals of history and to nostalgic reminders of a golden age of Islamic civilisation. Muslims have much to contribute to the renewal of British society, but this requires a vision that goes beyond a myopic focus on legal rulings and encompasses the full splendour of the finest elements of the Islamic tradition – its richly varied cultural and artistic heritage, its respect for learning and critical enquiry, its moral compass and spiritual depth, and its vision of a fair and just society.

Through the living spiritual and ethical values derived from their faith, Muslims in Britain have the potential to act as a powerfully transformational creative minority within wider society and as a positive force for the common good. Any analysis and critique of problems and controversial issues within Muslim communities in Britain addressed in these pages needs to be seen within the context of that fundamentally creative opportunity.

Executive Summary

Development of the Project

The discussions reported here represent a significant development of the Contextualising Islam in Britain Project. The first stage of this project, *Exploratory Perspectives*, published in 2009, was the culmination of a series of intensive symposia. These created an independent and open space for a group of scholars, activists, and community leaders with a diverse spectrum of views from across Britain's Muslim communities to come together to debate a question of pressing topical importance: what does it mean to live faithfully as a Muslim in Britain today?

The conclusions of the first stage of the project implied or explicitly identified where further work or discussion was needed. The aim of the second stage reported in these pages is therefore to address important new topics or to take further those topics which participants judged to be in need of further discussion.

One particular priority in the evolution of the project was to go further in considering one of the key questions identified in the first stage: how might Islamic theologies and Muslim communities contribute to notions of active citizenship and positive engagement in wider society for the common good? The discussions encompassed other (in some cases, contentious) issues of pressing importance for Muslim communities within contemporary British society, including the relationship between the individual and the community, education, gender equality and justice, and sexuality.

This project, like its predecessor Contextualising Islam in Britain: Exploratory Perspectives, was commissioned by the previous administration. While hosted by the University of Cambridge, it is independent and autonomous of both the University and government.

Rebalancing Individual and Community

Islam has often been regarded as essentially communitarian because of the precedence Muslims may be seen to give to the common good when conflict of interest arises between the individual and the community. It does not, however, demand that the needs of the individual are entirely secondary to community interests. Islam is first and foremost a religion, a moral code, and a way of life which, like all religions, must take the individual as its primary focus.

Participants in the project acknowledged the value of questioning the belief that the elevation of the individual in Western society has been entirely beneficial. Many agreed that unfettered individualism has elevated the expectation of personal entitlement above responsibility, and eroded family and community solidarity. There was, however, broad agreement amongst participants that within Muslim communities the relationship between the individual and the community needs to be rebalanced because it is often still the case that too much weight is given to the community.

Given the undeniable reality of anti-Muslim prejudice within Britain today, undertaking an internal critique amongst Muslims may appear to be a risky strategy which may play into the hands of critics of Islam and Muslims. Participants agreed, however, that it is only through an honest and probing internal critique that Muslim communities can shift their own norms as part of the process of rebalancing the relationship between the individual and the community.

Participants discussed the various ways in which communities can exercise authority over their members: through established power relationships (as in the dynamics of hierarchical gender relations); through insistence on 'tribal' partisanship and loyalty and the maintenance of honour; through avoiding difficult issues so as to preserve the community from public shame; through the conflation of religion and culture; and through inadequate representation of minority, dissenting or discordant views.

More subtle forms of persuasion can be exercised by branding dissent as a subversive attack on the unity and solidarity of the community. Any attempt at reform, no matter how minor, may also be regarded as undermining the core tenets of the faith and the beginning of a dangerous moral decline. Fear of deviation or straying from the straight path, as well as a suspicion of 'innovation', also play a part in the stifling of individual expression. The benefits of safety and security within the community may also be contrasted with the destructive effects, both personal and social, of unbounded liberty and individualism.

Participants agreed that a strong community is not airtight, but open, plural and flexible, and inclusive of creative energies and voices. Muslims need to feel that they have the right to express themselves as individuals and not always toe the line. Scholars may also often have a personal view, but dare not express it in case it offends sections of the community.

Many young Muslims, in particular, are seeking an authentic Islam rooted in the primary sources of the faith, but their understanding of what is authentic (often excavated through their own diligent study and enquiry) may not always be endorsed by those voices within the community which are themselves out of touch with authentic Islamic principles and values.

A recurrent theme raised by participants was the need to recognise the harm and distress that could be caused by certain traditional attitudes and practices within Muslim communities. Participants reiterated throughout the discussions as a whole that the issue of gender equality and justice was of pivotal importance and that no effective rebalancing could occur without bringing Muslim women into the frame.

A Broad and Inclusive *Umma*

Participants also agreed that rebalancing is also dependent on the revival of a broad and inclusive conception of the *umma*. The Prophet Muhammad's vision of the *umma* encompassed the Muslim, Jewish, Christian and pagan communities of Medina, all of whom were brought into the fold of one community or nation. There is a current need for a more complex, multiple concept of *umma* consonant with the broad and inclusive view at the dawn of Islam. This view encompassed wider society, the larger community of people with whom one lives.

An exclusivist mentality that rigidly separates Muslim from non-Muslim identity encourages a more constricted view of the *umma*. The problem of separate communities is exacerbated by the way in which outsiders impose on Muslims the perception of a monolithic community bereft of the richness and diversity characteristic of Muslim life. Muslims can feel trapped by this narrow understanding of Islam and Muslims, and participants agreed that this should be vigorously critiqued.

Supporting Young British Muslims

Participants agreed that there needs to be better understanding and more sensitive handling of the problems and needs of young Muslims in contemporary British society. Young Muslims have to contend with many problems, including social

exclusion, institutional discrimination, poverty and unemployment. Partly as result of these disadvantages, but also because of pressures exercised by community and family, they also face pressing personal issues, especially those concerning faith and identity, relationships, mental health, offending and rehabilitation, sexuality and sexual health.

Participants expressed concern at the harm and distress caused by authoritarian and insensitive engagement with issues within families. Many cases discussed by participants highlighted the way in which personal problems can be exacerbated by harsh parenting (including parental rejection) and how personal welfare may take second place to family 'honour'.

Participants recognised the need for a support system for families and individuals whose problems are compounded by their families. Such support also needs to include advice on how to consider other options apart from rigid 'make or break' or 'all or nothing' approaches which depend on prescriptive rulings and customary regulations divorced from context rather than a compassionate response to an individual case. This will help to promote a more flexible and less dogmatic outlook when approaching complex issues which require humane and sensitive handling within families.

Some young people in distress may go to Imams for help, advice and support. It was recognised that counselling skills needed to be included in the training of Imams, and that vital specialist skills such as arbitration and mediation needed to be learnt. This need was recognised in the 2010 Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) report on the training and development of Imams, which reiterated previous proposals for the continuing professional development of faith leaders in communication, negotiation, representation and other skills that enable them to operate more effectively and confidently within their own communities.

Gender Equality and Justice

In addressing the impact of modernity, the issue of gender equality and justice for women has loomed very large as a symbolic issue, a totem or test case of whether or not Islam, and Muslims, can adjust to the new context of liberal democracies.

Participants agreed that widespread misuse of the topic of 'women in Islam' often serves as a major barrier to meaningful discussion of important issues. A prime example is the ideological alliance between colonialism and feminism which generates shared judgements about the subjugation of women supposedly sanctioned by Islam. Some participants claimed that those who espouse such views

may have no genuine interest in the welfare of Muslim communities, but are very quick to pick up on the issue of Muslim women's rights.

Participants discussed how sexualised and Islamophobic images of Muslim women in the media and popular fiction perpetuate crude stereotypes of them as low-status and submissive victims who need enlightenment and liberation. The concomitant view that Muslim men are violent, oppressive and prone to hyper-masculinity is also reinforced.

Participants agreed, however, that such prejudices should not be taken as an excuse to avoid addressing urgent problems affecting the status and welfare of women in Muslim communities.

Feminism and Islam

Participants acknowledged that Western feminism has made an outstanding contribution towards securing dignity for women, but they also recognised how it diverges fundamentally from Islam in ignoring the importance of faith. While it is vital to engage with feminist ideas that promote gender equality and justice, they need to be rooted in a theological context if they are to be relevant to Muslims. It is a strongly held belief amongst Muslim women that Islam contains within it the resources to allow them to challenge injustice and oppression within their own communities. Some participants nevertheless upheld that this belief should not prevent Muslim women from making use of legitimate arguments from outside their own tradition as a precious source of ideas and experience.

It is distinctly unhelpful when some feminists respond to Muslim women who choose to affirm their faith by insisting that they need to be re-educated and even exit their faith community. This is a significant barrier to Muslim women who would like to establish positive political and feminist alliances that would assist them in the monumental task of challenging the power of men within their own communities.

Patriarchy

The Qur'an makes it clear that men and women have the same essential nature or primordial disposition, the same intellectual and spiritual faculties, and the same responsibility as moral agents of God to uphold justice. It has been claimed that the Qur'an initiated a process to move the believer, as a person and a member of a just social order, beyond patriarchy. It therefore needs to be asked whether Muslims have succeeded in fulfilling gender justice to the extent envisioned in the Qur'an.

Participants discussed how harm and distress may be caused, especially to women, by patriarchal structures within Muslim communities. They also discussed the importance of acknowledging and addressing the risk faced by vulnerable members within a minority group, such as women, whose rights as citizens may be compromised by the grant of public recognition to traditional rules and practices, as in the accommodation of Muslim family law. One solution would be to accept that human rights law provides the minimum floor which binds all the parties and which justifies state intervention to safeguard the rights of women.

Participants discussed the problem of inadequate access to mosques for Muslim women in Britain. The attendance of women in mosques is restricted not only by inequality of access, but also by reference to Islamic sources which ordain that attendance at Friday prayers is compulsory for men but only optional for women. It is also perpetuated by entrenched attitudes and practices that reinforce discrimination and exclusion. Women also need a better understanding of their rights, as well as greater confidence to take the initiative in exercising them.

Masculinism and the Devaluation of the Feminine

The idea that gender roles are socially constructed rather than innate has particular importance at this time for Muslim communities when a major corrective is necessary to promote gender equality and justice for women. It is important, however, to acknowledge that fundamental equality is not necessarily negated by accepting that men and women could have different and complementary gender characteristics and roles. By the same token, some women may themselves wish to adopt roles which have been traditionally assigned to women.

Masculinism and the concomitant devaluation of the feminine are major problems of our times. Participants discussed the way in which gender equality can be reduced and distorted to merely competing with men on male terms, and how this entails a corresponding devaluation of traditional feminine qualities and roles. The dogma consistent with feminist ideology that only work in the world is of any value has led to the downgrading of the 'non-working' world, a gross injustice to those who perform so much work of inestimable value in the home.

Some believed that social fragmentation can be attributed in many ways to the undermining of women through lack of understanding and appreciation of their critical roles as nurturers, carers, motivators, educators, counsellors and sympathisers. They also upheld that principles of mutuality and nurture can play an important part in resisting such fragmentation, which is regarded by many as a current sign of wider civilisational crisis.

Others emphasised that it is important not to essentialise nurturing roles to such an extent that they are regarded as the only jobs suited to women. In the same way, it is important to challenge the fixed idea that domestic work is entirely a woman's domain. There is a need for more balance in terms of the roles of men and women at home, in the workplace and in wider society.

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation, and the issues it raises about what is and what is not deemed to be permissible, represent a controversial and volatile subject, not only within Muslim communities but within other faith groups and within wider society. This applies particularly to homosexual or same-sex orientation, although it is more precise and encompassing to talk about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) orientations.

Only very recently have works begun to appear that tackle the complex and controversial issue of homosexuality in Islam from a religious perspective. Such works argue that Muslims can reconcile themselves to the inevitable sexual diversity in society without compromising their principles. They may also advocate a liberation theology, pointing out that Islam began as a process to end injustice, and that God's will works with and through those who suffer oppression. Just as there can be no progressive interpretation of Islam without gender equality and justice for women, so it can be argued that neither can there be renewal of authentic Islamic principles of justice relevant to the contemporary world without tackling intolerance, abuse, discrimination and harm based on sexual orientation.

Allied to this approach is the claim that there are no verses in the Qur'an which unambiguously condemn homosexuals and that those *hadith* which condemn homosexual and transgender people are of dubious authenticity.

One highly controversial aspect of the critique of prevailing attitudes to same sex relations in Islam is to interpret certain Qur'anic verses so as to suggest that the Qur'an does not express any moral condemnation or impose any legal sanction on homosexual people. Many participants objected strongly to what they regarded as serious misinterpretation and unjustifiable extrapolation of Qur'anic verses to justify same-sex relations. While all agreed that Muslims should support the right of LGBT individuals to be protected from discrimination, harassment and persecution under the law, many firmly upheld that it is wrong to misuse Qur'anic verses and exploit them in an attempt to construct, or at worst fabricate, a theological argument as a justification for homosexuality. This is not a productive strategy in the cause of

advancing greater tolerance of homosexuals because it lacks credibility and would be widely rejected within Muslim communities. It has to be accepted that the meaning of some verses cannot be 'creatively' manipulated in this way. This is not to say, however, that such verses, and other texts, can be exploited to justify illegal and unacceptable treatment of LGBT individuals and groups.

All faith communities, including Muslims, are faced with similar conflicts in relation to gender or sexuality. Participants agreed that while certain beliefs may be sincerely held, they cannot be acted upon to violate the rights of others through discrimination or persecution. Whatever might be proscribed as 'sins' as a matter of personal conviction clearly cannot all be translated into legal rulings and imposed on others. This is not only a matter of conforming meticulously to the law of the land wherever it regulates such matters, but is also a matter of abiding by the fundamental principle of mercy in governing relationships and fostering kindness, harmony and reconciliation within family and community.

Case studies have identified a range of serious personal and social problems caused by attitudes and practices that are intolerant of LGBT individuals, as well as inner conflicts and struggles which cause great personal suffering. Ill-treatment, neglect and lack of care of such individuals within Muslim communities can no longer be ignored but need to be recognised, acknowledged and dealt with responsibly and compassionately.

While all acknowledged the importance of a sensitive understanding of sexual diversity, and emphasised that LGBT individuals should be legally protected from discrimination and persecution, there was nevertheless strong support amongst participants for the view that heterosexuality is the only norm explicitly supported by Islamic teachings.

Participants upheld the need for the reclamation and implementation of the proper Islamic ethics and etiquette for engaging in respectful debate and disagreement in a plural world and a plural Islam. At the same time, it was emphasised that this principle must not negate the equally important freedom to express one's sincerely held beliefs. The debate on interpretation of religious teachings should be open and frank, as religious views are a matter of conviction and conscience. Muslims uphold their collective duty to convey to mankind what they believe to be the true and complete divine message entrusted to them without any evasion or distortion.

Islamic Education in a Secular Context

Participants discussed various issues and challenges arising from the perceived need to rethink the concept and practice of Islamic education in a secular context.

Muslim Educational Settings

Although traditional Islamic education should (and in most cases does) begin at home, it is formally and systematically conducted through the supplementary school (madrasa), which plays a major role in developing the Islamic identity of Muslim children.

In the absence of rigorous research data, most of the observations about the educational culture in traditional madrasas remain anecdotal, and it is important not to generalise. Participants discussed how some teachers may not only lack proficiency in English, but also lack proper teaching qualifications and the basic pedagogic skills essential not only for providing opportunities for discussion, interpretation and critical thinking, but also for contextualising Islam within contemporary Britain.

Participants also discussed the claim that madrasa education generally relies heavily on rote learning and copying down from authoritative sources, a methodology associated with an authoritarian and controlling attitude to the transmission of knowledge. Some participants expressed concern that the prevalent 'transmission/instruction-centred' Islamic approach to education might foster and reinforce foreclosed and rigid religiosities among British Muslim youth. Many expressed the view that there is a pressing need for a more child-centred approach in Muslim educational settings.

With regard to child protection, participants expressed concern at successive reports of unacceptable physical punishment of children at some madrasas in Britain, and the way in which parents may turn a blind eye to it either because they accept it as normal practice or because they fear that if they act as whistle-blowers they will be ostracised by the community. Cases of sexual abuse at madrasas have also been reported. Such mistreatment has been vigorously condemned by Muslim organisations which uphold that the standards of child protection in mainstream schools should operate without fail in Islamic educational settings.

Another key challenge is the need to integrate Muslim seminaries which train religious leaders into the wider British educational system so that their qualifications are recognised as equivalent to undergraduate degrees. This would enable their

graduates to enter the main routes of professional or academic development, including teacher training courses. An important step in this direction was taken with the publication of the DCLG report on the training and development of Muslim faith leaders in 2010.

Despite these concerns, it was acknowledged that madrasas are undoubtedly important educational institutions that shape the religious leadership and wider Islamic activism within Muslim communities. As such, they need to be invested in, regulated and improved so that they may more effectively respond to the challenges facing these communities.

The most innovative madrasas not only teach the standard curriculum, but encourage discussion and debate about what it means to be a Muslim in Britain today. One such model of madrasa education discussed by participants builds into the educational experience many of the professional dimensions of mainstream education. These include staff development programmes designed to improve teaching methodology and ensure adequate child protection, as well as enhanced parental involvement.

Participants observed that biased and ideologically motivated critiques of some Muslim schools unsupported by credible evidence often only serve to provoke a natural defensiveness which makes it more difficult to address legitimate concerns about the quality of education in such schools. There have been successive attacks of this nature orchestrated by think tanks and in the media.

Nevertheless, whatever bias and misrepresentation have been perpetrated in attacks on Muslim schools, and irrespective of the need for careful and intelligent critiquing of such attacks, a comprehensive review of the concept of Islamic education and Muslim educational practice is needed. However, the fact that Muslim schools function under such hostile scrutiny raises an important issue of balance. Review of educational philosophy, practice and standards needs to be a continuous process in all schools, and Muslim schools are no exception. At the same time, there needs to be an ongoing conversation which encourages critics to examine whether their position is rooted in bias or based on credible evidence.

Muslim Pupils in Mainstream Schools

Approximately 97% of Muslim pupils in Britain are educated in mainstream schools. Participants discussed the view that, given the current climate in which there is much negative portrayal of Islam and Muslims, greater priority should be given to ensuring

that the needs of Muslim pupils in mainstream schools are appropriately accommodated.

The Equality Act 2010 constitutes groundbreaking legislation in including religion and belief as a 'protected characteristic' in the same way as age, disability, ethnicity and race, gender, gender identity, sexual identity and orientation, and others. The 'Every Child Matters' agenda applies to all, including the specific needs of Muslim pupils. Failure to recognise, affirm and include the faith identity and religious needs of Muslim pupils may not only alienate pupils and make them feel that they are not valued, but may also give rise to inappropriate assumptions that in order to progress in society they will have to compromise or give up aspects of their core identity, including their religious beliefs and values.

Many participants took the view that there was a need for Muslims to engage more actively and positively with the educational process within mainstream schools. Some felt strongly, however, that such participation should not reflect an 'us and them' approach by which Muslims sought to engage in the decision-making only to advocate parochial Muslim interests. They believed that Muslims, as British citizens, should not see themselves as different from anyone else, but should have regard to the wider needs of all children in mainstream schools, not focusing solely on issues of exclusion and the perceived lack of recognition of Muslim identity.

It is also the case that there is no absolute right for the accommodation of specific religious or cultural needs, and there is variation in the extent to which schools accommodate such needs. The majority of schools do not have a policy of accommodation, and opposition to special provision is often a principled stance based on the belief that it is fundamentally divisive, rather than simply a matter of logistics or lack of appropriate facilities.

Participants agreed that, despite evidence of high achievement in some Muslim faith schools, there is an urgent need to address the underachievement of Muslims within the educational system as a whole. Almost one third of Muslims of working age (16-64) have no educational qualifications, the highest proportion for any faith group, whereas the most recent official figure for the population at large is, on average, one in nine. Fewer Muslim 16-year-olds are in education, training or employment than any other group of the same age. Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin pupils have consistently performed below the average for all pupils on every scale of the Foundation Stage profile and have consistently lower levels of attainment than most other ethnic groups across all key stages. They also experience high rates of incidence of Special Educational Needs.

Islamic Education as Holistic Education

Participants discussed ways in which Islamic education can legitimately be said to converge with the broad rationale of holistic education which emphasises the balanced development of human faculties. A comprehensive and integrated concept of Islamic education ideally encompasses not only the instruction and training of the mind and the transmission of knowledge, but also the nurture of the whole being, moral discipline, and learning from one another in the spirit of critical openness and respect for diversity. The teacher is therefore not only an instructor and transmitter of knowledge, but also a developer of character and nurturer of souls. This broad and balanced curriculum converges in many ways with the stated goals of the National Curriculum, which is designed to encompass not only the acquisition of knowledge and skills, but also personal, social, moral and spiritual development.

Participants discussed the educational philosophy and practice of certain school systems in the Muslim world which have adopted more holistic approaches that go beyond the dichotomy between secular and religious education. A common thread in many of these alternative models is a strong emphasis on inter-cultural studies, which may include the study of other faiths, so as to foster dialogue, tolerance, peaceful coexistence and integration within wider society. These schools do not seek to subvert modern secular states but promote an inclusive ideal that encourages practising Muslims to embrace modernity and the opportunities it affords. The holistic nature of such an educational vision is also implemented in the emphasis it places on extra-curricular activities, ethical values, character building, and service to the common good.

Participants discussed various priorities and challenges in implementing a holistic vision of education. These include the revival of critical thinking, active learning through talk and discussion, participation in creative and expressive arts, education in the humanities, the benefits of multi-faith Religious Education, and community service.

The Crucial Role of the Family

Participants agreed that the role of the family is absolutely central in implementing a range of opportunities for the education of the whole child. The family is, in fact, the very foundation of a truly holistic education.

It is obvious that moral and spiritual development in schools builds on the child's experience in the home, but it is also important to realise that the family can provide

many opportunities for extra-curricular activities, such as engagement in the creative arts, cultural and sporting activities, nature activities and community service.

Real concerns about the quality of education in schools is also driving a marked increase in the number of parents opting out of the system altogether and choosing home-schooling for their children. Motives for doing so vary greatly, including justifiable concerns about poor discipline in schools, lack of moral and spiritual education, bullying, excessive testing, and lack of stimulation for able and gifted children.

The quality of discourse and relationships within family and social life also initiates and reinforces the acquisition of the knowledge and skills which typify a genuine community of enquiry committed to lifelong learning. Holistic education in its deepest sense is fostered within a family circle centred on vibrant conversation, discussion, respect for alternative views and the open exploration of ideas, as well as the transmission of traditional wisdom and values. A talking culture within families is also an essential aspect of the reclamation of a culture of personal care, which can provide children with emotional resilience and a sense of personal responsibility.

A range of virtues is transmitted from generation to generation through proper education, upbringing and, above all, through inspiring examples set by elders and role models. Such people may be ancestors, parents, teachers, mentors or other exemplary characters either from the past or in the present. Given the demographic reality that more than half of British Muslims are under 25 years of age (the most youthful profile of any faith community), it can hardly be emphasised enough that the proper nurture of young British Muslims and the welfare of future generations depend crucially on quality of leadership and guidance within family and community. The same applies, of course, to all young people within all communities in Britain today.

Political Participation, Civic Engagement and Social Activism

While participants acknowledged that Muslims face many genuine difficulties, barriers, and restrictive assumptions, they discussed the many opportunities at this time for Muslims to transcend parochial 'Muslim' issues and engage positively with wider society for the common good.

Deprivation, Disadvantage and Public Hostility

Participants discussed the range of problems faced by post-diaspora Muslims. Some of these problems are more or less specific to Muslim communities, while others are

found in other minority communities, including Sikhs, Hindus and Balkan Christians, as well as in wider society.

Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities are shown to be disadvantaged by most of the key indicators of economic and social well-being. It is also apparent that many communities of Muslim heritage are the most ethnically/racially disadvantaged and deprived. Muslims have the lowest employment rate and the highest economic inactivity rate of any group. The majority of Pakistani and Bangladeshi children are living in households below the poverty line. Muslims also have the highest rates of reported ill health.

It is officially acknowledged that Muslims are experiencing anti-Muslim prejudice (Islamophobia) both personally and institutionally through forms of marginalisation, discrimination and stereotyping. It has been claimed that Islamophobia is not only widespread but also socially acceptable in Britain today. Despite the fact that most Muslims in Britain strongly identify as British, only one in three of the general population believe Muslims are loyal citizens, and such serious misperceptions are heightened by a mainstream media narrative which increasingly projects Islam and Muslims as a threat to traditional British customs, values and ways of life.

This rising trend of social polarisation illustrates that the prevailing British public discourse on Islam is fundamentally concerned with whether the religion is compatible with the liberal, democratic and secular norms and values of modern British and Western societies. Far-right fringe groups have been able to feed off a growing sense of suspicion within wider society toward Muslim minorities in their midst.

Participants discussed the factors driving the process of social polarisation. While there are many interrelated historical, socio-political, geopolitical, economic and cultural factors at play, it is possible to identify a deepening sense of social crisis as a prominent source of the problem. Widespread anxieties about economic recession, unemployment, inflation, violent conflict, and terrorism, for instance, can often be projected onto minority social groups who are seen as outsiders. Historians of mass violence point out that it is the blaming of such groups which may often initiate the processes that lead to genocide.

Barriers to Political Participation

Participants discussed the restrictive assumptions and myths which represent a barrier to greater political participation by Muslims.

There is widespread assumption that religious identity is the main factor driving political participation by Muslims. This has created the restrictive expectation that their participation in politics and public discourse is conditioned by their being Muslim first, and British second. As a result, there may be negative reactions to Muslims who speak about issues of general public interest or matters not identifiable as specifically 'Muslim'. Such matters may be seen as outside the legitimate territory allotted to and occupied by Muslims.

While Muslims have often been accused of falling short in their involvement in the political process, attempts to mobilise the Muslim vote have invariably been met with apprehension, criticism, and accusations of allegiance to foreign agendas and groups.

An additional impediment is the myth of a monolithic 'Muslim community'. Many countries of origin and various heritages are represented in Britain's highly diverse Muslim communities. Participants emphasised that a proper understanding of Muslim communities in Britain must take into account the diversity of cultural and religious practices, pre-migration status, settlement histories, geographies and socio-economic conditions within these communities. Failure to grasp this complexity may lead to inappropriate and unsuccessful public policy initiatives for engaging with and working with Muslim communities. The current climate of highly-charged debate around multiculturalism, integration and cohesion has only compounded this complexity.

It was reiterated by participants throughout the discussions that it is important for Muslims not to be confined within an exclusively Muslim identity concerned only with parochial Muslim issues. Muslims have the right and duty as responsible British citizens to speak out on issues that concern wider society. Some also questioned the mentality of 'Islamisation', the perceived need to relate everything to Islamic tradition, believing it to be a handicap which needs to be transcended. In the same way, they added, there may be no need to consult a detailed manual of Islamic rulings for guidance on the minutiae of every conceivable issue.

Active Citizenship, Community Spirit and the Common Good

Participants discussed the importance of recognising that the political sphere encompasses not only the political structures of the state at national and local levels but also the civic engagement and social activism generated by individuals and communities at the grass roots level.

Participants affirmed that tolerance towards faith communities and the inclusion of religious voices in the public sphere are integral to the British conception of

'secularity'. People of faith have the democratic right to contest issues in public discourse and to champion values rooted in their faith traditions.

Faith groups have long played an important role in public life at local and national levels. The positive contributions they make to public life are deeply rooted in their traditions of social action and underpinned by a strong commitment to values that promote stewardship, social and economic justice, and public service.

The 'Big Society' agenda of the present government, aiming to recast models of partnership between the state and communities, has significant implications for faith groups. Central to this new public policy agenda is a vision of active citizenship, with people from different communities coming together, independent of government, to solve local problems. There is a natural affinity between a positive vision of the Big Society and Islamic principles, given the strong emphasis in Islam on charity and good deeds.

Participants recognised that faith groups represent a powerful community resource with a deep reach into communities, particularly to the most marginalised groups. They provide a level of continuity and sustained support that is hard for other voluntary organisations to match.

Two words perhaps sum up the most pressing imperatives: 'engage' and 'collaborate'. Participants agreed that, given the Qur'anic principle of a community of people standing up for what is right and discouraging what is wrong, it should not be difficult for Muslims to understand the vital importance of engagement and participation as the essential route to societal transformation based on ethical values. Similarly, the Qur'anic principle of pluralism enshrines an unequivocal call for active engagement with others as a means of discovering truth and advancing justice.

Participants discussed the many channels and mechanisms apart from political parties for political engagement. These range from the family unit and the neighbourhood to mosques and community centres, Muslim organisations, local schools, and online communities. Muslims can also actively demonstrate their concern about various issues by becoming involved in campaigns which seek to benefit wider society and contribute to the public good. This requires the consciousness of wider social responsibility which goes beyond an often exclusive or disproportionate focus on foreign policy and 'Muslim issues'.

There is evidence that young Muslims in particular are idealistic about their participation in society as moral individuals, and are strongly engaged with issues of citizenship centred on community. Such findings give strong credence to the view

of Muslims as 'model citizens' revealed by a Gallup Poll conducted in 2007. Qualities of good citizenship were widely embodied by Muslims during the riots which disfigured English towns and cities in August 2011. It is important to bring this to public attention, especially when sections of the media are so quick to print negative headlines about Muslims on the flimsiest of pretexts.

Participants discussed how the higher moral objectives (*maqasid*) enshrined in the Qur'an and the Prophetic model of governance establish a constructive ethical framework which is axiomatically peaceful, inclusive, pluralistic and respectful of liberty of conscience within the secular public space. Such principles empower Muslims to participate fully as citizens in working towards ideas, laws, institutions, norms and values which protect civil rights and political freedoms, defend cultural and religious diversity, champion social and economic justice, and promote responsibility for the environment. In such a way, a new Islamic public theology can be advanced: one which fosters a vibrant and confident social activism in support of an open-ended and dynamic radical politics for the continued progressive transformation of society.

A renewed Islamic public theology offers rich resources for a broad alliance of citizens to develop inclusive and collective responses to the many interconnected and deepening crises in the contemporary world.

All communities need to be wary of claiming exclusive ownership of universal human values for the partisan purpose of asserting ethnic or national superiority or claiming special dispensation to act as moral exemplars for all mankind. Rather, all citizens and communities, no matter what their affiliation, need to work together to reclaim those shared universal principles and core human values which transcend national, cultural, ideological and religious divides.

The Individual and the Community

The Concept of the Individual¹

The Concept of the Individual in the West

The emergence and development of the concept of the 'individual' in the West can be traced back to successive historical movements. The Protestant Reformation gave precedence to an individual relationship with God requiring personal responsibility and accountability over unquestioning obedience to religious hierarchy; the Renaissance emphasised human dignity, intellectual freedom and the emancipation of the ego; the 'Enlightenment' carried this advancement of the individual further, advocating critical questioning of traditional institutions, customs and morals, and developing the concept of the unencumbered self, with human reason as the primary criterion for legitimacy and authority.

In the modern period, notions of self-interest and liberty evolved further with the advent of capitalism and the modern nation state.² A further milestone was reached at Nuremberg in the exploration of the responsibilities of the individual for atrocities committed in the Second World War and the Holocaust. This led to the development of international standards of human rights, which sought to strike a balance between rights and responsibilities.

Participants in the project acknowledged the importance of questioning the belief that the elevation of the individual in Western society has been entirely beneficial. Many agreed that unfettered individualism had elevated the expectation of personal entitlement above responsibility, and had eroded family and community solidarity.³

The Individual Self in Islamic Thought and Spirituality

Islam has often been regarded as essentially communitarian, in the sense that it may be seen to give precedence to the common good (*maslaha*) when a conflict of interest arises between the individual and the community. It does not, however, demand that the needs of the individual are entirely secondary to community interests. Islam is first and foremost a religion, a moral code, and a way of life which, like all religions, must take the individual as its primary focus. The dependence of social transformation on individual spiritual development and personal transformation is explicitly referred to in the well-known Qur'anic dictum that *God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves*.⁴

The Qur'an emphasises that all human beings are born with freedom of choice and will have to account fully and solely for their own deeds as individuals on the Day of Judgement, although there is always the promise of Divine Mercy. The Qur'an states that on the Day of Judgement, each individual's record of good and bad deeds will speak for and against his or her soul.⁵

The definition of the individual in Islam encompasses not only the legal concept of the competent adult in full possession of his or her faculties (*mukallaf*), capable of discharging legal and social responsibilities, and accountable for his or her actions, but also includes a deeply spiritual concept. It goes so far as to envisage the human being as capable of becoming the Perfect 'Man' (*al-insan al-kamil*) or the 'darling of God' (*habib-Allah*). It is also applied to the individual Muslim who strives to realise his or her full human potential as one whose essential nature (*fitra*) carries the divine imprint and, as affirmed in the Qur'an, has been created 'in the best of moulds'.⁶ Such individual spirituality requires consciousness of God (*taqwa*) and the attainment of excellence in character and behaviour.

It is mistaken to assume that the quest for individual spirituality is too idealistic, since it is absolutely rooted in the Qur'anic concept of the individually accountable human being into whose soul the divine spirit (*ruh*) has been breathed. The upbringing encompassed by the family and education at all levels aims to enable the individual to develop the full range of human faculties, including critical awareness, and, if necessary, the ability to challenge the collective if it is not working for, or is opposed to, the common good.

Participants discussed the significant contribution of Muhammad Iqbal to the concept of individuality in Islamic thought. Iqbal derived his notion of *khudi* (human personality, ego, individual self) from an inspired understanding of the Qur'an. A

human being can only attain to the status of *khalifa* (representative or steward of God on earth)⁷ if he or she strives continually to foster the growth and development of the individual self through the exercise of personal will and responsibility. Motivated also by his opposition to what he saw as Muslim passivity and fatalism, Iqbal upheld that political self-determination cannot be achieved without a 'can do' mentality as an expression of individual human agency.

Unlike a view of the individual that entails the rejection of transcendence, Islam, like all faith traditions, honours the creative potential of the individual without losing sight of the individual's position in a God-centred universe. It is important to recall too that Renaissance humanists were devout Christians, and their human-centred ideas were not intended as an assault on faith. Only later, in the modern period, has humanism come to be associated with atheism.

Concepts like 'freedom of choice' and 'freedom of expression' are often cited as examples of the benefits of modern individualism. The Arabic word *ikhtiyar* (choice, preference), however, is related to the word *khayr*, 'good'. To choose what is good, to fulfil the sacred trust (*amana*) placed upon us, is true freedom because it conforms to and activates the innate goodness embedded within our essential nature as human beings. Similarly, the legally protected right to personal freedom of expression brings with it the civic responsibility to use this right wisely so as not to provoke sensitivities to the point where they may lead to violence or suffering.

The Individual and the Community

Competition and Collaboration

The Qur'an advises individuals to compete with one another in doing good,⁸ but also to help one another in righteousness, *inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong*.⁹ While the injunction to compete appears to focus on the individual, the injunction to collaborate seems to indicate that the individual cannot be conceived of as independent from other members of society. The individual attains to goodness (*ihsan*) and perfection (*kamal*) by participating fully in society, both in competition and collaboration with others, and not by withdrawing or disengaging from it.¹⁰

There was broad agreement amongst participants that honouring the individual within the community requires a balanced view that resists the potential destructiveness of both centripetal and centrifugal forces. Centripetal forces pull

inwards, subordinating and even crushing the individual, while centrifugal forces pull outwards, thus rupturing the community. Instead, there are intersecting circles of rights and responsibilities encompassing the individual, the family, the community, wider society, the nation state, and ultimately all humanity and the entire creation. Individuals need help in navigating these circles so as to achieve equilibrium and resist the disproportionate pull of centripetal and centrifugal forces.

However, equilibrium and balance should not be seen as mere compatibility between the individual and the community. Neither should the Islamic principle of moderation be seen as a feeble compromise between competing extremes or misused as a call for Muslims to be silent and invisible in the public sphere. It is important that the distinction between the individual and the community is not contextualised within a predetermined framework, such as the 'clash of mentalities' between individualism and collectivism. A more creative way of looking at the relationship is needed so as to avoid the simplistic dichotomies set up by polarised thinking.

All agreed that a continual process of rebalancing within and between individuals, communities and wider societies is vitally important. Adjusting the balance in the right way between the individual and the community can apply a corrective to an excessively communitarian mentality and give more prominence to the individual without promoting excessive individualism.

The Need for Rebalancing

Participants discussed the need to rebalance the relationship between the individual and the community in response to the shared perception that too much weight has been given to the community.

There was emphatic agreement that there is a lack of creativity in much current thinking about a wide range of issues. Individual voices are often filtered out because they are not considered to be authoritative, but it is important to make room for legitimate dissent, including minority and discordant views. There may be a fearful and anxious reaction to ideas coming in from the outside, and pressing issues may be avoided so as to preserve the community from public shame. Participants agreed that strong communities are not airtight, but open, plural and flexible, and inclusive of creative energies and voices. Muslims need to feel that they have the right to express themselves as individuals and not always toe the line. Scholars may also often have a personal view, but dare not express it in case it offends sections of the community.

Many young Muslims, in particular, are seeking an authentic Islam rooted in the primary sources of the faith, but their understanding of what is authentic (often excavated through their own diligent study and enquiry) may not always be endorsed by those voices within the community which are themselves out of touch with authentic Islamic principles and values.

Such difficulties are also compounded by the fact that the word 'authentic' can itself convey different meanings. Authenticity can be taken to denote a fundamentalist or literalist reading of scripture, or it can convey the sense of the reclamation of the essence of the original message. Young Muslims may be drawn to either expression of the search for authenticity.

Participants reiterated throughout the discussions as a whole that no effective rebalancing can occur without bringing Muslim women into the frame. The issue of gender equality and justice is of such pivotal importance that it will be discussed in detail in a later section of this report.

The Decline of Independent Interpretation

An important way in which space for the individual is provided in Islamic thought and practice is through *ijtihad* (intellectual effort), a technical term of Islamic law that describes the process of coming to a legal decision through independent interpretation of primary sources (the Qur'an and the Sunna). This is in contrast to *taqlid* (imitation), the reliance on decisions and precedents set in the past.¹¹

A great quantity of classical Islamic literature was produced by interpreters who were not only interpreting the Qur'an and *hadith* (reported sayings and acts of the Prophet) but were also interpreting the interpretations of the master jurists (*fuqaha*). The texts and commentaries they produced constituted 'legitimate knowledge' and their students, as well as practitioners of law and theology, continued to re-interpret and comment on their works, providing successive commentaries on commentaries. In order to legitimise the truth of their claims most Muslims today prefer to be seen to follow the classical scholars and their interpretations.

The process of supplementation produced by commentaries and marginal notes added by students of the doctors of law on the works of their teachers led to a gradual move away from *ijtihad* to fixed meanings which left little room for flexible, creative and contextual interpretation of the corpus of transmitted texts.

The imitative mentality in following the decisions of authoritative religious scholars can be attributed to the socio-political interests of certain groups, especially the

scholars (*ulama*) who acted as fulcrums of power and knowledge through their role as guardians and interpreters of the sacred texts. These scholars then became the custodians of the divine legal capital, the final arbiters of all legal matters. They stamped the process of legal discourse with such authority that the laws they derived from the sacred texts were regarded as expressing the authentic and final law of God Himself.

A Broad and Inclusive *Umma*

The Prophet's concept of the *umma* was very broad and inclusive, taking in the Muslim, Jewish, Christian and pagan communities of Medina, all of whom were brought into the fold of one community or nation, the *umma*, in the Constitution of Medina (also known as the Charter of Medina). This was drafted under the Prophet's direction in AD 622 to bring to an end the bitter inter-tribal fighting between important clans in Medina, and laid down a number of rights and responsibilities for all the communities within the larger *umma*. There is a current need for a more complex, multiple concept of *umma* consonant with the broad and inclusive view at the dawn of Islam. This view encompasses wider society, the larger community of people with whom one lives.

Participants agreed that an exclusivist mentality which rigidly separates Muslim from non-Muslim identity encourages a more constricted vision of the *umma*. The problem of separate communities is exacerbated by the way in which outsiders impose on Muslims the sense of a monolithic community that is bereft of the richness and diversity characteristic of Muslim life. Muslims can feel trapped by this narrow understanding of Islam and Muslims, and participants agreed that it should be vigorously critiqued.

Cyber-Communities

Several participants emphasised that any discussion of Muslim communities needs to take heed of the growth of new cyber-communities promoted by the wider availability and use of the internet. These include social networking sites and Islamic cyber-environments that have exposed Muslims to new influences outside traditional spheres of knowledge and authority.¹²

The presentation, interpretation and distribution of knowledge about Islam have undergone a digital revolution on a number of levels. Translations of Qur'anic commentaries, previously only available in specialist libraries, can now be consulted online, and keyword searches can be undertaken on sources that were hitherto available only to scholars and experts. The internet can now be readily accessed to

ask questions and consult religious opinions. This can be done either through databases, direct questioning, or online discussions where a variety of opinions and schools of thought are represented – all this with a level of responsiveness and accessibility previously unimaginable.

This new type of engagement with sources of knowledge can present a challenge to traditional Islamic scholars, who may feel the need to adapt to digital contexts, or else lose some of their authority. It is also challenging for the general population who may find they have too much information to deal with, making it difficult to verify what is truthful or to select what is relevant.

Internet access represents a decentralisation of authority away from the traditional hub of knowledge located in the mosque. Participants recognized that centralisation of the source of knowledge may contribute to conformity and communitarianism, whereas the internet can clearly provide space for individual enquiry. On the other hand, there is a sense in which the internet, far from facilitating a culture of enquiry through diverse perspectives and individual interpretations, can actually encourage a mono-perspective. This is because communities of like-minded people may be attracted to a website or blog that actively promotes a one-sided message or agenda and condemns all competing perspectives. The role played by highly partisan blogs in feeding extreme polarisation in political debate is currently a major concern.

Coercive Aspects of Community Membership

Communities can exercise coercion over members in various ways: through established power relationships (as in the dynamics of hierarchical gender relations); through insistence on tribal partisanship and loyalty (*asabiya*) and the maintenance of honour; through avoiding difficult issues so as to preserve the community from public shame; through the conflation of religion and culture; and through inadequate representation of minority, dissenting or discordant views.

More subtle forms of coercion or persuasion can be exercised by stigmatising dissent as a subversive attack on the unity and solidarity of the community. Any attempt at reform, no matter how minor, may also be regarded as undermining the core tenets of the faith and the beginning of a dangerous moral decline. The benefits of safety and security within the community may also be contrasted with the destructive effects, both personal and social, of unbounded liberty and individualism.

Harmful Attitudes and Practices

A recurrent theme raised by participants was the need to recognise the harm caused

by certain traditional attitudes and practices within various faith and ethnic minority communities. Participants stressed that such practices stem essentially from culture rather than religion, and are not confined to Muslim communities. The treatment of women was considered by participants to be a matter of special importance. Harmful and criminal practices including so-called 'honour-based' violence, forced marriage, female genital mutilation and domestic violence will be discussed in later sections of the report.¹³

Other instances were discussed, including the lack of family support for young Muslims experiencing a range of personal problems, and the issue of cousin marriage which has received recent attention in the press.

Participants also addressed the contentious issue as to whether an assumed dichotomy between modest Muslim girls of 'high moral standing' and 'immoral' Western girls encourages the belief in some sections of the Muslim community that the latter can be targeted for sexual exploitation and abuse.

Claims have been made that Pakistani men have been involved in the sexual exploitation and abuse of white girls as young as 11, and, anecdotally, as far back as the mid-90s, local agencies have been aware of the participation of ethnic minority men in some cases of serial abuse.¹⁴

However, no consistent evidence has emerged that Pakistani Muslim men are uniquely and disproportionately involved either in these crimes or in preying on white girls because they believe them to be legitimate sexual quarry. Furthermore, no official data exists on the ethnic or religious background of those involved in the sexual exploitation of under-age white girls.¹⁵ Many leading voices in the charitable and social work sectors have stated that the problem is widespread and should not be associated with any specific ethnic group.¹⁶ The head of one Muslim youth group added: 'No community or faith group ever sanctions these evil crimes and to suggest that this is somehow ingrained in the community is deeply offensive. I urge all engaged in this debate to do so with tolerance, honesty, and, above all, based on evidence and not prejudiced positions'.¹⁷

Unjust as the stereotyping of Pakistani Muslim men is, it is important for all communities to be continually vigilant and aware of ways in which individuals may mistakenly believe that inappropriate and even criminal acts, as well as reprehensible attitudes, can be justified according to religious beliefs, as well as by cultural prejudices. There can be no Islamic justification for vice.

The issue of marriage between cousins in the Pakistani community has also been publicised following the 'Muslim outrage' supposedly sparked by a distinguished biologist's claim that Bradford is very 'inbred'. Evidence was cited that such marriages can be genetically harmful, since children are much more likely to inherit two copies of a damaged gene. Clearly, the use of the word 'inbred' was unfortunate, even clumsy. Certain newspapers, however, seized on these remarks to manufacture a controversy, flag up tired stereotypes and demonise Muslims.¹⁸

As in all such cases, it is important to avoid a merely defensive reaction to the sully of a whole community and, rather, to take an objective look at the facts. Marriage between cousins is legal in Islam and tolerated among most Muslims, though the degree of emphasis placed upon it varies between different Muslim communities. About 70 per cent of British Pakistanis are from the Mirpur region of Pakistan, and it is true that Mirpuris do, indeed, value marriage between first cousins as a manifestation of clan loyalty (*biraderi*).¹⁹ Studies suggest that 60 per cent of all Mirpuri marriages are to a first cousin, with a substantial proportion of the remainder being between more distant relatives. It has been noted that such marriages secure the status of the clan and also allow the family to retain its land and property. In a transnational context, they permit people to give their families access to better opportunities.²⁰ It is indisputable that instances of marriage between cousins do exist in Bradford, but in fact many British Muslims disapprove strongly of the practice and even those who do practise it may often recommend genetic screening to avoid the replication of faulty genes.

It is also important to understand that just as there is a big leap from Bradford or Mirpur in particular to Muslims or even Pakistanis in general, the singling out of Muslims is also unjust, since inter-cousin marriage is common across Asia. Again, the application of inter-cousin marriage is variable in other cultures. Marriage between first cousins is permitted by Buddhists and Zoroastrians. It is forbidden amongst Hindus in northern India, but strongly favoured in certain states in the south,²¹ where it is used in the same way as amongst the Pakistani Mirpuris to secure property and status.

Many British Muslims acknowledge that the subject is ripe for debate. However, it has been rightly said that 'peddling false Muslim outrage' in the press as a way to 'reproduce gross simplifications and paint Muslims as "the other" is certainly not the way to raise these issues'.²²

Some participants expressed the view that the response by Muslims to various instances of harm within their communities has been defensive and muted, evading

the issues so as not to bring further shame and bad publicity to sections of the community. Such evasion or indifference may spring from complacency about internal matters, in sharp contrast to strong opinions and judgements about foreign policy issues.

Given the undeniable reality of anti-Muslim prejudice within Britain today, undertaking an internal critique amongst Muslims may appear to be a risky strategy playing into the hands of critics of Islam and Muslims. Participants agreed, however, that it is only through an internal critique that Muslim communities can shift their own norms as part of the process of rebalancing the relationship between the individual and the community.

Participants upheld that constructive self-criticism is an intrinsic part of Islamic practice, reflecting the Prophet's own positive and proactive style of criticism. Greater risks need to be taken in developing a deeper internal critique, and it was considered that there is a pressing need for faith and community leaders to promote it. Delinquency and deviance are not misunderstandings or corrupt practices of Islam, but outright contraventions of Islamic teachings. This is a big responsibility for leaders, who need to be held to account by community members.

Supporting Young British Muslims

Support Services

Participants discussed the work of organisations dedicated to the well-being of Muslim families and individuals. One such organisation has developed pioneering initiatives in social and welfare services from an Islamic perspective, including projects on sexual abuse, fostering and adoption, the development of counselling, and sexual health education.²³

Another award-winning charity offers free listening and support services to young Muslims in distress.²⁴ Young Muslims have to contend with many problems, including social exclusion, institutional discrimination, poverty and unemployment. However, the top five concerns dealt with by the charity are relationship problems, mental health (e.g. anxiety and depression), faith and identity issues, offending and rehabilitation, and sexuality and sexual health.

Confidentiality is assured by the charity, except in extreme situations where self-harm or harm to others is intended. A non-judgmental policy encourages young people

to make contact without fear of rejection, prejudice, or condemnation. The charity is run by young people for young people, thus creating a system of peer support. Clients are not told what to do but are helped and empowered to make their own decisions.

Charity workers are trained to understand the cultural implications of issues faced by Muslims and to utilise key skills designed to give empathy and reassurance, draw out the client's own aspirations, and give space to work through the problem and explore related issues that may contribute to it. The starting point of the relationship with clients is always compassion and lending a hand. This is always borne in mind, even when charity workers face moral dilemmas in dealing with clients, and it helps them to resist the temptation to give prescriptive advice rather than to provide a space for clients to work through their problems themselves.

Sensitive Listening, Caring and Sharing

Participants agreed that Muslim communities need to be better equipped to deal with the issues that are currently faced by young British Muslims. This requires the adoption and implementation of authentic Islamic principles and values in everyday life.

Much of the discussion amongst participants centred on the need for a more sensitive human response to the needs and personal problems faced by young Muslims. In fact, the approach of personal empowerment can be shown to be rooted within an Islamic theological and legal framework. Two levels can be clearly discerned in Islamic approaches to addressing social issues: the application of abstract, prescriptive, judgmental rulings and customary regulations divorced from context; and the application of a sensitive and compassionate human response to an individual case.

The latter approach is notably exemplified in the humane, kind and beneficent way in which the Prophet himself dealt with specific cases brought to him for judgement in a way that pointed to the later development of Islamic ethics. Many *hadith* attest to the fact that the Prophet refrained from applying legislative or penal codes in resolving personal matters of morality, preferring to leave private relationships to be worked out between the parties concerned on the basis of broad ethical advice and practical common sense. He also showed compassionate awareness of human limitations and loving concern that people should not oppress themselves with unsustainable spiritual burdens and disproportionate self-criticism.

A common element in the stories of young Muslims facing a range of problems is the lack of family support. Discussion of various case studies highlighted this lack in

a range of distressing situations, including identity conflicts, social isolation, marital difficulties, mental health problems, and physical and sexual abuse.

Participants expressed concern at the harm and distress caused by harsh and insensitive parenting, including parental rejection. Such harm often extends not only to one individual, but to a great many other people who may be involved and whose lives may be irreparably damaged. Many cases discussed by participants highlighted the way in which personal problems can be exacerbated by family pressures and how personal welfare may take second place to family honour.

Participants recognised the need for a support system for families and for individuals whose problems are compounded by their families. Such support also needs to include advice on how to consider options other than rigid 'make or break' or 'all or nothing' approaches. There needs to be a more flexible and less dogmatic outlook in approaching complex issues which require humane and sensitive handling within families.

Participants also emphasised that there is a particular need for fathers to build meaningful relationships with their children. Core principles of fatherhood need to include kindness, calmness, love and gentleness, as well as the ability to listen without interruption, and to make suggestions and explore choices instead of imposing a single view.²⁵

Not all young people in distress will discuss their problems with charity workers. Some may also go to Imams for help, advice and support. It was recognised that counselling skills need to be included in the training of Imams, and that vital specialist skills such as arbitration and mediation need to be learned. This need was recognised in a recent DCLG report on the training and development of Imams, which recommended that 'programmes of initial training and continuing professional development need to include not only theology and spirituality but also reflection on practical experience, counselling and pastoral skills, and contextualising Islam in contemporary society'.²⁶ This reiterates previous proposals for the continuing professional development of faith leaders in communication, negotiation, representation and other skills that enable them to operate more effectively and confidently within their own communities.²⁷ This is of particular relevance to so-called 'imported Imams' who may lack awareness of the British context.

Participants highlighted the importance of developing an open listening culture. The ability to listen is integral to the development of emotional intelligence and the attainment of emotional maturity. Listening to the other, whether represented by a

different faith, race or culture, by a different gender, or by a different generation, underpins the development of a pluralistic outlook which is comfortable with diversity and treats others with respect and compassion.

A caring and sharing spirit is integral to the Islamic *khalifa* model of stewardship, whether in the family or in the workplace. The proper application of principles of stewardship fosters a climate in which trust, mercy, cooperation, tolerance and altruism are at least as important as efficiency, achievement, compliance and obedience to authority.²⁸

Gender – Equality, Identity and Sexuality²⁹

Gender Equality and Justice

The Challenge of Modernity

Modernity poses major challenges to the prerogative exercised by existing authorities to interpret and to promulgate traditions of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and theology (*ilm al-kalam, usul al-fiqh, usul al-din*). This is partly because the precedence given to the community over the individual conflicts with contemporary philosophical notions of the self. The rise of the modern self is characterised by the desire to live an authentic life, to grow and become fulfilled as a complete and fully rounded human being; in faith-based communities, however, there is a need to refer to texts to validate and justify doctrine and action and those texts may often be read in such a way that conflicts with the search for personal authenticity and autonomy.

Mainstream jurisprudence was developed for Muslim-majority contexts and for situations in which Muslims held political and economic power, but this is no longer the case for a very significant percentage of the world's Muslims, who live as minorities outside Muslim-majority countries. Furthermore, the world is a very different place today from 7th-century Arabia, and a rejuvenated kind of jurisprudence is needed to reflect developments in international law, international institutions and international standards of human rights, as well as advances in human knowledge instantly available through modern technology.

To put it simply, existing theological and legal discourses on matters of faith and moral agency are not sufficient in themselves for dealing with the new challenges posed by modernity. There is therefore a compelling need for jurists and theologians to reach out to new horizons and develop new modes of theological reasoning which

can do justice to a faith rooted in the ethical and spiritual values that lie at the heart of the path of the individual believer to God.

In honouring such a need, the issue of gender equality and justice for women is clearly of prime importance. Both men and women are equally endowed with the potential for realising their full humanity in this life; the completed or perfected 'man' (*al-insan al-kamil*) is not gendered, and full access to the delights and blessings of the afterlife is clearly not a privilege afforded only to men.

Feminism and Islam

While participants acknowledged that Western feminism has made an outstanding contribution towards securing dignity for women, they also discussed its fundamental divergence from Islam in ignoring the theological dimension. Some upheld that there can be no ultimately fruitful discussion between Islam and an ideology that seems to have no concept or vision of transcendence and no interest in any reality beyond the material world. While there is a clear need to engage with feminist ideas that promote gender equality and justice, such ideas will only be authentic for Muslims if they are rooted in their religious beliefs and values.

Many participants expressed the view that the way forward is not to replace one dominant model with another, supplanting the authority of text with that of social convention. Given the divergence between some of the principles, norms and values within the Islamic tradition and present day feminist ideas of women's rights, some participants suggested that this gap is unlikely to be permanently closed by a return to the classical tradition, or by the imaginative reinterpretation of Qur'anic verses and Islamic law or ethics. There may be a need to accept that there are limits to contextualising Islam in such a way that results in a perfect convergence between Islam and modern liberalism/feminism. Better critical engagement between different models may be facilitated if they are kept separate, and this may require the acceptance and management of some degree of dissonance between Islamic and other formulations.

Some went further in upholding that, although everyone would agree about the fundamental importance of social justice, there were serious theoretical and empirical defects in Western feminism. It was, in any case, too energy-consuming to try to incorporate the whole apparatus of feminist doctrines into Muslim discourse and there was a natural resistance to the invasion and double colonisation represented by Western critiques. In contrast to this, others argued that the central idea of Western feminism – the social construction of gender – was very useful if applied in

the right way to promote gender equality and justice, and not used to racialise Muslims or reinforce orientalist attitudes.³⁰

It is a strongly held belief amongst Muslim women that Islam contains within it the resources to allow them to challenge injustice and oppression within their own communities. Some participants nevertheless upheld that this belief should not prevent Muslim women from being open to legitimate arguments from outside their own tradition, using the experience of Western feminism and other political movements as a valuable source of ideas and experience.

It was therefore considered distinctly unhelpful that some feminists respond to Muslim women who choose to affirm their faith by insisting that they need to be re-educated and even to exit their faith community. This is a significant barrier to Muslim women who would like to establish positive political and feminist alliances that would assist them in the monumental task of challenging the power of men within their own communities.

The Totem of 'Women in Islam'

The issue of gender equality for women has loomed very large as a symbolic issue, a totem or test case of whether or not Islam, and Muslims, can adjust to the new context of liberal democracies.

It has been noted that the repeated allusions and insistent questions of fellow-citizens and the media about 'women in Islam' exert a kind of psychological pressure that drives Muslims to adopt a defensive and often apologetic stance.³¹ This defensiveness may be an understandable reaction to the stereotyping and misperceptions that often impel such interrogation, but it is not helpful when it is resorted to as a means of avoiding genuine enquiry and proper concern about the status and rights of women in Muslim communities.

The deployment of principles of gender equality is one way in which overt expressions of racism can be transformed into more socially acceptable criticism of minorities.³² Participants agreed that widespread misuse of the topic of 'women in Islam' often serves as a major barrier to meaningful discussion of important issues. A prime example is the ideological alliance between colonialism and feminism which generates shared judgements about the subjugation and oppression of women supposedly sanctioned by Islam. Some participants claimed that those who espouse such views may have no genuine interest in the welfare of Muslim communities, but are very quick to pick up on the issue of Muslim women's rights.

The emphasis placed on women and gender issues in current discourse about Islam and Muslims is largely driven by the widespread perception that Islam is characteristically or even uniquely misogynist and patriarchal. Such views are rooted to large extent in the ideological biases, historical prejudices, and cultural intolerance associated with 'orientalist' approaches to Islam which have undoubtedly compromised Western ideals of 'scientific objectivity'.

Such approaches also include Western misrepresentations of Muslim women as veiled, secluded and submissive sexual slaves or odalisques. Although this image of the Muslim woman has held sway in orientalist fantasies since the 18th century Enlightenment, it is well to realise that during the medieval period and the Renaissance, Muslim women were portrayed in an exactly opposite, though equally pejorative, way, as forceful shrews of wanton and intimidating sexuality. Changes in images of Muslim women are therefore linked to changes not only in European relations with the Muslim world but also to changing gender dynamics within Western societies.

The idea that 'Muslims make women slaves' is also an incendiary element in the anti-Muslim bigotry and propaganda which has escalated since 9/11, 7/7 and the War on Terror. Similar views were explicit in the way Serbian orientalists publicised the fiction (as part of their litany of misrepresentations) that in Islamic teaching, no woman has a soul.³³ Applying the label 'Islamic fundamentalist' indiscriminately to all Muslims as reflections of the 'darkness of the past', they equated Islam as a 'religion of terror' with the subjugation of women, and appealed directly to a sense of superior values which they regarded as implicit in Western civilisation.

Participants discussed how distorted, sexualised and Islamophobic images of Muslim women in the media and popular fiction have severe repercussions on their health and well-being. Such depictions de-sensitise observers to any understanding or appreciation of the integrity of Muslim women and how they perceive themselves, perpetuating instead crude stereotypes of them as low-status and submissive victims who need enlightenment and liberation. The concomitant view that Muslim men are violent, oppressive and prone to hyper-masculinity is also reinforced.

The negative effects of unchallenged Islamophobia include low self-esteem, stress and depression, anger and frustration, confusion, a sense of powerlessness and the provocation of reactionary attitudes and impulses which may increase vulnerability to radicalisation and extremism. A self-fulfilling prophecy is also involved in unremittingly negative depictions of Muslims: a community can become what is projected onto it.

Participants agreed that the impact of prejudice and racialisation should not, however, justify the avoidance of addressing urgent problems affecting the status and welfare of women in Muslim communities. There is a pressing need for an honest and probing internal debate which does not shy away from contentious issues and which fully acknowledges that such issues go beyond a few isolated cases.

The Silencing of Muslim Women

Participants discussed the way in which anti-Muslim prejudice is increasingly hidden behind the mask of concern for women. The prevailing discourse around practices such as veiling and arranged marriages, as well as criminal practices such as 'honour-based' violence, forced marriages, domestic violence and female genital mutilation, reveals how anti-Muslim prejudice has become normalised by contrasting supposedly 'Islamic' traditions of gender inequality with progressive 'Western' traditions of gender equality and female emancipation.

Such binary thinking has tended to reinforce unquestioningly the idea that Islam is oppressive to women. It is also used to justify the silencing of the voices of Muslim women while simultaneously proclaiming a mission to liberate them from the oppression of their supposedly enforced silence. In such a way, the right of Muslim women to speak for themselves may be misappropriated by self-appointed champions of women's rights in the West. The facade of concern for gender equality can thus facilitate the perpetuation and reinforcement of orientalist attitudes and anti-Muslim bigotry.

Muslim women using terms such as patriarchy, sexual inequality, and liberation in their writings may actually only be engaging obliquely with Western feminist thought. However, in the minds of those Muslims who are resistant to change and who are hyper-sensitive to any criticism of Muslim men, the use of such language may be seen as alien, provocative and inextricably linked to the subversive voices of Western feminists. The mis-labelling of Muslim women in this way not only denies the autonomy and creativity of their thought, but also wrongly suggests that there is no room within Islam to contest gender inequality.³⁴

Equality and Difference

One aspect of gender in Islam and within Muslim communities that raises important issues is the way in which certain female and male characteristics may be regarded as innate and universal rather than the outcome of nurture, or social construction. Such 'essentialist' positions on gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, or other group

characteristics, consider these to be fixed traits, claiming that they are independent of context, and discounting variation among group members as secondary.

Some participants were critical of this approach, claiming that the idealisation of the 'divine feminine', with its selective focus on divine beauty as a way to spirituality, not only entrenches traditional female roles, including submissiveness, but also male roles and ideals of masculinity which can be damaging to men. They contended that it is better to regard the feminine as a principle which is available to both men and women. They also felt that an emphasis on the idea that gender roles are socially constructed rather than innate is of particular importance at this time for Muslim communities when a major corrective is deemed to be necessary to promote gender equality and justice for women.

Others felt that it is misleading to create a false dichotomy between equality and difference, and that fundamental equality is not necessarily negated by acknowledging that men and women can have different and complementary gender characteristics and roles. To that end, it has been suggested that beyond the struggle represented by Islamic feminism and the vindication of rights, there is a need to speak of and promote an Islamic femininity which encompasses not only the dignity and autonomy of the feminine being and equality before the law, but also natural complementarity.³⁵ An appreciation of complementarity was also seen by some as integral to a partnership approach which protects an Islamic approach to feminism from the hostility towards men that has sometimes been a feature of Western feminism.

Some felt strongly that, in addition to the false dichotomy between equality and difference/complementarity, there is a similar problem in insisting on stark and often irreconcilable distinctions between nature and nurture, or essentialism and social construction, and other binary oppositions of this kind.

Many women choose to remain members of a cultural or religious group and they voluntarily adopt practices that are perceived to conflict with equality and non-discrimination norms. Such women may choose forms of dress that many people consider to be patriarchal; they may enter into intimate relationships – such as arranged marriages – which are considered to embody unequal relationships between men and women. They may also choose to regulate their personal affairs in forums – such as Muslim arbitration or Jewish Beth Din forums – where the rules of inheritance or divorce may be seen as discriminatory.

Some participants held the view that women have the right to choose for themselves whether they wish to adopt particular roles, including granting a measure of

authority voluntarily to a man within a consensual marital relationship provided that it does not involve domestic violence. The denial of citizenship by a Western government to immigrant women who express their voluntary acceptance of male authority can therefore be legitimately questioned as the inappropriate imposition of culturally conditioned concepts of gender relations.

Others expressed their unease at the idea of voluntary acceptance of subjugation or discrimination on the grounds that it cannot realistically be 'voluntary' – it must be imposed in some way if not directly on the individual in question. If so, the point of imposition needs to be identified and addressed. The problem here is partly one of language: it would be better not to associate the genuinely voluntary acceptance of male authority with subjugation and discrimination, but rather envisage such a relationship as the fulfillment of divinely prescribed and complementary roles, the maximisation of gender-related strengths, and the like. Such language expresses a more positive vision of the voluntary adoption of specific roles, even though the idea that differential roles and strengths are innate or divinely endowed is of course contested by those who favour a view of gender roles as socially constructed.

Despite the complexity of these issues, all agreed about the urgent need for radical change in attitudes and practices that cause harm and suffering to women in Muslim communities and have wider repercussions for the health of relationships within families.

Patriarchy and Masculinism

Patriarchy

It is often stated that the problem of gender inequality in Muslim communities is one of practice rather than principle. A considerable amount of material from religious sources and historical practice can be advanced in support of this view. Many have demonstrated that there is a strongly egalitarian voice within Islam generally, and more specifically in the Qur'an, that continues to speak to women in a startling and direct way.

It has been noted that it is one thing to believe that nothing in the message of Islam justifies discrimination against women, but quite another to pretend that women do not actually suffer discrimination in Western (or Eastern) Muslim communities.³⁶ 'Any look at these communities that could be called objective will reveal that we are far from the ideal of equality before God, complementarity in family and social relations, and financial independence, behind which many religious scholars (*ulama*) and

intellectuals hide by quoting verses and Prophetic traditions. This does not reflect the reality and to say otherwise would be a lie'.³⁷

However, those who emphasise the contrast between ideal principles and failure at the level of practical realisation are likely to come up against a number of stubborn problems. At a fundamental level, those who propose solutions by going back to legal rulings (*fiqh*) or through creative processes of interpretation, are faced with the unavoidable reality that some of the core ideas and practices derived from Islamic sources can legitimately be described as patriarchal. One verse of the Qur'an, for example, establishes male guardianship over women, commanding men to take full care of women, not only in the sense of physical maintenance and protection, but also in the sense of moral responsibility.³⁸ The same verse is also normally interpreted to sanction the legitimate use of physical chastisement (*daraba*) of refractory wives by husbands. The issues raised by this verse were discussed in depth by participants and are reported in the section below on Interpretive Approaches to 'Problematic' Texts.

Pride and arrogance have been implicated in patriarchy, in the sense that it is based on the false notion of male superiority. As such, it replicates the original sin of Iblis, who, having refused to bow down to Adam, as commanded by God, was expelled from Paradise and was thereafter known as *shaytan* (Satan).³⁹ The Qur'an makes it clear that men and women have the same essential nature or primordial disposition (*fitra*), the same intellectual and spiritual faculties, and the same responsibility as moral agents of God to uphold justice. In several places in the Qur'an, all human beings are spoken of as representatives of God on earth. The Qur'an also stresses that God, though conventionally referred to by the male pronoun, cannot be compared to anything and is therefore beyond the range of human comprehension, conceptualisation or imagination. This clearly includes gender, and the limitations of any conception of God as 'God the Father'.

It has been claimed that the Qur'an initiated what it best understood as a process to move the believer, as a person and a member of a just social order, beyond patriarchy. It therefore needs to be asked whether Muslims have succeeded in fulfilling gender justice to the extent envisioned in the Qur'an.

Some participants maintained that it was important to acknowledge that it is not only men who replicate misogynistic, patriarchal and authoritarian norms and practices. Inadequate relationships between men and women can also harm men by leading to dysfunctional relationships between mothers and sons, and the resultant replication of psychological and emotional damage.

The Control of Muslim Women: Sexuality and Marriage

Patriarchal structures which control female sexuality within Muslim communities are, at worst, replicated by various assumptions: that gender differences are universal and immutable, that women are incapacitated by child-bearing, the menstrual cycle and their supposedly 'emotional' (and hence irrational) nature, and that the roles of wife and mother are fixed. It may also be assumed that women are inherently 'dangerous' in their ability to excite men's illicit sexual desires and they must therefore be kept out of sight through seclusion and veiling. One caricature of Muslim female sexuality in European orientalist fantasies has depicted Muslim women as sexually rampant, and this is shared in some areas of the Muslim world. It also underlies the practice of female circumcision or female genital mutilation (FGM) in various parts of the world as a means of repressing female sexuality.⁴⁰

Although FGM is a cultural practice that predates both the Qur'an and the Bible and possibly even Judaism, there is absolutely no justification for it in Islam. In order for some parents to abandon this practice it is enough to educate them that it is no part of their religion. Although the extent of this practice is often deeply exaggerated, racialised and exploited to undermine Islam and Muslims, the fact remains that there have been recent reports of up to 2,000 British schoolgirls being subjected to FGM during the summer holidays. Some are taken abroad, while others are 'cut' or circumcised here in the UK by women either already living here or flown in for the purpose.

The UK Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act 1985 makes it an offence to carry out FGM or to aid, abet or procure the service of another person. The Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 makes it against the law for FGM to be performed anywhere in the world on UK permanent residents of any age and carries a maximum sentence of 14 years imprisonment. It is vital that everyone understands that every woman, no matter what their background or creed, is protected by this law. And yet, to date, no prosecutions have been brought under UK legislation.

There is no reliable statistical evidence available to indicate the extent of the problem in the UK because of the secrecy surrounding the practice. It is only now that the issue is coming into public view. Change will only come from within and the numbers coming forward are rising. Young people born and raised in Britain are more assertive in expressing their views, and despite family pressure it will become increasingly difficult to silence them.

Participants also emphasised that there is no justification whatsoever in Islam for criminal acts involved in so-called 'honour-based' violence. Honour attacks are

punishments on people, usually women, for acts deemed to have brought shame on their family, and can include acid attacks, abduction, forced suicide, mutilations, beatings, and in some cases, murder. Figures from 39 out of 52 police forces in the UK reveal that there were at least 2,823 'honour' attacks in 2010, and among the 12 forces able to provide figures from 2009, there was an overall 47% rise in incidents during that year. There is evidence that families may often try to deny the existence of honour attacks and that perpetrators may even be respected within the community because they are perceived as defending the family and community's honour and reputation. There is often inadequate support for victims, and many need continuing help and protection in the face of what may become a lifetime threat.⁴¹

Laws to prevent forced marriages and provide a way out for those already in marriages to which they have not given their consent were introduced in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in 2008. The Forced Marriage Act lays down that anyone – including a victim, friend or local authority – can ask a court to implement a Forced Marriage Protection Order (FMPO). This can stop a person being married against their will and prevent them from being taken abroad. It can also demand that perpetrators cease any intimidation, reveal the victim's location and hand over passports, or face potential imprisonment. Anyone convicted of coercing somebody to marry can be jailed for up to two years. However, the current legislation is civil rather than criminal and therefore a forced marriage is not a criminal act in itself. To protect victims, civil solutions are employed to avoid criminalising members of their family.⁴²

The Forced Marriage (Protection and Jurisdiction, Scotland) Act 2011 goes further than the rest of the UK in making the breach of a protection order in Scotland a criminal offence punishable by a fine, a two-year prison sentence, or both. Under this legislation, the protection orders issued by courts can also be specifically tailored to a victim's needs, for example by ensuring they are taken to a place of safety or by helping those in danger of being taken abroad for marriage. Greater help will also be made available for victims of forced marriages, and existing powers to annul such unions have been strengthened. The Director of Amina, the Muslim Women's Resource Centre in Glasgow, has emphasised that forced marriage is not acceptable within any major religion, and stated that the new Scottish law will mean that 'victims of forced marriage will no longer be alone and have to suffer in silence'. 'The Scottish government', she said, 'has given a voice to a silent minority and a lifeline to many young people who until now have had nowhere to turn for help and support'.⁴³ The UK government has also announced plans to consult on making forced marriage a criminal offence in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

International human rights instruments and bodies, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination, have condemned forced unions and supported women's right to choose their marriage partner. Forced marriage is a violation of internationally recognised human rights standards which uphold that marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses,⁴⁴ and that a woman's right to choose a spouse and enter freely into marriage is central to her life and dignity, and her equality as a human being.⁴⁵

Participants discussed the way in which the distinction between forced marriage and arranged marriage (in the sense that it is only the former which is criminalised) can hinder any discussion about the harm that may be caused by the latter. Such marriages might be used to control the way in which the community is replicated, at the expense of individual and personal needs, particularly those of Muslim women. Further questions need to be asked about this. It also needs to be said that parental control over the choice of marriage partners can have adverse effects on young men as well as young women. Marriage within the extended family is often seen as a common solution to what parents see as the problem of young men who are 'out of control'.

Muslim Family Law

The debate about accommodating Muslim family law in Britain has taken on greater urgency in Britain since the speech of the Archbishop of Canterbury (Dr Rowan Williams) in 2008 which suggested that there may be a useful role for the devolution of some decision-making in areas such as family matters back to religious communities.⁴⁶ The Archbishop's speech was a thoughtful, informed and highly nuanced reflection (prepared for an audience of lawyers and jurists) on the complex relationship between law, citizenship and the identity of religious communities in a modern plural society. The resultant furore in the British media⁴⁷ confirmed the difficulty of having a reasonable discussion on the accommodation of Muslim religious norms in an atmosphere in which Islam and Muslims are routinely demonised in public debates.

However, Archbishop Williams' claim that Muslim legal and ethical norms (Sharia) were already guiding the conduct of British Muslims is self-evident. As scholars of legal pluralism have noted, there is no strict separation between state (mainstream) law and the various informal norms that are followed by minorities such as Muslims. Presenting these two systems of norms as an irreconcilable dichotomy fails to take into account the intermediary spaces where individuals often apply a hybrid mixture of norms to guide their conduct or to settle disputes.

In Britain, the Beth Din offers members of Jewish communities two separate services – civil arbitration and religious rulings. The Beth Din provides civil arbitration as an alternative to court action under the Arbitration Act (1996) which grants all British citizens the right to resolve civil disputes through arbitration.⁴⁸ It is clear that many Muslims, too, are using alternative arbitration forums for advice, consultation and dispute resolution. These Muslim community organisations, often labelled ‘Sharia Councils’, apply Muslim legal and ethical principles, as well as the cultural norms of local communities.⁴⁹

Participants recognised, however, that it was important to acknowledge and address the risk faced by vulnerable members within a minority group, such as women, whose rights as citizens may be compromised in many ways by the grant of public recognition to traditional rules and practices. This concern highlights a classic liberal dilemma: how is the balance to be struck between promoting the rights of a minority community and protecting the rights of Muslim women, who may be treated less generously under Sharia law than under secular law?⁵⁰

The control of Muslim women – especially in areas such as sexuality, marriage, divorce and in relation to their children – is a recurring feature of traditional cultural and religious communities. Women are also often given the status of passing on the particular collective history of the tradition and its social, cultural and religious norms to the next generation. They become a public symbol of the group as a whole. This explains why traditional communities place such emphasis on family law and why they insist that they, rather than the state, should have exclusive jurisdiction in this sphere.

The common assumption that Muslim arbitration forums are forced upon reluctant Muslim women fails to do justice to the fact that Muslim women are often willing users of these forums, and that they are seeking reform rather than the abolition of this form of Muslim family justice. If all persons, including women, freely choose to be governed by a traditional justice system – the argument goes – then the state should respect these choices. This is, of course, an acceptable argument.

However, some participants felt that such a superficially attractive analysis ignores the numerous ways in which granting control over family law to a traditional culture or religion – already heavily embedded in patriarchal norms and practices – has the potential for causing harm to vulnerable group members such as women. Such harm may not be immediately evident, but may emerge over time. Some felt strongly that where there is evidence of coercion or a risk of harm the state must be willing to protect individual Muslims despite the religious or cultural claims of their community.

There may be several ways to address problems posed by Muslim arbitration forums. One option would be to prohibit these forms of alternative dispute resolution altogether. This would tackle the problem of any community-based coercion. However, if it is true that women are using these tribunals because of a pressing need, and out of choice, a blanket prohibition is likely to result in the informal use of these tribunals, thereby increasing Muslim women's vulnerability.

Some felt that the present approach of allowing these tribunals to operate as another form of arbitration is also not ideal because it does not take into account the specific risk to women of being conciliated back into violent or coercive relationships. One solution would be to accept that human rights law provides the minimum floor which binds all the parties in this context and which justifies state intervention to secure the rights of women. This may require training of staff, inspection and procedures to ensure that women are fully informed about the nature and consequences of their choices. It was also suggested that one urgent reform needed in such forums is for more women to be trained as Advisors, Experts, Board/Council Members, Arbitrators, Scholars and Chairs.

An additional advantage of an approach that permits some recourse to these tribunals, but which regulates them to meet safeguards, is that the social group is encouraged to reform its practices from within. This may provide a more effective way of transforming social group norms that may harm women, as well as of empowering the women within these communities to demand and initiate change without abandoning their group membership.⁵¹ Giving due regard to the most pressing demands of Muslims can yield the benefit of greater identification of Muslims with mainstream political and legal institutions which can, in turn, promote the goals of integration and social cohesion.

Some participants believed that it was important for policy makers to maintain a range of options to allow the maximum choice for Muslims and state institutions rather than assuming that one option, such as Muslim religious arbitration, is the only or best option. It may be that the focus on minority *fiqh* (*fiqh al-aqalliyat*) – the development of distinct and separate Islamic legal rules for Muslim minorities – was a phase in the evolution of European Muslim communities, who now need to adopt strategies that emphasise universal rather than separate values.⁵²

Most participants shared the view that religious tribunals whether Sharia Councils, Beth Din, or Christian Ecclesiastical Courts, have a valid role to play provided that adequate regulation, whether state or voluntary, ensured that they did not drop below 'floor level' standards.

Inequality in Access to Mosques

Participants discussed the problem of inadequate access to mosques for Muslim women in Britain. It was pointed out that worship, as an expression of individual spirituality and one's personal relationship with God, is often equated within the community and, especially in the mosque, with the religious obligations of individual men, to the exclusion of women.

It is estimated that 30% of mosques have no facilities at all for women; the personal experience of some participants confirmed that in many others there is only a token facility, often confined to dark, dank and dingy basements. Of the total space available in mosques, which includes over a million places for prayer, the proportion available to women is between 15% and 25% depending on how the space is calculated. In other words, for every woman there are spaces for between four and seven men.

The attendance of women in mosques is restricted not only by inequality of access, but also by reference to Islamic sources which ordain that attendance at Friday prayers is compulsory for men but only optional for women. It is also perpetuated by entrenched attitudes and practices that reinforce discrimination and exclusion. For example, women may be moved to the back room of the mosque at the start of prayers, or they may be made to feel uncomfortable by the evident disapproval of men in their vicinity and even by explicit indications that they should move away. Women should not have to feel grateful for being given a small women's committee 'on the side' or a space to pray. This should be a right, not a special privilege.

Some participants upheld that impediments to equality of access needed to be overcome by recourse to British law and legal structures, the right of every citizen. It was suggested that there should perhaps be a test case in the courts for equality of access and treatment in mosques.

As one step towards developing good practice in British mosques and broadening and deepening the engagement of Muslim women within them, a directory of the 100 most 'women-friendly' mosques in England was launched in the summer of 2010. Criteria for inclusion encompass the provision of a separate prayer space for women, services and activities specifically for women, an Imam or female scholar accessible to women, the inclusion of women in decision-making processes and the representation of women on mosque committees. Out of the 486 mosques assessed, fifty mosques were found to meet all of the requirements, and a further fifty met four out of the five criteria, including the provision of separate prayer space for

women. The long-term aim of this exercise is for other mosques and religious institutions to take account of the obvious fact that good service delivery cannot be achieved by ignoring half the population.⁵³

Some participants suggested that positive discrimination could play a part in reversing the oppressive silencing of the female voice. They also believed that women need a better understanding of their rights, as well as greater confidence to take the initiative in expressing these rights. But the responsibility to take up women's rights should not fall only on women. Men, too, need to champion them, as the Prophet himself did.

Masculinism and the Devaluation of the Feminine

Masculinism and the concomitant devaluation of the feminine are major problems of our times. It may be assumed that there is a particularly pressing need to address this problem in Muslim communities and societies, where, at worst, draconian perversions of Islam may even deny an education to women. Such discrimination is an injustice completely at variance with the instruction of the Prophet that *The acquisition of knowledge is a sacred duty imposed on every Muslim, whether male or female.*

Participants discussed the way in which gender equality can be reduced and distorted to mean merely competing with men on male terms, and how this entails a corresponding devaluation of traditional feminine qualities and roles. The dogma consistent with feminist ideology that only work 'in the world' is of any value has led to the downgrading of the 'non-working' world, a gross injustice to those who perform so much work of inestimable value in the home.

Some believed that social fragmentation can be attributed in many ways to the undermining of women through lack of understanding and appreciation of their critical roles as nurturers, carers, motivators, educators, counsellors and sympathisers. They also upheld that principles of mutuality and nurture can play an important part in resisting such fragmentation, which is regarded by many as a current sign of wider civilisational crisis.

Others emphasised that it was important not to essentialise nurturing roles to such an extent that they were regarded as the only jobs suited to women. In the same way, it was important to challenge the fixed idea that domestic work was entirely a woman's domain. There was a need for more balance in terms of the role of men and women at home, in the workplace and in wider society. Many agreed that there needs to be a concerted effort to challenge the various ways in which the old

masculinist paradigm is sustained. In many ways, it is self-evident that the gift for relationship at the heart of the feminine psyche needs to guide this effort, whether that gift is offered by women or by men who have integrated it into their own being.

The rebalancing of healthy gender dynamics will also recover the voices of women in the Qur'an and in the Tradition. Perhaps most importantly of all, it will bring to life the primary and overriding principle of the Qur'anic message, that of mercy (*rahma*), which is also expressed in the famous Divine saying (*hadith qudsi*) in which God speaks on the tongue of the Prophet: *My Mercy prevails over My wrath*. The Arabic word for womb (*rahm*) comes from the same root as the word for mercy, thus illustrating the natural connection between women and this pre-eminent divine attribute which is invoked at the beginning of every surah of the Qur'an, save one. Allied to mercy is the ethic of reciprocity between individuals. This includes not only mutual knowing, but also mutual support and the mutual love and affection which are the basis of intimate relations.

Interpretive Approaches to 'Problematic' Texts

Participants discussed in some depth the verse in the Qur'an that is normally interpreted to sanction the use of physical chastisement (*daraba*) of refractory wives by husbands.⁵⁴ This verse makes it clear that such chastisement is advised only as a last resort in the case of violation of marital duties (*nushuz*) which is resistant to other solutions, firstly by admonition and, if that fails, by the husband leaving the marriage bed. It has been noted that it is also possible to interpret the term *nushuz* as comprising every kind of deliberate bad behaviour not only of a wife towards her husband (in the sense of persistent breach of marital obligations) but also of a husband towards his wife, including what is nowadays described as mental cruelty; with reference to the husband, it also denotes ill-treatment, in the physical sense, of his wife.⁵⁵

The Prophet himself intensely detested the idea of beating one's wife and is reported to have expressly forbidden the beating of any woman with the words *Never beat God's handmaidens*. On the basis of this, and on the Prophet's reported stipulation that any chastisement, if resorted to at all (and only then for evident immoral conduct) should not incur any pain, all authorities stress that it should be more or less symbolic – with a toothstick (*miswak*) or something similar, or even with a folded handkerchief.⁵⁶

Despite these lenient interpretations, the fact is that the verse in question remains deeply controversial in that it can be used to justify abusive conduct and can still be exploited to inflict pain on women. In view of this, certain modern scholars have put

forward alternative interpretations of the verse, proposing that the word *daraba* means, in this context, something other than 'beat' or 'strike'. Some of these alternatives may be considered idiosyncratic, but one that has gained ground in recent discussions of this issue is the suggestion that in this context the word means 'separation' or 'seclusion', the logical next step after the previous sanction in the verse, that of refusing to share the marriage bed. This separation points to the possibility of permanent separation through divorce, and gives the wife the opportunity to seek reconciliation, return to the marital state and win back her husband, or decide if she would prefer divorce from her estranged husband. Thus, the *darb* of separation is the last resort before seeking the mediation of arbiters from their respective families. If this does not manage to heal the rupture, then both parties should face the eventual choice of either holding together on equitable terms or separating with dignity.⁵⁷

Another reason for serious consideration of this reinterpretation is that it is not clear how a few symbolic strokes of a toothbrush or a folded handkerchief in the latter stage of serious and potentially irreconcilable marital discord could be sufficient to convey the true gravity of the deadlock and its consequences. It might well be asked how such a nominal action could go a decisive step further than refusing to share the wife's bed in order to reach reconciliation or seek separation. The obvious next step after leaving the marital bed (or so the argument goes) is to follow the Prophet's own practice in separating for a while before deciding whether to reconcile or divorce.

Such a reinterpretation is attractive, affirming as it does an approach to the Qur'an which is emancipatory rather than misogynistic, but it remains controversial, and raises many questions about whether radical or imaginative reinterpretation of such verses or of other sources is the best way forward in the wider cause of advancing gender justice for Muslim women. If the focus remains on the interpretation of sources, the fact is that physical chastisement may be upheld by some as one legitimate interpretation of the *daraba* verse, no matter how interpreters in the past or the present have sought to minimise its implications.

Given that there is always the danger that such legitimacy can be exploited to justify domestic violence, many participants upheld that it would be better simply to accept that there are texts and rulings that people may no longer apply in the contemporary context. This is not to erase or abrogate them but simply to set them aside. The same applies to many Prophetic traditions that have been used to sanction misogyny but which are being exposed as fabricated by critical scholarship.

It was also pointed out that the *daraba* verse places male authority in the context of the responsibility allotted to men in the Qur'an to provide for and protect their wives.⁵⁸ In the modern world, however, it is no longer the case that men bear the full responsibility of maintaining their families.

Disregarding or setting aside verses or texts that are held to be no longer applicable in the contemporary context has a parallel in the urgent call for an immediate international moratorium on the application of the so-called *hudud* penalties of corporal punishment, stoning and the death sentence in all Muslim-majority countries. Some scholars maintain that such penalties are erroneously regarded as an application of Sharia law. It is also a grave injustice that they are applied almost exclusively to women and the poor, the doubly victimised, and never to the wealthy or the powerful.

As guarantors of a deep reading of the texts, and as guardians of the higher objectives of justice and equality and the critical awareness of changing social contexts, scholars need to take the lead in demanding the suspension of such penalties. It is not enough for scholars to hide behind pronouncements that the strict application of *hudud* penalties is almost never applicable and is intended only as a 'deterrent'. An open and less defensive internal debate is required, one in which responsible scholars refuse to retreat into silence or be satisfied by timid, evasive or convoluted responses that are unworthy of the clarity and humanity of the message of Islam.⁵⁹

One promising approach is to return to first principles, as in the insight that the central value of the Muslim legal tradition is the promotion of individual autonomy for men and women. By the same token, it can be argued that although the Sharia called for freedom, equality and justice, these ideals could not be fulfilled because of social stratification in Muslim societies on the basis of status, sex and religion. This suggests that the legal development of the Sharia in today's world needs to be based on a clear distinction between legal and religious objectives. Otherwise, there is a danger that the Sharia may be reduced merely to a religious ritual or an ethnic cult and entirely lose its relevance as a source of inspiration, moral guidance and law.⁶⁰ As well as trying to bring to light the underlying principles of Islamic norms and laws, proper account needs to be taken of the public sphere in which Islam and Muslims have to operate and in which discourse is constructed. Some participants maintained that the *maqasid al-Sharia* (the higher principles and objectives of Islamic law) should not be used as a 'mantra' to solve all problems, but that many perspectives and methodologies need to be incorporated into an inter-disciplinary approach that also develops dialogical models between Muslims and non-Muslims. The over-arching principle of human dignity needs to guide the discussion.

Some participants upheld that the root of problems was in culture and society, and not in texts. In fact, the starting point for navigation of principles has to be the text, because if domestic violence is a cultural practice, those who engage in it may seek justification for it in the text. The way to counter the misuse of verses and other texts to justify abusive practices is to refer to other verses and texts which provide guidance on how to live an exemplary life. Effective communication with Muslim practitioners at the grassroots level will be compromised if there is any suggestion that certain texts can simply be disregarded, even if it might be considered acceptable to dispute the authenticity of some Prophetic traditions (*hadith*). It has to be accepted that there will be resistance to the message of contextualisation on the grounds that the message of the Qur'an is immutable and eternal, and applicable to all times. As such, it would be wrong to pick and choose its verses. The shelving or setting aside of texts could well be considered as equivalent to erasing or abrogating them.

Others pointed out that such an approach would not prevent the misuse of Qur'anic verses, as, in this case, taking the *daraba* verse as a justification for wife-beating. The point of contextualising, they argued, was to see that verse not only in the light of the rest of the Qur'an and the practice of the Prophet, but also in the wider context of the underlying objectives of the Sharia, the space and time we live in, and cumulative advances in human knowledge. If that more extensive process leads to the conclusion that a verse is best left aside, it can be validly argued that this is not 'picking and choosing'.

Many emphasised that the way forward requires grown-up thinking as well as the emotional and psychological maturity to understand that people cannot live by external boundaries alone, but need to learn how to navigate deeper values and principles so as to reconcile the wisdom and guidance of tradition with how to live in modern society. The Prophet himself often waived rules if he considered they were not meeting underlying moral objectives. He is reported to have said that, whenever possible, a penalty should not be imposed, *for it is better for a leader to make a mistake in forgiving than to make a mistake in punishing*. Prophetic practice was always an embodiment of deeper values and principles, and was also moving in the direction of liberating people from harshness and oppression.

Sexuality and Sexual Orientation

Sexual Diversity

Sexual orientation, its expression, and the issues it raises about what is and what is

not deemed to be permissible, represent a controversial and volatile subject, not only within Muslim communities but within other faith groups and within wider society. This applies particularly to homosexual or same sex orientation, although it is more precise and encompassing to talk about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) communities.

Critical of 'sexual essentialism', some analysts argue that we need to see the wide spectrum of sexual diversity as a continuum rather than the oppositional binary promoted by both science and religion. From this viewpoint, sexual identity and sexual practice are not static but multi-layered, impacted by various factors such as time, space, class, religion and social politics. The questioning of constructed norms and the refusal to submit to prescribed norms is held to create new spaces for previously unacknowledged identities.

Many expressed the view that they had no issue with personal sexual predilections, which were matters of personal conscience for all people as moral beings before God, but Islamic standards of modesty (*haya*) required that sexuality, sexual practices and sexual expressions were private matters and should not be displayed openly in public. This applied as much to heterosexual as to homosexual relationships. Some, however, expressed disapproval of the strident public assertion and in-your-face display of alternative sexual orientations and practices as if they were social norms.

While all acknowledged the importance of a sensitive understanding of sexual diversity, and emphasised that LGBT individuals should be legally protected from discrimination and persecution, there was nevertheless strong support amongst participants for the view that heterosexuality is the only norm explicitly supported by Islamic teachings.

Sexual Orientation and Islamic Theology

Only very recently have works begun to appear that tackle the complex and controversial issue of homosexuality in Islam from a religious perspective. One such examines the foundations for prevailing attitudes towards homosexuality in Islam, and argues that Muslims can reconcile themselves to the inevitable diversity in society without compromising their principles.⁶¹ Some advocate a liberation theology, pointing out that Islam began as a process to end injustice, and that God's will works with and through those who suffer oppression. Just as there can be no progressive interpretation of Islam without gender equality and justice for women, so it can be argued that neither can there be renewal of Islamic principles of justice relevant to the contemporary world without tackling intolerance, abuse, discrimination and harm based on sexual orientation.

Allied to this approach is the claim that there are no verses in the Qur'an which unambiguously condemn homosexuals and that those *hadith* which condemn homosexual and transgender people are of dubious authenticity. Consequently, it is claimed that sexual orientation or gender identity should not be barriers to acceptance. In the same way, so the argument goes, the assumption of a heterosexual norm in the Qur'an does not automatically mean that the Qur'an forbids or condemns homosexuality.

One highly controversial aspect of the critique of prevailing attitudes to same sex relations in Islam is to interpret certain Qur'anic verses in such a way as to suggest that the Qur'an does not express any moral condemnation or impose any legal sanction on homosexual people.⁶²

A limited number of Muslim scholars have suggested that the Qur'anic verses relating to the people of Lut, which are normally taken by Muslims as categorically forbidding homosexuality, do not specifically refer to consensual sex between men but to many deplorable acts, one of which was rape. Other crimes associated with the people of Lut for which they were collectively condemned and destroyed include highway robbery, inhospitality, theft, infidelity and insulting God's Prophet. Other verses that are usually interpreted as referring to women who are beyond the age of childbearing and men who are very old or impotent are reinterpreted so as to include the possibility that they could refer without judgement to lesbian women or gay men.

Such re-interpretation of verses and other texts has been defended as a conscientious effort of interpretation entailing committed ethical engagement with the text and regard for the ethical nuances of legal reasoning. Such engagement could open the door to constructing new realities consistent with the needs of the time. This, so the argument goes, is in accord with the view that since social norms naturally change over time, ongoing Islamic scholarship needs to examine closely the relationship between Qur'anic notions of social justice and current global debates over justice and equity.⁶³ Furthermore, textual analysis can do more than determine when Muslim societies are acting outside the parameters of a Qur'anic world-view and intent; it can also present a rationale for altering such actions.

However, many participants objected strongly to what they regarded as serious misinterpretation and unjustifiable extrapolation of Qur'anic verses to justify same-sex relations. While all agreed that Muslims should support the right of homosexuals to be protected from discrimination, harassment and persecution under the law, many firmly upheld that it is wrong to misuse Qur'anic verses and exploit them in an attempt to construct, or at worst fabricate, a theological argument as a justification

for homosexuality. This is not a productive strategy in the cause of advancing greater tolerance of homosexuals because it lacks credibility and would be widely rejected within Muslim communities. It has to be accepted that the meaning of some verses cannot be 'creatively' manipulated in this way. This is not to say, however, that such verses, and other texts, can be exploited to justify illegal and unacceptable treatment of LGBT communities.

Personal Suffering and Harm

Widespread moral panic is aroused by 'alternative' sexual orientations. They have been psychologically and clinically pathologised as personal and social illnesses, labelled as deviant behaviour to be suppressed or eradicated, and even regarded as the cause of the destruction of civilisations. Some claim, without evidence, that the perceived decline of Western civilisation can be attributed to the allegedly greater number of homosexuals in the West, but homosexuality exists in all cultures and in all communities.

Attention was drawn to the perceived injustice in the separation of the sexual act from sexual identity – a classic case, it was claimed, of double standards. It would not be expected of a heterosexual person to abstain from respectful sexual conduct within the context of a mutually loving marriage. It therefore needs to be asked whether it is acceptable to reduce loving homosexual relationships to mere sexual acts, and to be unable to recognise that homosexuals can also enter into and sustain an ethical partnership. It needs to be questioned whether one's faith as a Muslim can ethically justify the suffering and alienation of those whose lives are blighted by being marginalised to the fragile periphery of society.

Case studies have identified a range of serious personal and social problems caused by attitudes and practices that are intolerant of LGBT individuals, as well as inner conflicts and struggles which cause great personal suffering. Ill-treatment, neglect and lack of care of such individuals within Muslim communities can no longer be ignored but need to be recognised, acknowledged and dealt with responsibly and compassionately.

LGBT Muslims often experience traumatic struggles within themselves and in their relationship with God, as well as with their friends, their families and the wider community. Lacking a support system, they may not know whom to turn to and may suffer in silence; some experience depression and other mental health conditions and may even be driven to suicide. They often experience a double sense of alienation and threat, being stigmatised by Islamophobic attitudes when in LGBT spaces and by homophobic reactions when in Islamic spaces. As a result, no space

seems safe or comfortable. They also face constant fear of loss of employment and estrangement from family if their sexuality comes to light.

It needs to be asked how such profound problems can be reconciled with the Qur'anic statement that *We do not burden any human being with more than he is well able to bear*.⁶⁴ Exclusion, harm and injustice are not acceptable, particularly in the name of religion, and need to be addressed within communities and from within an Islamic framework without compromising the belief strongly adhered to by many Muslims that homosexuality is forbidden in Islam.

Respectful Disagreement

All faith communities, including Muslims, are faced with similar conflicts in relation to gender or sexuality. Participants agreed that while certain beliefs may be sincerely held, they cannot be acted upon to violate the rights of others through discrimination or persecution. Whatever might be proscribed as 'sins' as a matter of personal conviction clearly cannot all be translated into legal rulings and imposed on others. This is not only a matter of conforming meticulously to the law of the land wherever it regulates such matters, but is also a matter of abiding by the fundamental principle of mercy in governing relationships and fostering kindness, harmony and reconciliation within family and community.

At the same time, it is important not to negate the equally important freedom to express one's sincerely held beliefs. The debate on the interpretation of religious teachings should be open and frank, as religious views are a matter of conviction and conscience. Muslims uphold their collective duty to convey to mankind what they believe to be the true and complete divine message entrusted to them without any equivocation, dissimulation or distortion.

There was strong agreement that it was impracticable to expect that consensus (*ijma*) amongst scholars knowledgeable in *fiqh* would be reached in overturning the belief that homosexuality was forbidden in Islam. This would remain a contentious question and a matter of juristic disagreement (*ikhtilaf*). Some maintained that there is a need to favour the reasoning of those jurists whose judgements provide greater benefit and prevent harm and injustice. It was agreed, however, that disagreement falls within the ambit of plural discourse in which diverse opinions can be legitimately expressed. As such, there was a pressing need for the reclamation and implementation of the proper Islamic ethics and etiquette (*adab al-ikhtilaf*) for engaging in respectful debate and disagreement in a plural world and a plural Islam.⁶⁵

Education⁶⁶

Rethinking Islamic Education in a Secular Context

Muslim Educational Settings

Although Islamic education should (and in most cases does) begin at home, it is formally and systematically conducted through the supplementary school, or madrasa, which plays a major role in developing the Islamic identity of Muslim children.⁶⁷ Such Islamic educational centres were originally set up by first generation migrants⁶⁸ who regarded 'secular' culture as a serious threat to the religious identity and values of their young people. In this way, they embraced the 'myth of continuity', creating narratives and institutions that would replicate as far as possible the religious and cultural norms and practices embedded in the styles of upbringing in their own homelands.

Classes generally run every evening for about two hours, although this provision is sometimes only offered at weekends. Many (but not all) of these classes are conducted within the premises of a mosque and are therefore also managed by the mosque committee.

The curriculum generally entails memorisation and recitation of the Qur'an, learning about the life and practice of the Prophet (*Sira* and *Sunna*), including what he is reported to have said and done, and being instructed in the fundamental teachings and practices of Islam. Islamic law and history, as well as the basics of Arabic, may also be studied. Seminaries (*dar al-ulum*) that train religious leaders are closely based on their mother institutions in the Subcontinent and largely replicate the traditional curriculum known as *dars-e nizami*.

Lacking proficiency in English, most of the religious leaders who ran the Muslim educational organisations established by migrants could not effectively communicate with young Muslims who had predominantly begun to use English as their primary medium of communication. They also lacked recognised teaching qualifications and the basic pedagogic skills essential not only for providing opportunities for discussion, debate, argument and interpretation, but also for contextualising Islam within contemporary Britain. This is a cause of serious concern that still persists.

Participants discussed the heavy reliance in traditional madrasas on rote learning and copying down from authoritative sources, a methodology associated with an authoritarian, teacher-centred approach to the transmission of knowledge. Many expressed the view that in both Muslim educational settings and families there is a pressing need for a more child-centred approach in which the innate purity of the child's faculties is not contaminated by adult fears, and in which the potential for learning is not stunted by conditioning. The natural receptivity of children to deep religious and philosophical insights needs to be recognised and honoured at the youngest age possible.

With regard to child protection, participants expressed concern at successive reports of unacceptable physical punishment of children at some madrasas in Britain, and the way in which parents may turn a blind eye to it either because they accept it as normal practice or because they fear that if they act as whistle-blowers they will be ostracised by the community.

Such mistreatment has been vigorously condemned by Muslim organisations, which uphold that the professionalism and regard for the health and safety of children that characterise mainstream schooling should operate without fail in Islamic educational settings.⁶⁹ These organisations also assert that supplementary Muslim schools should be universally subject to regular Ofsted inspections and Criminal Records Bureau checks. They also condemn without reservation any bigotry towards members of other faiths that may exist within Muslim communities, especially if this is promulgated in educational settings.

In the absence of rigorous research data most of the observations about the educational culture in madrasas remain anecdotal. It is important not to generalise, but it is impossible not to be concerned about the implications of categorical attitudes that sanction the pre-eminence of indoctrination and rote-learning. The Qur'anic conception of authority – be it divine, Prophetic or parental – is authoritative rather than authoritarian in its approach to leadership and guidance. The Qur'an encourages 'critical faithfulness' and not mindless obedience,⁷⁰ and repeatedly warns that the 'forefathers' should not be followed blindly simply by virtue of being elders.⁷¹

Similarly, while respect, kindness and even reverence towards parents are clearly demanded by the Qur'an, parental authority is not independent of higher principles and values.

It has long been a concern of mainstream educators that quite young children spend so much time after school in madrasas. It is important to realise that while the vast majority of young Muslims attend mainstream schools, the majority are also likely to have attended madrasas until they are at least fourteen.

Some participants expressed concern that the prevalent 'transmission/instruction-centred' Islamic approach to education might foster and reinforce foreclosed and rigid religiosities among British Muslim youth.⁷²

Another key challenge is the need to integrate Muslim seminaries which train religious leaders into the wider British educational system so that their qualifications are recognised as equivalent to undergraduate degrees. This would enable their graduates to enter the main routes of professional or academic development, including teacher training courses. An important step in this direction was taken with the publication of the DCLG report on the training and development of Muslim faith leaders in 2010.⁷³ The effective implementation of the recommendations of this report constitutes a key challenge in furthering the work of integration.

Despite these concerns, it was acknowledged that madrasas are undoubtedly crucial educational institutions that shape religious leadership and wider Islamic activism within Muslim communities. As such, they need to be invested in, regulated and improved so that they can respond more effectively to the challenges facing these communities.

There is promising evidence that practitioners are becoming more aware of the limitations of an educational process based so heavily on teacher-directed instruction and rote learning. New Higher and Further Education programmes are also being introduced to provide professional development pathways for Muslim educators, to help them engage critically with the theological and pedagogic aspects of their practice so that they may become more self-reflective practitioners.

In addition, guidance on most issues related to effective supplementary schooling, including behaviour management, child protection, roles and responsibilities, health and safety, and recruitment and training, is now available from some local authorities and Muslim publications. There is increasing recognition of the important role that madrasas could play in helping to raise the attainment of underachieving groups, as well as supporting the religious and cultural identity of young people. There is also

evidence that madrasas are willing to work closely with mainstream schools to improve teaching methodology, curriculum development and accreditation, as well as child protection.⁷⁴ The most innovative madrasas do not only teach the standard curriculum, but encourage discussion and debate about what it means to be a Muslim in Britain today.

Participants observed that ideologically motivated attacks on some Muslim schools when unsupported by credible evidence often only serve to provoke a natural defensiveness which in turn makes it more difficult to address legitimate concerns about the quality of education in such schools and about the necessity for an internal critique. There have been successive attacks of this nature orchestrated by think tanks and the media,⁷⁵ as well as more objective reports that reflect higher standards of journalism.⁷⁶

Nevertheless, whatever bias and misrepresentation have been perpetrated in attacks on Muslim schools, and irrespective of the need for careful and intelligent critiquing of such attacks, a comprehensive review of the concept of Islamic education and Muslim educational practice is required. This needs to go far beyond an honest critique of those few schools which are genuinely found to have unacceptable practices, or which may fall short of the achievement of most Muslim schools in working towards established standards.

However, the fact that Muslim schools function under such hostile scrutiny raises an important issue of balance. The review of educational philosophy, practice and standards needs to be an ongoing process in all schools, and Muslim schools are no exception. At the same time there needs to be an ongoing conversation which encourages critics to examine whether their criticisms are rooted in bias or based on credible evidence.

An Alternative Model of Madrasa Education

Participants discussed an alternative model of madrasa education that has been established in Britain to take into account the realities of living in a plural British society and by so doing to better equip Muslim children to be comfortable with their multiple identities as British Muslims. The curriculum in one such madrasa to be described here as a case study⁷⁷ is similar to that offered in many other mainstream madrasas, based principally on the traditional sources, the Qur'an and Sunna. However, the methodology and approach adopted is fundamentally different in many ways, and in some quarters this has aroused vehement disapproval of its 'un-Islamic' and 'modern' character.

It was emphasised, however, that there is a need to face up to the fact that parents are increasingly expressing concern over the style of teaching, method of instruction, disciplinary procedures and many other aspects of the standard arrangements in traditional madrasas. The need for reform is clearly indicated by the fact that, in the madrasa under discussion, 90% of the pupils are former pupils of other madrasas. Limited facilities, overcrowded classrooms, lack of tolerance, the language barrier and lack of basic communication skills are just some of the critical issues that need to be addressed.

It would, however, be unfair to lay the blame squarely on the quality of teaching and the learning environment. Parents must realise that they too have a responsibility and a role to play. The fundamental factor in ensuring the success of any madrasa is the parent-pupil-teacher partnership and it is no secret that, when it comes to the Islamic education of the child, this is an area that is undoubtedly neglected.

Many parents play an active role within the mainstream education of their child and regularly engage with the school in monitoring their progress. However, when it comes to the madrasa, the same sense of responsibility, enthusiasm, interest and engagement with the institution is rarely shown. Parents should not shun their responsibility for this dimension of their children's education, leaving everything in the hands of the teacher.

In the new model of the madrasa proposed here, parents may at any time feel free to discuss important issues and concerns relating to the education of the child. Children are required to fill in a homework diary on a regular basis as a record of their progress, and the diary is also used as a communicating link between the parent and the teacher. If there are any questions or concerns then these can be dealt with by passing on notes via the diary. A parents' evening is held once every term with almost 100% attendance.⁷⁸

All the subjects taught are conducted in English, thus making the task of the teacher and pupil not only a great deal easier but also much more enjoyable and rewarding. National events and contemporary global issues are also shared with the children and they are given guidance as to how to approach these events as Muslims. Through the Islam and Citizenship Education programme of study, which is based on the National Curriculum syllabus supplemented by Islamic material, the pupils are taught fundamental principles of how to be good human beings and good citizens, as essential prerequisites to becoming good Muslims.⁷⁹

The madrasa also supports a comprehensive assessment scheme covering standards in attendance, uniform, character, interaction and conduct. Certificates and prizes

are regularly handed out to motivate and encourage the children. An annual report on the attainment of each child in all subject areas is also presented to the parents. An end-of-year awards ceremony and performance evening is held where families and friends are invited to enjoy Islamic songs (*nashid*) and plays performed by the pupils. The achievement of successful and hardworking pupils is also celebrated by all.

A staff development programme provides staff with opportunities for team-building and teacher-training sessions designed to improve teaching methodology, to familiarise them with disciplinary procedures, and to remind them of the core aims and objectives of the madrasa. Members of staff are also provided with continuous professional development training in a number of areas, including behaviour management, child protection and first aid.

Given the concern shared by all participants at reports of mistreatment of children at some madrasas in Britain, it was reassuring to hear that in the madrasa under discussion emphasis is placed on teaching with love, care and compassion and not through intimidation or fear.

The madrasa also engages with a variety of media outlets, allowing the pupils to speak about their experience of education within the madrasa. Christian clergy have been invited to meet and have discussions with the pupils. Health care professionals are also invited to encourage healthy lifestyles from both medical and Islamic perspectives. Pupils are also made aware of the harm caused by drugs and other harmful substances.

Another notable change initiated by this model madrasa is that classes begin an hour later than the usual time of 5pm in other madrasas. A major benefit of this change is that it gives parents and staff (many of whom work from 9 to 5) sufficient time to get to the madrasa after the working day. In the children's case, it permits them to take adequate rest after returning from a long day at school. Rested children clearly make better pupils than exhausted ones.

'Secular' Extremism and Religious Illiteracy

One of the ways in which the phenomenon of secular extremism has manifested itself in recent times is the increasing prevalence and stridency of fundamentalist atheists and other ideologues implacably opposed to religion who are seeking to marginalise or silence religious voices in the public sphere. One study published in 2011 has found a substantial increase in more widespread social hostility to religion in Britain.⁸⁰

Even those secular policy makers and educationalists who are not be openly hostile to religion may often fail to appreciate the importance of faith to many communities, and do not take seriously the positive role played by religious principles and values in contributing to social welfare, community cohesion and conflict resolution.

Many secular educationalists, claiming that their pedagogic models can contribute to education against extremism, base their claims on the exclusive equation of critical thinking, enquiry and openness with Western modernity. Implicit in such a cliché is the automatic association of religion with absolutism and unquestioning submission to authority.

Some ideologically motivated critiques of Muslim schools can be framed within the wider context of attacks on faith schools and religious education in general. In media discussions about the role of faith schools, religious education has even been dismissed by a prominent philosopher as ‘intellectual abuse’⁸¹ carried out in ‘ghettoes of superstition’, which, ‘far from aiding social cohesion, only cause further divisions’.⁸² Such critics are emphatic in asserting that religion has no place in public life and in demanding that it is relegated entirely to the private sphere.

Such uncompromising assertions may be consistent with the doctrine of ideological secularism, but are essentially alien to the moderate British tradition of procedural secularism, which gives equal space for the inclusion and participation of faith communities in the public sphere.⁸³

The Multiple Benefits of Religious Education

The claim that religious education constitutes ‘intellectual abuse’ is decisively contradicted by young people themselves, whose experience of the multiple benefits of Religious Education (RE) is highlighted in various surveys. RE here refers to non-confessional multi-faith Religious Education in England and Wales, a unique model of teaching on faith traditions within the secular curriculum.

The UK Professional Council for Religious Education reports that amongst secondary school students aged 11 to 18 those who enjoy RE and see positive benefits for their own lives from studying religion outnumber by four to one those who are negative about RE.⁸⁴ Recorded statements by these students reveal that many like RE because of the opportunities it gives for expressing opinions, engaging in discussion, acquiring knowledge of other faiths and cultures, developing the skills of philosophical enquiry and reflection, and pondering the meaning and purpose of life.

It needs to be emphasised, however, that the evident benefits described here are not

available to the pupils of those Muslim schools which opt out of properly teaching multi-faith RE on the grounds that it is 'secular' and therefore in conflict with Islamic education. Unfortunately, this divisive attitude has prevented many young Muslims from becoming RE teachers and taking the opportunity to play a central role in addressing the religious and pastoral needs of the vast majority of Muslim children who attend mainstream schools.

The broad educational rationale of mainstream RE is designed to promote personal and social development and therefore need not be seen as incompatible with the core educational values of Islam. In fact, it is entirely consistent with the strong Islamic tradition of critical openness based on the Qur'anic call for engagement with a diversity of perspectives in the spirit of active pluralism.⁸⁵

Meeting the Needs of Muslim Pupils in Mainstream Schools

There are over half a million Muslim pupils in school education, of whom approximately 97% are in the maintained sector. The faith commitments of Muslim pupils and their families encompass all aspects of everyday life and conduct, including daily life in school.

Participants discussed the view that schools needed to have a good understanding of how they can respond positively in meeting the needs of Muslim pupils. Many mainstream schools make efforts to foster an inclusive ethos which values difference and addresses the needs of the communities that they serve. Some participants believed that, given the current climate, in which there is much negative portrayal of Islam and Muslims, greater priority should be given to ensuring that the needs of Muslim pupils are appropriately accommodated.

The Education Act 1944 emphasises the right of parents, subject to reasonable constraints, to have their children educated in accordance with their wishes. All children, whatever their background, should be educated in a spirit that values the multiple identity represented by their faith, culture and British nationality. The self-esteem and self-confidence nurtured by such respect forms the basis for the reciprocal understanding and appreciation of the heritage and beliefs of others.

The Equality Act 2010 aims to ensure that public authorities understand how different people will be affected by their activities, so that services are appropriate and accessible to all, and meet different people's needs.⁸⁶ The Act constitutes groundbreaking legislation in including religion and belief as a 'protected characteristic' in the same way as age, disability, ethnicity and race, gender, gender identity, sexual identity and orientation, and others.⁸⁷ Since April 2011 all public

bodies, including mainstream schools and other state-funded educational settings, have been bound by the Public Sector Equality Duty. This obliges them to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity, and to foster good relations between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not.⁸⁸

There are those who argue that this new legislation will have very positive benefits for Muslims because public bodies will be required to deal with institutionalised anti-Muslim prejudice and discrimination. However, it was pointed out that, as in all matters related to faith and belief, much is open to interpretation and it is likely that the implementation of the Act will need to be tested in the courts before its efficacy can be judged.

Faith should be seen as an important asset and reference point with relevant messages for young people in addressing constructively many of the issues that they face today, including educational underachievement and failure, disaffection, drugs, crime and sexually-transmitted diseases. However, if a school adopts a policy which regards the religion of their pupils as a strictly private matter, they may find it more difficult to appreciate and respond positively to some of the distinctive spiritual, moral, social and cultural needs of Muslim children. This may be particularly true if they are inappropriately categorised as 'Asians'. Asian needs and Muslim needs are not necessarily the same.

Failure to recognise, affirm and include the faith identity and religious needs of Muslim pupils may not only alienate pupils and make them feel that they are not valued, but may also give rise to inappropriate assumptions that in order to progress in society they will have to compromise or give up aspects of their core identity, including their religious beliefs and values. Muslim pupils are sometimes placed in situations where they feel pressured into acting contrary to their beliefs and conscience. This, in conjunction with Islamophobic attitudes and comments within schools, can have a reciprocally negative effect on the child's opinion of the school and, indeed, of education itself.

The 'Every Child Matters' agenda applies to all needs, including those of Muslim pupils. It is reasonable to believe that they will achieve greater success if they are also given opportunities to flourish in aspects of the curriculum with which they have particular affinity. The study of Islamic civilisation, for example, and its well-attested historical contribution to the development of many of the foundations of Western civilisation, could motivate and inspire more pupils to feel that they are part of an institution that clearly values their Islamic heritage. Such an approach will help Muslim pupils to see themselves as an integral part of school life and of wider society.

As part of its influential programme for promoting public understanding of Muslim heritage, the Foundation for Science and Technology provides curriculum enrichment, working directly with schools, teachers, parents and children to reveal a thousand years of scientific, technological, and cultural achievements made by men and women of many faiths and cultures, which have had a huge but largely unrecognised impact on the modern world.⁸⁹

The seminal book *Every Muslim Child Matters* offers practical guidance for schools and children's services in itemising every area of the curriculum which lends itself to the integration of an Islamic perspective.⁹⁰

Many schools have responded positively to issues related to cultural diversity. However, others have not been receptive to requests made by Muslim parents and pupils in relation to their faith-based aspirations and concerns. Lack of respect for religious values and poor discipline in mainstream 'secular' schools are often identified as factors in the preference for faith schools shown by many parents from faith communities.

The perception by parents that schools may not be receptive to the accommodation of faith-based needs is reflected in the finding of one study that almost half of British Muslim parents surveyed indicated that they would prefer to send their children to a Muslim school rather than a state school.⁹¹ The majority of remaining respondents stated they would choose the best school, regardless of whether it were mainstream or Muslim, while less than one in ten chose the option of a mainstream school. The findings also refuted the external perception that Muslim schools are predominantly preferred by those who have low levels of education and income.

Closer cooperation and engagement between Muslim communities and mainstream schools should not be solely dependent on the proactive role of the school in facilitating it. It also requires greater participation by Muslims themselves. There are very few Muslim head teachers and governors. In contrast, 12% of doctors in the UK are Muslim even though Muslims in total make up only 3% of the population. Participants emphasised, however, that effective participation should not be defined only in terms of institutional leadership but should also be realised through parental engagement and through the full range of recognised pathways within the educational profession.

The School Community as a Neutral Space

Many participants took the view that there is a need for Muslims to work more closely with schools. Some felt strongly that such participation should not reflect an

'us and them' approach, by which Muslims seek to engage in the decision-making process (for example, as governors) only to advocate parochial Muslim interests. They believed that Muslims, as British citizens, should not see themselves as intrinsically different from others, focusing solely on issues of exclusion or the perceived lack of recognition of Muslim identity, but should have regard for the wider needs of all children in mainstream schools.

The mentality of differentiating oneself from wider society was regarded by some participants as the outcome of lack of confidence and a sense of victimisation. Those with experience in mainstream schools also claimed that pupils from minority groups may use the 'Minority card' (the 'Muslim/Asian' card in the case of Muslims) to blame their lack of success on the supposedly racist attitudes of teachers rather than on their own shortcomings.

Some maintained that no special accommodation is made within school or society for many other ethnic or religious communities in Britain, and that members of these communities do not generally feel threatened or insulted by such lack of awareness of their specific cultural needs. Others questioned this assertion, pointing out that members of various minority communities, including Sikhs and Hindus, often reported that their needs were not valued or addressed. A sense of exclusion is not therefore unique to Muslims.

It is also the case that there is no absolute right to the accommodation of specific religious or cultural needs, and there is variation in the extent to which schools accommodate such needs. The majority of schools do not have a policy of accommodation, and opposition to special provision was often a principled stance based on the belief that it was fundamentally divisive, rather than simply a matter of logistics or a lack of appropriate facilities.

It was pointed out, however, that where there are heavy concentrations of Muslims there may be few policies against accommodating Muslim needs. In such cases, schools may even over-compensate by not celebrating Christmas for fear of offending Muslim parents. It is important that schools achieve the right balance, which requires a whole community approach and good relations between schools and parents.

It was also suggested that it is fundamentally mistaken to regard an educational setting as a neutral space, since all educational systems are based on particular conceptions of human nature, faculties, ideas and beliefs, even if underlying ideologies may not be made explicit. It has been claimed that in the wider context of the debate about faith schools, secular schools (as opposed to faith schools) are

not ideologically free zones. Secularism as an ideology has its own assumptions about the human person, the ideal society, the ideal system of schooling and the meaning of human existence. While these assumptions may not be formally codified into a curriculum subject designated 'secular education' as an alternative to 'religious education' it can be argued that they characteristically permeate the ethos and culture of state-provided secular schools and form a crucial part of the hidden curriculum.⁹²

By the same token, in a democratic society all should feel empowered to be fully 'who they are' and no one should need to pretend to be someone else. That right entails the freedom to criticise aspects of a system or an institution that are not consonant with one's principles, values or beliefs. What is important is that one is even-handed, and willing to censure low standards, poor results or lack of moral compass in any school, whether Muslim or non-Muslim.

Achievement and Underachievement

There is no large-scale monitoring of educational attainment in terms of religious affinity and faith community. However, indications are to an extent provided by ethnicity, since pupils of Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Somali and Turkish heritage in schools are predominantly Muslims.

The collection and publication of statistical data relating to educational attainment in terms of ethnicity is clearly an important component when highlighting inequality in attainment. However, possible links between faith identities and underachievement may be overlooked due to the current practice of not collecting and publishing attainment data in relation to religious background.

There is an urgent need to address the underachievement of Muslims within the educational system as a whole. Almost one third of Muslims in Britain of working age (16-64) have no educational qualifications, the highest proportion for any faith group, whereas the most recent official figure for the total UK population is, on average, one in nine.⁹³ The geographical areas in which this figure drops to one in three are confined to those described as 'education blackspots' in cities such as Birmingham and Glasgow.⁹⁴ Muslim pupils from Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Turkish and Somali backgrounds are among those who experience the highest levels of academic underachievement and consequent lack of qualifications in Britain.⁹⁵ Fewer Muslim 16-year-olds are in education, training or employment than any other group of the same age. Pupils of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin have consistently performed below the average for all pupils on every scale of the Foundation Stage profile and have consistently lower levels of attainment than most other ethnic groups across

all key stages.⁹⁶ They also experience high rates of Special Educational Needs provision.⁹⁷

However, it is worth noting, as a riposte to biased attacks on Muslim faith schools, that in 2009, these schools surpassed national averages in modern foreign languages and in 5+ A* – C GCSE percentage indicators.⁹⁸ One voluntary-aided Muslim school has been recognised by the Government as one of the 100 highest achieving schools in England and Wales.⁹⁹ Many pupils who enter the school with below average attainment leave with exceptionally high levels of achievement. In 2009 the school's GCSE results exceeded all national benchmarks and the school's own high targets. It was also awarded humanities specialist status in 2008, with Citizenship, Humanities and English as its lead subjects. The positive impact of this was recognised in the Ofsted report which found that many students at the school express their aspiration to become 'good British citizens'.

It is also the case that students attending Muslim schools are excelling within underperforming local authorities, and that good teaching practice in Muslim schools has been recognised in Ofsted reports.¹⁰⁰ The spiritual, moral and social development of pupils is also often rated by inspectors as 'good' in Muslim schools, even in schools where teaching is only 'satisfactory'.¹⁰¹

It is also significant that, contrary to common assumptions that educational achievement by Muslims in the UK is lower than for other pupils at all stages of compulsory education, relevant OECD statistics for the UK indicate that, as in the Netherlands, a higher percentage of Muslims achieve a high level of education than non-Muslims. As in Sweden, Muslims in Britain seem to be represented at both the high and low extremes.¹⁰²

It is important to note, however, that it is not easy to assess levels of achievement and underachievement precisely, and that measures vary. One study, for example, counterbalancing the findings of the OECD report, found that Muslim students are less likely to obtain a first or upper second class degree and need an extra two years to obtain the same qualifications as their White peers.¹⁰³

The Importance of Knowledge, Learning and Enquiry in Islam

Islam attaches great importance to knowledge, learning and enquiry. The very first word of the Qur'an to be revealed to the Prophet Muhammad was the imperative *iqra* ('read!')¹⁰⁴ and there are numerous references in the Qur'an and sayings of the Prophet that emphasise the importance of knowledge and learning.¹⁰⁵ Islam holds knowledge (*ilm*) and learning as sacred and, therefore, central to the development

of any civilisation.¹⁰⁶ It has been rightly said that there is not a single aspect of European civilisation in which the decisive influence of Islamic culture is not traceable, and 'nowhere is this so clear and momentous as in the genesis of that power which constitutes the paramount distinctive force of the modern world – natural science and the scientific spirit'.¹⁰⁷

Important as it is to rectify the pervasive Eurocentric biases present in so much Western historical writing, and to give full credit in school curricula to the transformational impact of Islamic civilisation, it was nevertheless emphasised by some participants that the Qur'anic spirit of enquiry should not be confined to a nostalgic celebration of its 'golden age' but needed to be revitalised in the contemporary Muslim world. A study of 20 member states of the Organization of the Islamic Conference found that these countries spent only one-seventh of the global average on scientific research from 1996-2003.¹⁰⁸ Those Muslim countries have fewer than 10 scientists, engineers, and technicians for every 1,000 people, compared with the world average of 40, and 140 for the developed world. They also contribute only about 1% of the world's published scientific papers. Another study of OIC nations found that, in 2005, Harvard University alone produced 2,000 more scientific papers than the total number produced by 17 Arabic-speaking countries.¹⁰⁹

Islamic Education as Holistic Education

Participants discussed ways in which Islamic education can legitimately be said to converge with the broad rationale of holistic education emphasising the balanced development of human faculties. A comprehensive and integrated concept of Islamic education based on the worldview of Divine Unity (*tawhid*) ideally encompasses not only the instruction and training of the mind and the transmission of knowledge (*talim*), but also the nurture of the whole being (*tarbiya*), moral discipline (*tadib*), and learning from one another in the spirit of critical openness and respect for diversity (*taaruf*). The teacher is therefore not only a *muallim*, a transmitter of knowledge, but also a *murabbi*, a nurturer of souls and developer of character. The Islamic educational system has never divorced the training of the mind from that of the soul.¹¹⁰

It is worth noting that the Islamic concept of education as *tarbiya*, 'nurturing, rearing', is consistent with Latin *educere*, to 'lead or draw out' (English 'educer') and with the English word 'develop', whose underlying meaning is to 'unwrap'. This concept of drawing out latent potential points to an educational process which includes remembering, activating, awakening, eliciting or bringing to light innate capacities. These capacities reflect the essential nature or primordial disposition (*fitra*) with which the human being has been imprinted by God, endowing him or her with

the potential to become His representative or steward (*khalifa*) on earth. The origin of the English word for 'character' is from a Greek word meaning a 'stamp', 'impression' or 'engraving', from which the sense of 'character' as a scribal mark is derived. Authentic human character is engraved or etched on the soul, having been created by God 'in the best of moulds'.¹¹¹ The development of character is thus the unfolding of the divine imprint.

It was suggested that any description of Islamic education should include the dimension of *tazkiya*, which encompasses knowledge and practices directed to the purification of the soul, or the cleansing of the heart, from vices such as egotism, pride, envy, greed and heedlessness. The source of such spiritual education and transformation is firmly rooted in the Qur'an,¹¹² and in the injunction of the Prophet Muhammad that the greater struggle (*al-jihad al-akbar*) is the struggle to conquer the lower self. The Prophet prayed to God not only to increase him in knowledge but also to improve his character.

In Islamic terms, over-emphasis on *talim* at the expense of *tarbiya* can compromise the integrity of the educational experience, producing a system of schooling or instruction characterised by a top-down, teacher-centred Transmission of Information model of learning. It is important to realise that many critiques of instructional or schooling regimes are directed not only at authoritarian approaches to education in Muslim schools but also at the utilitarian priorities of the secular education system in the West.

A comprehensive view of Islamic education converges in many ways with the stated goals of the National Curriculum, which is supposed to encompass not only the acquisition of knowledge and skills, but also personal, social, moral and spiritual development.

Participants discussed the misleading dichotomy which has arisen from regarding Islamic education as a faith-based alternative to the secular conception of education based on the humanist ideals of Western modernity. Islamic education is not confined to religious education, but is an overarching concept referring to the totality of teaching and learning activities that take place in the family, the school and the mosque. There is a pressing need for a radical realignment of the one-sided and polarised mentalities underlying much entrenched thinking within contemporary Islam and the secular humanism of late modernity, so that they can interact more intelligently. Promising signs that this process is underway can be observed in the way the West has begun to question the supremacist assumptions within its rhetoric of 'rational enlightenment' and the corresponding way in which the Muslim world

is gradually reconsidering and recontextualising the meaning of being faithful to Islam in the light of contemporary needs.¹¹³

Participants discussed the educational philosophy and practice of certain school systems in the Muslim world which have adopted more holistic approaches, going beyond the dichotomy between secular and religious education.¹¹⁴ In some of these schools, while a certain percentage of the curriculum is devoted to religious studies, there is a parallel programme offering a broad and balanced education. Although many of the children may aspire to become Imams and spend many hours learning how to recite the Qur'an, they also follow a curriculum centred on science and social studies. Other models follow a more integrated modern curriculum.

A common thread in many of these alternative models is a strong emphasis on inter-cultural studies, which may include the study of other faiths, so as to foster dialogue, tolerance, peaceful coexistence and integration within wider society. These schools do not seek to subvert modern secular states but promote an inclusive ideal that encourages practising Muslims to embrace modernity and the opportunities it affords. The holistic nature of such an educational vision is also implemented in the emphasis placed on extra-curricular activities, ethical values, character building, and service to the common good.

Opportunities and Challenges within School and Family

Critical Thinking

There was strong agreement amongst participants that the revival of critical thinking was a pressing priority in the education of Muslims.

A strongly open educational approach, embracing critical thinking (*al-tafkir al-naqdi*) and dynamic interpretation in relation to primary sources was pivotal in building a fully-fledged jurisprudential system in the early period of Islam. The process of scrutinising evidence, examining assumptions and making deductions was a living tradition that pervaded the legal field during the early days of Islamic jurisprudence. The necessary component of independent thinking and interpretation recognised by the tradition as *ijtihad* has important pedagogic implications.¹¹⁵ While there is increasing recognition of the need to reinstate critical thinking in contemporary Islamic legal thought, there is also a pressing need for its application to scholarship and education.

Much of the Qur'an is in the form of arguments which recognise the need and capacity of the human mind to reason and consider explanations as a means of coming to valid conclusions and heeding advice and guidance.¹¹⁶ The Qur'an is not only sanctioned by divine authority but also appeals to, and is verified by, human reasoning. It also recognises the practical reality that human life is subject to change and adaptation, and emphasises developmental processes active in both physical and psycho-spiritual dimensions of human nature.

Participants discussed the potential of even very young children for critical thinking. This is fostered in those schools that follow programmes such as 'Philosophy for Children', a movement that aims to teach children reasoning and debating skills.¹¹⁷ The experience of many philosophers and teachers working with young children supports the view that children benefit from philosophical enquiry even in early primary school. Furthermore, there is empirical evidence that teaching children reasoning skills early in life greatly improves other cognitive and academic skills and greatly assists learning in general.

Values Education within a Community of Enquiry

The best thinking skills programmes go beyond the sharpening of a narrow set of abstract intellectual skills, and create a community of enquiry committed to developing a range of ethical values essential to participation in a society in which there exists a plurality of values.

These values include respect for others, taking all ideas seriously, caring for the procedures that govern collaborative enquiry, and a willingness to engage with broader perspectives and listen to alternative viewpoints. The philosophical exploration of concepts such as good, bad, fairness, rules, rights, duty, and loyalty also facilitates intelligent enquiry into ethical questions.

The fear is sometimes expressed that if children are encouraged to explore ethical questions and make up their own minds about ethical values, there will be little agreement about core values. Instead, it is assumed that children will adopt a relativist outlook, according to which 'anything goes', and in which all choices for action are equally valid and immune from criticism. Such moral relativism is typically associated with modern secular society by some Muslims, as it is by some followers of other faith traditions and ethical systems. However, the rigorous nature of the enquiry in such programmes as 'Philosophy for Children' and the emphasis on assessing reasons for positions means that, in practice, a community is very unlikely to come to the conclusion that 'anything goes'. In fact, experience shows that

students in such a community of enquiry typically recreate for themselves a stable set of core ethical values which have withstood the test of careful evaluation.

The integration of philosophical and ethical dimensions in programmes which foster a community of enquiry is entirely consistent with the comprehensive description of human faculties enshrined in an authentic vision of Islamic education. The Qur'an upholds reason as a praiseworthy means of validating truth, advising that people of insight (and those graced with divine guidance) are those who *listen closely to all that is said, and follow the best of it*.¹¹⁸

Rote-Learning vs Comprehension

During the discussion amongst participants about the prevailing pedagogy in madrasa education, the claim was made that it was simplistic and misleading to set up a dichotomy between a traditional teacher-directed pedagogy based on rote-learning of texts and a progressive pedagogy which favours critical thinking, discussion and interpretation.

It is simply not the case that the former methodology is practiced exclusively or even disproportionately within all Muslim educational settings, any more than education in thinking skills forms the bedrock of practice in mainstream schools. In fact, mainstream educational practice is itself largely characterised by a top-down, teacher-directed transmission of information model of teaching and learning which does not generally give prominence to a culture of critical or creative thinking.

There is a common misconception that memorisation is somehow opposed to thinking and comprehension. On the contrary, the memorisation of complex verbal material is a vital tool in developing higher-order cognitive faculties. Memorisation makes complex material accessible to the brain for subsequent processing and lifelong reflection. It also provides a store of knowledge on which new knowledge can be built and gives substance and credibility to arguments and opinions.

Some critiques of mainstream education uphold that it needs to reclaim a largely lost culture of memorisation in those areas where it enhances deep learning. Learning poetry, for example, like learning music for performance, has transferable benefits, because this kind of memorisation develops potent cognitive strategies for utilising a variety of patterns and cues. These include word order, metrical and rhyming patterns, and various poetic devices such as alliteration and assonance which build memorable connections between words and are a common feature of epic poetry and sacred text. Such skills were well developed in societies rich in oral tradition, and

of course encompassed not only skill in memorising but also the expressive skills required for inspiring recitation.

Participants emphasised, however, the importance of ensuring that memorisation, imitation, dictation and factual 'right-answer' recall are not over-extended as learning strategies. All educational institutions, whether mainstream or otherwise, need to show that they have developed a methodology of teaching and learning in all subject areas (including religious education) that promotes deep comprehension through critical and creative thinking skills, discussion, research and recourse to personal experience. The memorisation of sacred texts can undoubtedly contribute to such a rich educational experience and should not be denigrated.

Creative and Expressive Arts

Fears and suspicions about the role of the arts, especially music, in encouraging undesirable traits of character and even destabilising whole communities and societies have been common to various religions (including Judaism, Christianity and Islam) and philosophical and ethical traditions.

Amongst some Muslims, the place of the creative and expressive arts, whether in the school curriculum or in daily life, is a matter of considerable controversy. Most forms of artistic expression may be regarded by them as a threat to Islamic values. Since Islam emphasises restraint and modesty, the arts may be seen as dangerous in promoting self-indulgence, sensuality and licentiousness.

Debates continue about whether stringent Muslim reservations about the arts are justified by primary scriptural sources. Many uphold that there is nothing in the Qur'an which explicitly prohibits forms of artistic expression and that the sayings of the Prophet which may often be cited as doing so are of dubious authenticity. In the case of visual arts, it is a common misconception that all forms of figurative or representational art are forbidden in Islam. In fact, the pre-eminence of calligraphic, abstract and geometric forms in Islamic art is not a consequence of any such 'prohibition' but simply reflects the preference of the Islamic artist 'to leave the outer forms of nature and the material world, and concentrate on the abstract, inner reality of things'.¹¹⁹

That said, those Muslims with strong reservations may often adhere to the cautious view that in the case of 'doubt', it is always best to play safe and avoid the possibility of error.

Such proscriptive arguments, however, appear very marginal when it is realised that

Muslims in general enjoy a rich artistic experience. The younger generation of Muslims in particular has positive attitudes to the arts and enjoys them with few qualms.¹²⁰ It has been strongly asserted that to thrive within Europe, Muslims must make room for the arts in their lives, and that 'it is not possible to think of a Muslim presence without nourishing and encouraging an artistic and cultural expression which is an alternative to a popular culture that does not often care about ethics or dignity'.¹²¹

Participants acknowledged that there needs to be an open debate amongst Muslim educationalists about the role of the arts in education. Such a debate needs to be informed not only by authentic Islamic principles and the realities of living in contemporary society, but also by the findings of contemporary research to re-evaluate the place of visual arts, music, dance, drama and other forms of artistic expression.

Introspection, Reflection and Contemplation

Introspection and reflection are essential for the development of moral and ethical values because they teach young people to examine themselves, to understand their own motives and the consequences of their actions. Intelligent and purposeful struggle with the lower self is dependent on those qualities of self-awareness and self-knowledge which arise from self-examination. The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: *He who knows his own self, knows his Lord.*

The Qur'an is insistent in its call for people to think deeply and reflect on the visible 'signs' (*ayat*) accessible to human perception as evidence of the existence of God and the hidden dimension of the 'Unseen' (*Ghayb*). The development of higher faculties of perception (*albab*), or 'seeing with the heart', is linked to higher cognitive faculties such as *tadabbur* (pondering), *tafakkur* (deep thinking, reflection, and contemplation), and *tawassum* (observation and understanding of the signs of nature).¹²² In Islam, as in all faith traditions, the contemplative faculties go deeper than critical thinking in having their prime orientation in the development of mindfulness or consciousness of God (*taqwa*). As such, they combine cognitive, ethical and spiritual dimensions.

Islam affirms the centrality of higher faculties in the education of the fully human being. Participants agreed that Muslim educators therefore have much to offer from their spiritual tradition for the restoration of opportunities for deep thinking, extended reflection, contemplation and the cultivation of self-knowledge, whether at school or within the wider educational context of the family.

Observation, Perception and Direct Experience

There are a number of verses in the Qur'an which exhort men and women to make good use of the faculties of 'hearing, sight and hearts' with which they have been endowed by God.¹²³ Using the senses and learning by direct observation and experience is therefore a fundamental dimension of an Islamic vision of education. It also reflects the deeper wisdom in Islamic spirituality that knowledge gained by direct experience, or 'tasting' (*dhawq*), is the way to spiritual certitude (*yaqin*). The connection of wisdom to the faculties of direct perception is clearly shown in the derivation of the English word 'sapience' (wisdom) from Latin *sapere* ('to taste'), which also gives the word 'savour'. Direct perception operates on various levels, from the physical senses to the activation of the primordial capacity for intuitive perception of the truth. Faith (*iman*) is not a matter of blind belief, but is continually verified and strengthened by direct observation and awareness of the imprint of the divine attributes in creation, evident to those who have 'eyes to see' and 'ears to hear'.¹²⁴

Given the enormous contribution of Islam to the development of empiricism and the scientific method in the West, it might be expected that Muslim educators would be in the forefront of reviving a culture of observation and experimentation which is in decline in British schools.¹²⁵ Given also the central importance of geometry in Islamic civilisation, a Muslim vision of education might also be expected to defend the place of geometry in the curriculum, both as a key element of mathematics and as the very foundation of Islamic art, architecture and aesthetics.

Education in the Humanities

The progressive marginalisation of the arts and humanities has been identified by the Cambridge Primary Review as a serious issue in the curriculum of mainstream schools.¹²⁶ In the curriculum of some Muslim schools, the neglect of these subjects may be even more evident. Only the bare minimum required may be offered, and even then may be poorly delivered. Such imbalance in the curriculum may be partly attributable to the traditional preference within Muslim communities for certain professional pathways such as law, medicine, engineering and computer science, but it can also be the consequence of negative attitudes towards subjects such as literature.

It was pointed out that it appears that no proper provision is made in madrasas to introduce students to the subjects within the classical Islamic humanities (the *adab* genre) and almost no contemporary Western liberal arts subjects are studied. Without proper familiarity with the humanities it is difficult to expect that students

will develop the interpretive and communicative skills necessary for engaging with the rich Muslim cultural heritage and developing a more appropriate and effective language for articulating Islam in contemporary British society. Education in the humanities is also crucial in developing a more synthetic, integrated and complementary approach to the curriculum.

The study of history and geography is not only integral to the human need for orientation in time and space but also has a moral purpose in fostering understanding of the factors involved in the rise and fall of human civilisations. The achievements of early Muslim geographers and historians attest to the importance of these subjects in advancing the spirit of enquiry and the open interest in the diversity of human experience at the heart of Islamic civilisation. This splendid legacy is an opportunity to motivate Muslim educators and parents to play an important part in reviving a culture of geographical and historical literacy.

Given the fact that many Muslim children grow up speaking more than one language, Muslims can also play an important role in increasing public understanding of the benefits of multilingualism, and not least amongst teachers, many of whom mistakenly believe that bilingualism and multilingualism among their pupils is a problem rather than an asset. Research clearly shows that children who speak at least two languages do better at school than those who speak only one.¹²⁷

Nature and Environmental Education

Given the repeated call in the Qur'an for reflection on the beauty and majesty of nature, the study of the natural world and environmental issues ought to be a key element in Islamic education. This is an important challenge for Britain's predominantly urban Muslim communities.

It was agreed by many participants that it is vital for children to capture a balanced, healing and beneficent vision of the natural world, and that people in every community need to explore how they can provide opportunities, supported by school or family, for experiential learning in natural settings. These may include adventure programs, often praised as a means of developing not only physical fitness, but also problem-solving abilities, leadership skills, social skills and independence. Those who have participated in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme enthusiastically attest to that.¹²⁸ Programmes may also include real-world projects which give children a taste of country life or involve them in gardening or environmental conservation.¹²⁹

Above all, young people benefit enormously from simple immersion in the spaciousness and tranquillity of nature. The Qur'an states that *the servants of the*

*All-Merciful are those who tread lightly on the earth.*¹³⁰ This is an important message for a culture which may pay undue homage to the adrenalin rushes provided by extreme sports supported by hi-tech equipment, or the quest for personal triumphs in the conquest of nature.

Community Service and Stewardship

Charitable work in the service of the wider community is a mark of excellence in holistic education and, given the importance of charitable deeds in Islam, is surely integral to the ethos and practice of authentic Islamic education.

The Qur'an calls people of faith to be true to their 'covenants', which include the covenants between God and man, between man and his own soul, and between the individual and his fellow-men, thus embracing the entire area of man's moral and social responsibilities.¹³¹ The embodiment of philanthropic principles is not therefore a matter of convenience, calculation or expediency, but an absolute sacred trust (*amana*). This imposes on Muslims the duty of stewardship (*khilafa*), which demands a proactive sense of care, social responsibility, charitable deeds, and good works (*salihat*).

One of the most effective ways to engage the whole being of anyone is to involve them in service to others. Involvement in active charitable work or community service which brings together different communities, including faith communities, and the 'haves' and 'have-nots', is immensely enriching to all. The poor, deprived or needy may be materially enriched, but the givers also benefit immeasurably because of what they learn about the human spirit, the joy of selfless giving without hope of reward, the development of compassion and empathy, direct insight into the way of life and beliefs of others, and an understanding of the roots of true happiness. Young people are hungering for involvement of this kind, because it is part of their innate humanity, and both educational institutions and families can clearly play an important role in providing them with a practical context for its expression.

The Crucial Role of the Family

The role of the family is absolutely central in implementing a range of opportunities for the education of the whole child. The family is, in fact, the very foundation of a truly holistic education.

Participants discussed the theological status of the family in relation to the nurturing process of *tarbiya*, and how it contributes to the education of the whole personality. The issue of home-schooling was also raised. It was claimed that, whilst the

pedagogic process within the Qur'an is one which respects the autonomous learner, the role of the family can nevertheless often be stagnant in being largely compliant with authority figures.

It is obvious that moral and spiritual development in schools builds on the child's experience in the home, but it is also important to realise that the family can provide various opportunities for many of the dimensions of wider holistic education. The role of the family and the home environment goes far beyond that of parental cooperation with the school in keeping homework diaries, attending parents' evenings and the like. It extends to providing many opportunities for extra-curricular activities, such as engagement in the creative arts, cultural and sporting activities, nature activities and community service.

Real concerns about the quality of education in schools are also driving a marked increase in the number of parents opting out of the system altogether and choosing homeschooling for their children. Motives for doing so vary greatly, including justifiable concerns about poor discipline in schools, lack of moral and spiritual education, bullying, excessive testing and lack of stimulation for able and gifted children.

The quality of discourse and relationships within family and social life also initiates and reinforces the acquisition of the knowledge and skills which characterises a genuine community of enquiry, committed to lifelong learning. Holistic education in its deepest sense is fostered within a family circle centred on vibrant conversation, discussion, respect for alternative views, and the open exploration of ideas, as well as on the transmission of traditional wisdom and values. A talking culture within families is also an essential aspect of the reclamation of a culture of personal care, which can provide children with emotional resilience and a sense of personal responsibility.

A constellation of virtues is transmitted from generation to generation through proper education, upbringing and, above all, through inspiring examples set by elders and role models. These paragons may be ancestors, parents, teachers, mentors or other exemplary characters either from the past or in the present. If someone does not receive this quality from family, environment and education, it is very difficult to acquire it by personal effort alone. Given the demographic reality that more than half of British Muslims are under 25 years of age (the most youthful profile of any faith community), it can hardly be emphasised enough that the proper nurture of young British Muslims and the welfare of future generations depend crucially on quality of leadership and guidance within family and community. The same applies, of course, to all young people within all communities in Britain today.

Wider Society and the Common Good¹³²

The Secular Context

The Secular State and Liberty of Conscience

There is a web of misunderstanding, not confined to Muslims, regarding the true origin, nature and intent of secularism. The core of the idea of the secular state is not anti-religious, for the historical separation of the powers of church and state in the West actually guaranteed the status of religion and the freedom of the church from state control, ensuring that neither should interfere in each other's domain of government. Secularism is therefore essentially a contract, ensuring religious freedom, tolerance and peace within a shared political space.

An important aspect of the separation of powers is the fundamental principle of liberty of conscience, a principle ardently advocated by Martin Luther, the father of Protestantism. Insisting that God requires voluntary and sincere religious beliefs, Luther sets out the principle that forbids human authorities from compulsion or coercion in matters of faith, since any such compulsion would render faith insincere. The role of the civil government is simply to maintain peace and order in society.¹³³

The principle of liberty of conscience is absolutely in accord with the Qur'anic injunction that *there shall be no coercion (ikrah) in matters of faith*.¹³⁴ On the strength of this categorical prohibition, all Islamic jurists (*fuqaha*), without any exception, hold that forcible conversion is under all circumstances null and void, and that any attempt at coercing a non-believer to accept the faith of Islam is a grievous sin: a verdict which disposes of the widespread fallacy that Islam places before the unbelievers the alternative of 'conversion or the sword'.¹³⁵

Procedural and Ideological Secularism

The misreading of secularism as an anti-religious movement is echoed in similar misunderstandings about the nature of Renaissance humanism. Renaissance humanists were devout Christians, and their restoration of 'humanness' was not intended as an assault on faith. The conflation of humanism with atheism is a phenomenon of the modern period.

The distinction between secularity and secularism has also been conceptualised as the difference between 'passive' or 'procedural secularism' and 'assertive' or 'ideological secularism'. Procedural secularism protects the equal rights of all citizens, while freely allowing religious citizens to participate fully and robustly in open debate in the public sphere. As such, it has brought many benefits to humanity, ensuring religious and political freedoms for minorities. Ideological secularism, on the other hand, attempts to exclude or rigorously control religious voices and institutions in the public (and even the private) sphere, and has led to tyrannical and oppressive rule in some parts of the world, including the Middle East.¹³⁶

The term 'secular' comes from the Latin *saeculum*, which means 'this age' or 'the present time', and the concept refers to the condition of the world at this particular time or period or age. It is precisely by recognising and understanding the condition of the world at this particular time that the challenge of religious and cultural pluralism can be met. This is not to give precedence to the temporal world over the spiritual world, nor to set one against the other, but to understand that human minds are conditioned differently in each age, and that tradition must be dynamically self-renewing and responsive to new conditions and new questions if it is to remain a living tradition.

In other words, time, place and people cannot be ignored in the development of human understanding. Participants acknowledged that while it was important to guard against modernism and secularism as uncompromising ideologies which are essentially inimical to the spiritual quest, it was equally important to take account of the reality of contemporary conditions and to remain open to discover what contemporary life has to offer in supporting that quest.

Political Participation

Objectives and Dimensions of Political Participation

There are many important objectives of political participation. It can bring greater

unity to communities, influence government policy on issues of particular concern to British Muslims, and increase representation of Muslims within policy-making establishments and authorities. It can help to counter the extremist narrative which opposes notions of citizenship, participation and engagement, and provide a legitimate and constructive channel for young Muslims to vent their anger and frustration over domestic and foreign policies which are perceived as anti-Muslim. It also provides a means to engage with political structures to work for the common good of all citizens, irrespective of their political, racial, cultural or religious affiliation. Given these various objectives, there is a need for a coherent narrative within Muslim communities to guide more effective political participation at all levels.

Political participation involves both individual activism and community mobilisation. Effective impact is not premised on any single approach, and in many ways they are inter-dependent. While motivated and altruistic individuals and leaders may have inspirational influence, the role of structures and organisations in mobilising communities may also be decisive, as in recent equality and anti-religious discrimination legislation. An historical example is the synergy between activists on the ground and a parliamentarian with direct access to the legislative process that drove the movement for the abolition of slavery. Pertinent questions which might be asked include: what is the right balance between the three dimensions? Should any one of them be prioritised in particular situations? Which 'button' needs to be pressed, and when?

Problems of Post-Diaspora Muslims

Post-diaspora Muslims have to contend with a range of problems, some of which are more or less specific to Muslim communities, while others are replicated in other minority communities, including Sikhs, Hindus and Balkan Christians, as well as throughout wider society. These include inter-generational conflict, structural and socio-psychological discrimination, poor social mobility, poor leadership, an oppressive securitised agenda, and persistent ideological debates.

In addition, many impressionable young European Muslims, whose only connection with their religion may be the desire to find some sense of moral certainty and a place in the world, are given an identity compass linked to a vision of the *umma* within global Islam. This prompts them to see themselves as part of a wider struggle of resistance against hegemony, imperialism and godless capitalism.¹³⁷

Inter-generational conflict in Muslim families needs to be seen in the wider context of the breakdown of inter-generational links that has been identified as one of the chief problems affecting young people in wider British society today.¹³⁸ However,

inter-generational conflict and the resultant pressures experienced by young people within Muslim families also take specific forms that reflect cultural norms and practices.

The mindset of many British Muslims has been affected by various landmark events in recent history. These include the *Satanic Verses* affair in which British Muslims captured media attention in an unprecedented manner, and, as a result of which, the problematic term 'Muslim community' began to be widely used; the Bosnian War, which highlighted the brutal plight of indigenous European Muslims; the attacks in the USA on 11 September 2001, signalling the 'War on Terror' and a new era which identified 'Islamic terrorism' as a global threat; the occupation of Iraq in 2003; the bombings in London on 7 July 2005; and the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Disadvantage, Deprivation, Public Hostility and Alienation

The experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic communities in housing, health, education, the labour market and the criminal justice system vary widely, and are influenced by complex factors, including country of origin, location of settlement, gender, and changing economic structure. It is clear, however, that minority communities are generally disadvantaged in most of the key indicators of economic and social well-being. Within this context, it is also apparent that many communities of Muslim heritage are the most ethnically/racially disadvantaged and deprived, with the added burden of double disadvantage due to negative perceptions of Muslims.¹³⁹

Muslims have the lowest employment rate and the highest economic inactivity rate of any group.¹⁴⁰ Muslim men are among the least likely to be in managerial and professional jobs and the most likely to be in low-skilled jobs. Just under three-quarters of Pakistani and Bangladeshi children are living in households below the poverty line.¹⁴¹ Muslims also have the highest rates of reported ill health.¹⁴²

It is officially acknowledged that Muslims are experiencing Islamophobia both personally and institutionally through forms of marginalisation, discrimination, prejudice and stereotyping. Muslims have the highest rates of risk of being a victim of racially motivated crime,¹⁴³ and almost half of Muslim students have experienced anti-Muslim prejudice.¹⁴⁴ Various reports have confirmed the persistence of discrimination, especially in education, housing and the media.¹⁴⁵ Baroness Warsi has warned that Islamophobia is not only widespread but also socially acceptable in Britain today, a view endorsed by many commentators in the media in response to her speech.¹⁴⁶ Despite the fact that most Muslims in Britain strongly identify as British, only 36% of the general population believe Muslims are loyal citizens, and such

serious misperceptions are heightened by the mainstreaming of Islamophobia in the media. The same narrative increasingly projects Islam and Muslims as a threat to traditional British customs, values and ways of life.

The centrality of the Islamic faith in the lives of Muslims is often wrongly assumed to underlie such perceived threats. Faith undoubtedly constitutes an important component of the core values that define the individual and communal identities of Muslims in Britain, and plays a crucial role too in the emerging self-understanding of young British Muslims and the ways in which they interpret and engage with diversity. Evidence shows that religion plays a much greater part in the lives of young people from Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Caribbean and African communities than it does for White British or mixed-heritage young people. Nearly all Pakistani and Bangladeshi school pupils report that they are Muslim (99 per cent in each instance) and the vast majority within these two groups assert that religion is fairly or very important to them, compared to only 34% of pupils of white British background.¹⁴⁷

It is a serious mistake, however, to assume that religiosity is the dominant cause of extremism, since many other contributory factors are involved. These include not only socio-economic deprivation and endemic Islamophobia, but also the historical legacy of trauma caused by colonialism and grievances over 'Western' foreign policy in the Middle East. There is clear evidence that, contrary to popular belief, the people who are attracted to violent extremism are likely to be those who do not have a good grounding in the religion, and that very religious Muslims are in fact most resistant to radicalisation.¹⁴⁸ These important findings are timely in shattering one of the most prevalent stereotypes about Muslims, radicalisation and violent extremism.

The identity crisis facing Muslim youth is often framed as a proverbial tug-of-war between Muslim society and the dominant British culture, but a study of young South Asian Muslims in Bradford refutes the commonly held assumption that British Muslim alienation is an entirely 'Islamist' phenomenon. This study reveals the emergence of a kind of 'dual nihilism', a double sense of alienation not only from British society but also from the cultural traditions and values of their own families and communities.¹⁴⁹

Direct causal links between a climate hostile to Muslims, significant economic and social disadvantage and the 'radicalisation' of individual Muslims has yet to be demonstrated. There is, however, an emergent body of work which indicates that perceptions of public hostility to Muslims may serve to attract and orient some younger Muslims towards a primary Islamic identity that may render them susceptible to being targeted by violent extremists making spurious claims to Islamic principles and values.¹⁵⁰

Social Crisis, Polarisation and Scapegoating

It is important to recognise the way in which increasing anti-Muslim prejudice is a barrier to the development of policies designed to achieve public accommodation of Muslim legal and ethical norms in the European public sphere. Anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia act as a significant barrier to a reasonable analysis of Muslim claims for accommodation, as well as being a barrier to Muslim integration into Europe.

Ideas about racial or cultural inferiority can sometimes be transferred from an earlier to a contemporary racialised group. An important historical precedent for current processes of racialisation of Muslims is the treatment of Jews, who are one of Europe's earliest racial and religious minorities. Similar trends can be observed in the context of Muslim minorities, especially after the 'crisis' incidents of 9/11 and 7/7. There is a pervasive assumption in the media and public culture that Muslims in Britain are immune from integration because of their religious attachment to a scriptural text (the Qur'an) and foreign law (the Sharia), in the same way that Jews were previously perceived as being wedded to the Old Testament and the Talmud. Muslims are also commonly represented as a social group that is openly and aggressively trying to impose its religion on national culture. This partially explains the recent concerns about multiculturalism.

Differences arising from religious culture are often systematically excluded from definitions of Britishness, even though it is not difficult to show a striking convergence, for example, between many distinctively British and Islamic principles and values.¹⁵¹

The overall picture is of an increasing sense of unease, fear and hostility between Muslims and non-Muslims over the last decade. This has coincided with a mainstream media narrative which projects the fallacy that there is no common ground between the West and Islam and that Muslims are a threat to the customary British way of life.

This rising trend of social polarisation illustrates that the prevailing British public discourse on Islam is fundamentally concerned with whether the religion is compatible with the liberal, democratic and secular norms and values of modern British and Western societies. Far-right fringe groups have been able to feed off a growing sense of suspicion within wider society toward Muslim minorities in their midst. This in turn is linked to a growing public narrative of Islamic values as regressive, backward, violent and oppressive.

Negative attitudes do not work only in one direction. British Muslims are more prone

than other Muslim diasporas in the West to hold negative perceptions of Westerners, with more than half believing that Western populations are selfish, arrogant, greedy, immoral, violent, and disrespectful towards women.¹⁵²

Participants discussed the factors driving the process of social polarisation. While there are many interrelated historical, socio-political, geopolitical, economic and cultural factors at play, it is possible to identify a deepening sense of social and economic crisis as a prominent source of the problem. Historians of mass violence point out that the processes that lead to genocide invariably commence with anxieties generated by perceptions of social and economic crisis. Such anxieties are typically alleviated by the projection of blame onto minority groups who are seen as outsiders.¹⁵³

Restrictive Assumptions and Myths

There is a widespread assumption that religious identity is the main factor driving political participation by Muslims. This has created the restrictive expectation that their participation in politics and public discourse is conditioned by their being Muslim first, and British second. As a result, there may be negative reactions to Muslims who speak about issues of general public interest or matters not identifiable as specifically 'Muslim', such as higher education, British values, or rambling rights. Such matters may be seen as outside the legitimate territory allotted to and occupied by Muslims.

While Muslims have often been accused of falling short in their involvement in the political process, attempts to mobilise the Muslim vote have invariably been met with apprehension, criticism and accusations of allegiance to foreign agendas and groups. The concept of a 'Muslim Vote' has also been dismissed as a return to religious politics and an affront to the democratic and secular values of British society.

Given the framing of the Muslim community as a 'security' issue, those in a position to make public policy or influence public opinion and who might seek out intelligent views from Muslims, may be interested in, say, a theological perspective only in so far as it provides arguments against violence, or can help dispel fears of Muslim extremism. At the same time, if Muslims are invited to the table, the consultation may be heavily formalised and distinctly asymmetric with outcomes predetermined by biases in the choice of participants. There may also be a deferential attitude, as if Muslims are privileged in having been granted access to the process.

False assumptions may also be projected onto Muslims that they are too assertive, inherently incapable of integration, or irredeemably intolerant. While the real source of such misjudgements may often simply be a dislike of difference, the ground is

shifted so as to find the source of the problem in any number of external reasons. These may include adherence to alien cultural practices or the illusory threat posed by the impending 'Islamification of Europe'.

In the same way, Muslims in other countries can be blamed or patronised for not being ready for democracy even if freedom has been denied to them by repressive regimes propped up by Western governments. Critical analysis of discourse has identified blaming the victim as one of the means of upholding power relations and sustaining racism.¹⁵⁴

An instructive illustration is provided by the treatment of Jews in pre-war Germany. Despite the fact that they were well integrated culturally even to the extent of being leaders in various arenas of German culture, other reasons were readily fabricated to justify genocide. Bosnian Muslims also contributed greatly to the cultural life of their nation. The Serbs, however, differentiated and isolated the Muslim community by creating a straw-man Islam and Muslim stereotype and by setting and emphasising cultural markers which stigmatised Islam and Muslims as alien, backward, culturally and morally inferior, threatening and perversely exotic. It is quite clear that Serbian orientalists, by bending scholarship and blending it with political rhetoric, defined Islam and the local Muslim community in such a way as contributed significantly to making genocide acceptable.¹⁵⁵

An additional impediment is the myth of a monolithic 'Muslim community'. Although many countries of origin and various heritages are represented in the highly diverse British Muslim communities, studies commonly draw on the experiences of people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin to draw conclusions about British Muslims as a whole, since these communities account for a large proportion of the Muslim population. There are obvious problems with such an approach. While it may capture the headline experiences of the majority Muslim population, it masks the wide diversity of experience across a spectrum of countries of origin and heritage, as well as the difference between the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities.

A reductionist approach that essentialises all Muslim religious practice into one authorised form of Islam is likely to distort the daily practice of individual Muslims. This is particularly important because there is a risk that the claims for accommodation that are made by Muslim community representatives on behalf of Muslims reflect one particular viewpoint about Muslim norms. It is essential to protect the right of Muslim communities to maintain their own community organisations and representatives as part of a commitment to the collective aspect of religious freedom.

Participants emphasised that a proper understanding of Muslim communities in Britain must take into account the diversity of cultural and religious practices, pre-migration status, settlement histories, geographies and socio-economic conditions within these communities. Failure to grasp this complexity runs the risk of implementing inappropriate and ultimately unsuccessful public policy initiatives for engaging with and working with Muslim communities. The current climate of highly-charged debates around multiculturalism, integration and cohesion has only compounded this complexity.

Identity Politics

The term *asabiya* (tribal partisanship) can be used in both positive and negative senses. Positive or balanced *asabiya* is a source of solidarity and social cohesion. It recognises that co-operation and community spirit are hard wired into humanity, and that social organisation and community pride are necessary for civilisation to flourish. It also recognises that the validity of one's own understanding and practice of universal values does not justify looking down on other ways in which such values may be realised in other communities.

This is distinct from the negative form of *asabiya*, that crudely jingoistic and smugly ethnocentric mentality which endorses group prejudice and parochial self-interest. A verse in the Qur'an advises that there is no superiority of one over another except in *taqwa*, that consciousness and loving awe of God which inspires us to be vigilant and to do what is right.¹⁵⁶ This verse is an implicit condemnation of all ethnic/racial, national, class or tribal prejudice, a condemnation which is made explicit by the Prophet Muhammad in his reported assertion that *He is not of us who proclaims the cause of tribal partisanship, and he is not of us who fights in the cause of tribal partisanship, and he is not of us who dies in the cause of tribal partisanship*. When asked to explain what he meant by tribal partisanship, the Prophet answered, *It means helping your own people in an unjust cause*.¹⁵⁷

Disapproval of tribalism is evident in the Pact of the Virtuous (*hif al-fudul*), struck when Muhammad was a young man, and not yet a Prophet. In this pact, tribal leaders and members pledged that it was their collective duty to intervene in conflicts in the cause of justice and side with the oppressed against the oppressors, whoever they might be and whatever alliances might link them to other tribes. The Prophet's approval of the pact, in which he saw nothing that contradicted the values of Islam, confirmed that principles of justice, morality and the common good of society are not the exclusive domain of any one community, faith or ideology.

Participants reiterated that it is important for Muslims not to be confined by an exclusively Muslim identity concerned only with parochial Muslim issues. Muslims have the right and duty as responsible British citizens to speak out on issues that concern wider society. Some also questioned the mentality of 'Islamisation', the perceived need to relate everything to Islamic tradition, believing it to be a handicap which needs to be transcended. In the same way, they added, there may be no need to consult a detailed manual of Islamic rulings (*fiqh*) for guidance on the minutiae of every conceivable issue. Concepts such as justice and charity are not defined in the Qur'an, since it is taken for granted that these are universal human principles.

While identity politics is often regarded as a negative aspect of partisan communitarian insularity and equated with tribalism, some upheld that it is important to realise that identity politics is part of modern political life and is proof in itself of integration in the mainstream political system. The role of identity politics as an historical contingency in bringing justice and opportunity to marginalised groups may be equated with communitarianism in France, for example, but it is certainly less problematic in countries with a tradition of procedural secularism, such as Britain and the United States.

Emerging Confidence

Muslim engagement in civil and public life in Britain has evolved significantly over the last 30 years, and there is a palpable sense of an emerging Muslim confidence in engaging with mainstream politics. There are increasing numbers of Muslim MPs, Peers, councillors and representatives elected at regional and local level. Culture and ethnicity, rather than religion, used to be the dominant factors governing the entry of Muslims into public life, but since the Rushdie affair religion has emerged as a factor in its own right.

The Rushdie protests of the late 1980s are commonly identified as the watershed in the development of more overtly religious identity among British Muslims. The incident energised pre-existing Muslim community networks and organisations and galvanised them into a political and social activism that has since been progressively reinforced. As a result, there is now a wide array of civic organisations that represent the full spectrum of theological and cultural approaches to the Muslim faith within Muslim communities in contemporary Britain.

Participants discussed the fact that there have been numerous criticisms of the extent to which these bodies are truly representative. Even those bodies which are committed to a non-sectarian approach and are open to all traditions may have to contend with communitarian politics involving rivalries between different camps.

Some participants felt strongly, however, that the answer to these and other problems is not to criticise organisations from the sidelines and focus only on shortcomings but to engage with them, or join them, so as to contribute to their improvement and transformation. They also upheld the importance of honouring the achievements of forebears who established such organisations and understanding that they acted according to the constraints of the time. Subsequent generations stand on their shoulders. Those who are critical of existing organisations are also free to set up new ones, and thus strengthen Muslim activism and representation in the public sphere.

'Big P' and 'small p' Politics

It is important to realise that the political sphere encompasses not only the political structures of the state at national and local levels but also social activism generated by individuals and communities at the grass roots level. Recent events in the Middle East, including the revolutionary movements for democracy in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria, have also shown the power of mass communication through mobile technology and electronic social media in supporting movements for radical political change. There is little evidence, however, of the use of proactive social electronic networking by Muslims in the UK.

'Big P' politics, or political participation in mainstream political structures at national and local levels, operates at various levels: registering to vote, voting at the time of elections, campaigning for a candidate and/or a political party, joining a party, and standing as a candidate. It is typically associated with being members of political parties or community leaders.

Engagement in 'small p' politics, however, is characterised by vigorous social networking, partnerships within the community and voluntary sector (intra-community and inter-community engagement), development of social capital through innovation, and the use of 'soft' media messages to raise awareness of community issues. Giving space for independent-minded, dissenting or marginalised individuals and groups (including women) that may not fit into existing structures is a key feature of 'small p' politics, as is the right of all citizens to engage in peaceful public protest and demonstrations.

There has been increasing Muslim participation in local politics at council and borough level ever since a Muslim councillor was first elected in 1970 in Glasgow. There are now dozens of Muslims occupying council seats around the country. There are various reasons for this preference for local politics: local councils are perceived as civil authorities outside the political system, and the impact of council policies is

more direct and tangible. Councils are the authorities that oversee mosques and community centres.

Over-emphasis on 'Big P' political structures has resulted in a lack of foresight as to how to develop grass roots campaigns that can reach beyond parochial Muslim communities and their sectarian divisions so as to address broader concerns about social and economic justice for all communities. As a result, a 'silo' mentality of working has tended to prevail, with the wearing of the mayoral chain of office often being perceived as the pinnacle of achievement for first and second generation municipal workers. Gaining the status of being an elected member has often been regarded as being more important than other forms of social campaigning. There is also a need for honesty in challenging the mentality that gives precedence to buildings and institutions over the communities they are meant to serve.

Certain positive benefits have emerged from 'Big P' participation. More local authority leaders are now coming through from Muslim communities, and the increasing number of elected members in the House of Commons, the Greater London Authority, the European Parliament, and local chambers, offer multiple avenues of potential influence.

The example of the Prophet was rooted in local, grass-roots, 'small p' politics, and it was only later that 'Big P' politics emerged with the consolidation and large-scale expansion of Islamic civilisation.

In the sphere of 'small p' politics, the development of pastoral care and engagement in various social issues is being effectively facilitated by chaplaincy services across various sectors, including prisons, hospitals, universities and the armed services. The role of chaplain does not necessarily require training as an Imam and can be undertaken by women as well as by men. It may often involve membership of a multi-faith team and requires the exercise of pastoral, listening and counselling skills.¹⁵⁸

Participants noted, however, that there has largely been a vacuum in the response of Muslim leaders to the challenge of the Big Society, and some contended that there has been minimal engagement in the debate about the supposed failure of state multiculturalism and the need for a muscular liberalism to counter the separatism of those Muslim communities which are regarded as not subscribing to British values. Major policy statements which have major implications for the socio-economic well-being of Muslim communities warrant vigorous, intelligent and articulate critical analysis by Muslim leaders.

It is fair to observe, however, that some Muslim organisations have engaged effectively in the debate about multiculturalism and issued well-expressed statements in immediate response to pronouncements by politicians. One such statement by the Muslim Council of Britain emphasises the need for 'a national conversation not only on the phenomenon of extremism and its expression in the far right and amongst zealots who adopt a religious vocabulary, but also on the much-referred-to crisis of identity that focuses inordinately on young Muslims. The uncertainties of identity are much more widespread in society. At a time when Britain faces many challenges it is important that we have a responsible discussion about our shared future in a way that does not project anxieties on to minority communities'.¹⁵⁹

Including 'Middle England'

As part of a clearer articulation of 'positions' and more insightful forward analysis, it is important for Muslim leaders to be absolutely clear about upholding a position which protects the liberal space within the UK and the benefits this brings to all communities, including Muslim and other faith communities.

Some suggested that one neglected aspect of engaging at all levels within the system, whether in a targeted or concerted manner, is the relationship of Muslim communities with Middle England, that wide constituency of voters of such critical electoral importance for all political parties. Have Muslims developed a language for addressing this community? In what sense do their values converge or diverge? How can Muslims bridge the gap between their predominantly urban settlements largely concentrated in a few major centres and the broad swathe of Middle England, often embedded in the countryside? Greater connection with this community could perhaps be effected through occupying a more centrist political position, rather than alignment with individuals and organisations on the margins.

Others maintained that any re-alignment for the sake of connecting to Middle England should not entail any loss of clarity or nerve in upholding the essential principles underlying respect for the positive aspects of multiculturalism and pride in an 'open, confident society'.¹⁶⁰ Nor should it compromise other principles of social and economic justice which are of such concern to Muslim communities. In fact, the phrase 'muscular liberalism' can be removed from its potentially divisive context and repositioned in an unexpected way as a valid definition of the honourable tradition of peaceful and legitimate dissent and progressive social activism which has done so much historically to advance freedom and social justice in Britain for all its citizens. Middle England has itself nurtured many of the great reformers and social philanthropists who contributed so decisively and with such altruism to the evolution of a fair, just and decent society.

The Way Forward

Participants discussed various ways in which more effective political participation amongst Muslim communities can be advanced. Strong faith leadership is essential, as is a professional ethos that promotes delivery of good quality services. At the same time, there needs to be greater engagement of sub-groups, including converts, within committee structures in mainstream Muslim organisations and greater engagement with other organisations campaigning on issues such as economic inclusion, the environment, housing, education and the like.

Other areas for development include innovation in communication and message delivery, especially within the sphere of social activism, and the creation of a culture of forward planning in engaging with the media, instead of a reactive position, sometimes long after the event. It is also crucial to foster an awareness and positive expectation that community activism can lead to real change, and to ensure that civil society organisations demonstrate to communities what can be achieved by such activism. Muslim women also need to be supported and equipped to advance in the political arena.

It is mistaken to believe that Muslims are averse to political participation and do not want to engage with wider society. They are receptive and eager to learn but the messages conveyed to them by community and faith leaders may sometimes be perceived as alien, off-putting and insensitive to the context in which they live their lives. It should be recognised that there is much good practice in Muslim faith leadership training in Britain at all levels – secondary education, higher and further education, and continuing professional development. There is, however, an urgent and acknowledged need for further development of educational provision for Muslim faith leadership training in Britain. It is also recognised that programmes of initial training and continuing professional development need to include not only theology and spirituality but also reflection on practical experience, counselling and pastoral skills, and contextualising Islam in contemporary society.¹⁶¹

Two words perhaps sum up the most pressing imperatives: ‘engage’ and ‘collaborate’. Given the Qur’anic principle of a community of people standing up for what is right and discouraging what is wrong, it should not be difficult for Muslims to understand the vital importance of engagement and participation as the essential route to societal transformation based on ethical values. Similarly, the Qur’anic principle of pluralism enshrines an unequivocal call for active engagement with others as a means of discovering truth and advancing justice.

There are many channels apart from political parties for political engagement,

ranging from the family unit and the neighbourhood to mosque and community centres, Muslim organisations, local schools, active groups and campaigns, and online communities. Muslims can actively demonstrate their concern about various issues, such as substance abuse or street crimes, by becoming involved in campaigns which seek to benefit wider society and contribute to the public good. This requires a consciousness of wider social responsibility which goes beyond an often exclusive focus on foreign policy and 'Muslim issues'.

Civic Engagement and Social Activism

The Inclusion of Religious Voices in the Public Sphere

Some participants expressed apprehension that the secular space is increasingly opposed to the idea that there is a special category of conscience based on religion which justifies the reproduction of strong religious views within the public sphere. This may be seen as 'turning the clock back', an encroachment of retrograde values, in contrast to the universal values held to be central to a liberal political and social system.

Tolerance towards faith communities and the inclusion of religious voices in the public sphere are nevertheless integral to the British conception of 'secularity', even if residual anti-Catholic bias is still built into certain institutions. While the space for religious voices may appear to be shrinking, people of faith have the democratic right to contest issues in public discourse and to champion values rooted in their faith traditions.

Dr Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, has emphasised the duty of all people of faith to contribute actively to the real health of society through their joint and energetic commitment to sustain what he calls 'the visibility of faith in the public sphere'. Dr Williams is not of course proposing that our democracy should be replaced by a theocracy; he is simply affirming what he calls 'the religious roots of moral and social vision'. He calls on people of faith to resist the idea that the 'default setting' for every developed human society must be rooted in an ideological brand of secularism that must keep out of view any sign of religious commitment.¹⁶² Secularity can encompass the voices of all citizens, whether religious or otherwise.

In discussing one of the meanings of pluralism as 'the social or legal system that works with diverse communities of conviction', Dr Williams has also noted that the issue of 'loyalty' is a matter of immense misunderstanding in our present situation.

His telling conclusion is that the loyalty of people of faith to the society in which they live should necessarily and justifiably be 'interpreted, enriched and challenged' by their primary loyalty to God. If so, they become models, in his words, of 'religiously responsible citizenship'.¹⁶³

The issue is not *whether* faith perspectives and religious voices should be included and tolerated in the public sphere, for that right is incontestable, but the manner in which such a right is exercised and the extent to which it should influence legislative decisions. There is no right to intimidate or impose religious beliefs on others, nor to act contrary to the law of the land in discriminating against or persecuting any groups regarded as deviant according to religious beliefs. Given such non-negotiable realities, there remains the need to define how disagreement is managed within a contested space, and how a liberal democracy should accommodate illiberal convictions.

Active Citizenship, Community Spirit and the Common Good

Faith groups have long played an important role in public life at local and national levels. The positive contributions they make to public life are deeply rooted in their traditions of social action, underpinned by a strong commitment to values that promote stewardship, social and economic justice, and public service.

For instance, Christian churches and movements have had an historic influence in shaping British society in a range of contexts, including community development, social inclusion, and heritage. They have made, and continue to make, a distinctive contribution to the development and implementation of Government policy in many areas.

An increasing focus in recent years on the role of the Third Sector has seen even greater prominence of faith groups in the delivery of public services and community development. Faith groups have come to be seen as vital partners in public policy initiatives and agendas, particularly in the areas of social cohesion and integration. The 'Big Society' agenda of the present government, aiming to recast models of partnership between the state and communities, has significant implications for faith groups. Central to this new public policy agenda is a vision of active citizenship, with people from different communities coming together independent of government to solve local problems. There is a natural affinity between a positive vision of the Big Society and Islamic principles, given the strong emphasis in Islam on charity and good deeds.

Recent government initiatives in support of the Big Society have identified various

ways in which communities can become actively involved at a practical level in local decision-making and the delivery of services.

For instance, the Community Right to Challenge will enable voluntary and community bodies, employees of an authority, and parish councils, to challenge a relevant authority (an English county, district or London borough council) by expressing an interest in running any service for which it is responsible. The local authority must consider and respond to this challenge, publishing its response to the expression of interest and setting out reasons where it decides not to take a proposal forward.

Similarly, the Community Right to Buy will ensure that community organisations have a fair chance to bid to take over assets and facilities that are important to them. These facilities could include their village shop, community centre, children's centre or library which could be used as a community hub for their neighbourhood or town. This new provision will require local authorities to maintain a list of public and private assets of community value. When the owner of a listed asset wants to sell it, a window of opportunity will come into effect to give communities more time to develop a bid and raise the necessary capital. They will then be in a better position to bid to buy the asset when it comes on the market.

The government has also announced that Locality – a new nationwide network of community led organisations – will train up to 5,000 Community Organisers to work closely with communities to identify local leaders, projects and opportunities, and empower the local community to improve their local area.

Participants recognised that faith groups represent a powerful community resource with a deep reach into communities, particularly to the most marginalised groups. They provide a level of continuity and sustained support that is hard for other voluntary organisations to match.

Inevitably, faith groups share many of the organisational challenges that are common to other voluntary sector organisations, including capacity, resources, governance and management of volunteers. They also face an additional challenge stemming from lack of understanding (for instance within some local authorities) about the extent of their work or from suspicion about their motives.

An Islamic socio-political theology based on Islamic social principles such as *maslaha* (the common good) encourages active Muslim engagement within the framework of secular democratic politics so as to preserve human dignity and uphold values of

social and economic justice for all citizens. Civic involvement is an Islamic imperative. In common with all ethically committed citizens, it is incumbent on Muslims to build social and political networks to improve the condition of society as a whole.¹⁶⁴

This imperative is fully acknowledged by Muslim leaders who increasingly celebrate the steady forward march of Muslims from a state of relative powerlessness towards a confident, self-assured and forward-looking community ready to make a positive contribution towards building a better and prosperous society for all. An impressive example of Muslim philanthropy in the service of all human communities, regardless of faith, is the work of Muslim charities in alleviating suffering following the earthquakes in Haiti (2010) and Japan (2011), and the famine in Somalia (2011).¹⁶⁵

Given the fact that Muslims constitute one of the youngest minority ethnic and faith populations, the development of the young Muslim British voice is crucial; at least one third are under the age of sixteen, and one fifth between the ages of 16-24. All the available evidence indicates that young Muslims in particular are keen to be part of a local and national agenda supporting civic and community engagement.¹⁶⁶

A recent study of how Muslim and state schools pupils (both Muslim and non-Muslim) perceive citizenship education, and how it influences their views of society and their role within it, has concluded that in Muslim schools the teaching of Islam fits well with the principles of citizenship education, producing pupils who are idealistic about their participation in society as moral individuals. In fact, the Muslim pupils showed much greater engagement than non-Muslim pupils with those issues of citizenship centred on community.¹⁶⁷ Such findings give strong credence to the view of Muslims as 'model citizens' revealed by a Gallup Poll conducted in 2007.¹⁶⁸

In the light of another finding that more than a quarter of British people do not trust their neighbours, and almost three quarters do not know their neighbours' names,¹⁶⁹ the strong desire for engagement and positive sense of community amongst these young Muslims has much to contribute to the reclamation of community spirit in the population at large.

Such qualities of good citizenship were widely embodied by Muslims during the riots which disfigured English towns and cities in August 2011. Their actions, like those of other socially responsible faith communities, played an important role in helping to prevent even worse rioting. Muslims in towns and cities around England were at the forefront of protecting vulnerable communities, working with their neighbours to repair damaged shops and to restore public safety. It is important to bring to public attention their commendable bravery and civic duty in support of neighbours,

especially when sections of the media are so quick to print negative headlines about Muslims. In particular, the nation was inspired by the example of Tariq Jahan, the bereaved father of one of the three upstanding young Birmingham Muslims killed while defending their neighbourhood. He showed great dignity, compassion and common sense in appealing for calm and demanding an end to the violence.

It is to be hoped that the reaction of such Muslims to the riots will not only bring wider appreciation of good Muslim citizenship, but will also help to dispel anti-Muslim denigration in the media. There is a pressing need for proper public acknowledgement of the huge advancement in the integration of Muslims into wider society as a counterbalance to negative portrayal of Muslims and Islam.¹⁷⁰

Navigating the Secular Public Space: An Islamic Counter-Narrative

Unfortunately, misconceptions about Islam amongst Muslims themselves often inhibit effective responses to anti-Muslim bigotry and reinforce exclusion. An effective Islamic counter-narrative needs to be based on the recognition that the secular public space is an integral dimension of an authentic Islamic conception of civil society and that it can be actively enhanced through constructive and critical engagement with existing institutions, social and political groups, and different communities.

Islamic traditions and values are not only compatible with the contemporary secular public space, but some of the most progressive dynamics of this space were in fact integral to the model of community governance established by the Prophet Muhammad in Medina. This model points the way to a dynamic, progressive, flexible and inclusionary Islamic politics which can work to enhance existing political, cultural and economic institutions and respond with intelligence, integrity and efficacy to the pressing challenges and deepening crises of our times. Central to an Islamic response is a contextually sensitive extension of the higher moral purposes and objectives (*maqasid*) of the Sharia, going beyond the detailed legal rulings and prescriptions of *fiqh* and embracing the overarching principles and values that inform them.¹⁷¹

The Qur'an is not essentially a manual or code of law, but refers to itself as *al-huda*, or guidance. Only a small proportion of its 6,200 verses relate to law and jurisprudence, while the vast majority are concerned with matters of faith and morality, and a variety of other themes. There are just under 350 verses in the Qur'an concerning matters of legal conduct, the bulk of which were revealed directly in response to specific problems that were actually encountered.

In contrast to the excessively text-based, legalistic orientation of much classical and contemporary Muslim scholarship, the Qur'an repeatedly calls on its readers to explore and study other societies and ways of life, and learn the lessons of history. The Qur'an enshrines a comprehensive vision in which both text and context, whether historical, sociological or natural, are woven together as a holistic tapestry of 'signs' (*ayat*) reflecting the Divine Reality. Wisdom is not gained simply by studying the Qur'an and the life and sayings of the Prophet – as fundamental as that is – but is widened to include scrutiny and contemplation of the whole of the created universe.¹⁷²

The importance of context is reinforced by the Qur'an itself. On the one hand, the Qur'an issues a universal *reminder to all peoples*,¹⁷³ and describes the Prophet as a *mercy for all mankind*.¹⁷⁴ On the other hand, it contextualises itself firmly within the task of addressing the norms and pressures of Arabian society.¹⁷⁵ There is thus a dialectic within the Qur'an itself, one universal and one particular. This establishes a sound textual justification for not simply evaluating the Qur'an and Prophetic traditions literally, but for discerning their universal moral objectives and the implementation of these objectives in the specific context of Arab society and culture.

Spiritual Responsibility and Progressive Social Activism

The Qur'anic call for the emergence of a group of people *who invite unto all that is good, enjoying what is right (maruf) and speaking against what is wrong (munkar)*¹⁷⁶ is misinterpreted within contemporary Islamist ideology to imply the necessity of establishing an Islamic State which upholds what is good and forbids evil as defined by the corpus of legal opinions constituting Sharia Law. Although *khilafa* has even since the classical period been equated with the political function of a system of rule (the Caliphate, or governance by a Caliph), the Qur'an never makes reference to the idea of a state, but instead addresses a voluntary community of believers. The Qur'anic conception of *khilafa* is instead broadly metaphysical, focusing on the relationship between God, created beings, and the universe.

The word *khalifa* is often translated as 'vicegerent', denoting a representative of a higher authority, but a better term in English is 'trustee'. This conveys the idea of human beings being appointed to carry the sacred trust (*amana*) as stewards or caretakers of the Earth. While the Qur'an clearly advocates that 'trusteeship' entails social responsibility at the communal and collective level, it does not set out a systematic political programme exercised by a centralised bureaucratic political institution. Rather, every individual man and woman is a *khalifa* of God, instructed to care for the earth and its inhabitants through establishing social justice.¹⁷⁷

Moreover, the Qur'anic use of the terms *maruf* and *munkar* is very broad. *Maruf* denotes what is commonly known or accepted to be right or good, while *munkar* refers to what is universally rejected as wrong or evil, including actions which are hateful, unseemly, and reprehensible. The Qur'an's careful choice of words to convey good and evil undercuts a narrow focus on codification and law. It advocates instead a universalist conception of shared moral values which conform to a pluralist and inclusive conception of Sharia.

This is not an endorsement of the moral relativism that denies any absolute truths or fundamental values. On the contrary, it honours the realisation that human communities are blessed with a shared, universal conception of goodness. In the same way, all human beings are endowed with an essential nature or primordial disposition (*fitra*), an inner rectitude which is intuitively attuned to a moral and spiritual criterion (*furqan*) or touchstone for distinguishing right from wrong. Those who 'enjoin what is good' are inspired by what the Qur'an describes as a higher moral imperative to *guide others in the way of the truth and act justly in its light*.¹⁷⁸

In other words, the twin higher purposes of the Qur'anic revelation are the realisation of truth (spiritual) and the establishment of justice (societal). These generate a wider set of spiritual and social duties, including the duty to respect the dignity of the human person, to uphold political self-determination and freedom of expression, to establish social justice, including social welfare and support (*takaful*), to advance gender equity, and to protect the coherent order or unity (*tawhid*) of all creation (ecology and environment).

One of the most significant, yet still under-used authentic historical documents on Islamic polity is a letter of instruction written by the fourth rightly-guided caliph, 'Ali, expounding the principles of governance to his newly appointed deputy in Egypt, Malik al-Ashtar.¹⁷⁹ The letter is a concise, but comprehensive, guide to justice in governance, and an invaluable source of insight into how the *maqasid* should be applied in a socio-political context. Various principles (as extensions of the *maqasid*) for enhancing civil society can be derived from this letter in conjunction with verses from the Qur'an and other traditions from both Sunni and Shia sources. These include equality, impartiality and universality; political freedom and peaceful dissent; non-violence; and the sanctity of the natural order.

Equality, Impartiality and Universality

The principle of racial equality is established beyond doubt by the famous statement of the Prophet in his last sermon: *All mankind is from Adam and Eve; an Arab has*

*no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over a black nor a black has any superiority over a white except by the quality of God-consciousness and good deeds.*¹⁸⁰

Imam 'Ali further establishes the equality of all people regardless of their religious faith, and unequivocally affirms that the concept of 'brotherhood' within a multi-religious community extends to non-Muslims: *Make your heart a throne of mercy towards your people. Show them perfect love and care. For they are in one of two groups: either your brother in religion or your fellow-human being.*¹⁸¹ This broad view, in total harmony with the Qur'an, embraces all races, all cultures, all tongues. It asserts the unity of the human race and the equality of all human beings, demanding compassion for all and not only to members of one's own group.¹⁸²

Numerous Qur'anic verses ordain religious pluralism¹⁸³ and forbid religious coercion.¹⁸⁴

Religious diversity is a given, and the attitude of Muslims toward non-Muslims of all persuasions should be essentially tolerant in nature.¹⁸⁵ Similarly, numerous verses indicate that Islam does not denote a historically delimited form of religious exclusivism, but on the contrary, encompasses an unfolding, trans-historical reality with diverse manifestations in different communities. The Qur'an does not promise salvation to any particular religious group, but to all those who sincerely endeavour to surrender to God (*islam* in its original connotation).¹⁸⁶ The Qur'an also guarantees that anyone who has faith and performs good deeds is eligible. Moral nobility and ultimate felicity are not assured by religious affiliations and labels but by adherence to humble veneration (*ubudiya*) and consciousness of God (*taqwa*), and by striving to live a good life.¹⁸⁷

Participants agreed that all communities need to be wary of misappropriating universal human values for the partisan purpose of asserting ethnic or national superiority or claiming special dispensation to act as moral exemplars for all mankind. Rather, all citizens and communities, no matter what their affiliation, need to work together to reclaim those shared universal principles and core human values which transcend national, cultural, ideological and religious divides.

From this perspective, the challenge for Muslims in Britain today, which is no more than the challenge for all Muslims and people of faith anywhere, is to embody the altruistic and impartial love of humanity which co-exists with consciousness and loving awe of God as the core of all authentic religion. It is to come of age and help the nation as a whole to lift its ambition, rediscover its moral and spiritual compass, heal its social maladies, and live up to the values which it claims for itself. This is a

task which cannot be accomplished by any group acting in the interests of narrow identity politics, parochial self-interest, tribal partisanship, exclusivism, or self-congratulatory triumphalism, but only by all people of goodwill embracing shared universal human values and acting together for the common good.

Political Freedom and Peaceful Dissent

During 'Ali's caliphate (656-661 CE) a group of religious and political dissidents known as the Kharijites had grown in power. Although they were highly disruptive, not only opposing 'Ali's leadership but also slandering him in public and accusing him of *kufr* (disbelief), 'Ali never challenged their complete freedom to express their religious and political views, including their opposition to his leadership. They regularly heckled him, disrupting his public addresses. In response, 'Ali simply engaged with them, and refuted their views eloquently in reasoned public debate, granting them political freedom to mobilise and publicise their dissent as long as they did so peacefully. Only when the Kharijites attempted a military coup did 'Ali respond in kind with force. His use of force was therefore entirely defensive, and was not an attempt to limit their freedom of expression and association. This attitude was consistent throughout the Prophet's own model of governance, as well as throughout the caliphates of the rightly-guided caliphs.

The principle of respect for political freedom, peaceful dissent and open public debate is entirely consonant with the view endorsed by participants that space should be given to minority, dissenting or discordant views in all communities. For some participants, this was a particularly pressing concern within Muslim communities where freedom of expression may sometimes be questioned or opposed, and uncomfortable views may be suppressed or stigmatised as subversive attacks on the unity and solidarity of the community.

Non-Violence

The Qur'an and Prophetic teachings on conflict and conflict resolution emphasise that the axiomatic position of the Muslim is a state of non-violence, which should not be departed from except in the event of external aggression requiring self-defence. The Qur'an asserts unequivocally that the preferred condition is peace, that hostilities are never to be initiated, and that fighting is only permissible as a defensive response to attack.¹⁸⁸

Furthermore, the thrust of the Prophet's regulations for the conduct of war in the event that it becomes necessary are even more stringent than the contemporary laws of war as laid down in international treaties such as the Geneva Conventions.¹⁸⁹

These unprecedented and comprehensive Islamic regulations prohibiting all destruction of civilian life and infrastructure de-legitimise many aspects of modern warfare.

The Sanctity of the Natural Order

The Qur'an repeatedly clarifies that the entire universe, from the cosmos to all life on earth, exists by way of a natural balance that should not be altered.¹⁹⁰ The Qur'an also describes the natural order as a single, living, sentient system in a constant state of reflection on the Divine Reality.¹⁹¹ Further, every life-form is described as part of a community, a social order that is comparable to that of human life.¹⁹² The Qur'an conveys not only a sense of wonder at the beauty and majesty of nature, but inspires a deep-seated respect for the sanctity and inter-relatedness of all life.

Numerous verses of the Qur'an suggest that social and environmental corruption is a consequence of human action that disrupts the self-regulating dynamic of natural balance.¹⁹³ Acts of injustice and excess inevitably tilt the balance of the natural and social order, resulting in the degradation or destruction of both.¹⁹⁴

The Prophet enjoined that the natural order should be actively protected and nurtured. Not only is the wanton destruction of the environment through practices such as deforestation prohibited, but the Prophet also encouraged people to engage actively in greening the land as much as possible.¹⁹⁵

Rigorous principles of animal welfare are also clearly laid down in the Qur'an and Prophetic Traditions, and it is incumbent on Muslims to address cases of mistreatment where such principles are breached, in the same way as it is incumbent on people in wider society to live up to the high standards of animal welfare often held up as a cherished British value. For instance, it is legitimate to question whether truly Islamic standards of compassion can be reconciled with the severe distress involved in the mass importation of sacrificial sheep from Australia and New Zealand for the celebration of the Festival of the Sacrifice (*Eid al-Adha*) at the end of Hajj, the Pilgrimage to Mecca.

A strong case could also be made that Muslims could be more active and vocal in engaging with issues of animal welfare in wider society, such as the evident cruelty involved in some aspects of intensive factory farming. If Muslims, in defence of their own traditions, are justified in reacting to misunderstandings and distortions about halal slaughter (often motivated as much by anti-Muslim bigotry as by genuine concern for animal welfare), then they might also engage with equal passion in the recurrent national debate about the cruelties of battery chicken farming.

A New Islamic Public Theology

The re-assessment of the real essence of the Islamic polity provides Islamically mandated tools which are profoundly peaceful, pluralistic and inclusive. They empower Muslims to fully participate as citizens to work for ideas, laws, institutions, norms and values which protect civil rights and political freedoms, defend cultural and religious diversity, champion social and economic equality, promote material and psychological well-being, and support ecological awareness and environmental conservation. In such a way, a new Islamic public theology can be advanced.

Re-excavation of the higher ethical principles by which the Islamic polity was constituted in its most original forms implies a vibrant and confident social activism in support of an open-ended and dynamic radical politics for the continued progressive transformation of our societies. A renewed Islamic public theology offers rich resources for a broad alliance of citizens to develop inclusive and collective responses to the many interconnected and deepening crises in the contemporary world.

Glossary of Arabic Words

The glossary includes Arabic words used in the first report of the *Contextualising Islam in Britain* project (*Exploratory Perspectives*, 2009) if they recur in the current report (2011) as well as new words not covered in that earlier glossary.

adab: cultured behaviour, both inward and outward; the genre of classical Islamic humanities, including literature

akhlaq: good character, ethics

albab: faculty of perception within the 'heart' (*lubb*), the central locus of awareness in the human being

amana: sacred trust, moral responsibility

'aql: the holistic 'intellectual' faculty that encompasses spiritual, moral, emotional and rational intelligence

'asabiya: ethnic or tribal partisanship, chauvinism

ayah (pl. *ayat*): verse of the Qur'an. Lit. 'sign', referring also to the divine imprint in Creation.

dhawq: tasting, experience of direct knowledge

faqih (pl. *fuqaha*): master jurist qualified to give a legal judgement

fiqh: Islamic law or jurisprudence, the way that Muslim legal scholars have understood and interpreted the Shari'a; *fiqh al-aqalliyat*: minority *fiqh*, the development of Islamic law in the specific context where Muslims are a minority

fitra: intrinsic human nature; the primordial disposition of the human being

furqan: criterion for distinguishing truth from falsehood

Ghayb: the Unseen, the Unmanifest; that which is beyond the reach of human perception

hadith (pl. *ahadith*): reported sayings or acts of the Prophet Muhammad

halal: permissible in Islam

haram: forbidden in Islam

haya': modesty, self-respect

hisba: prevention of evil

hudud (sing. *hadd*): boundary limits for the lawful and unlawful; fixed penalties for specified crimes

hukama: sages

ihsan: virtue, goodness, excellence – the correct attitude of mind and spirit that should permeate a Muslim's actions and interactions

ijma': consensus; the process of deriving Islamic law by relying on the consensus of Muslims scholars (traditionally, the third source of law after the Qur'an and *hadith*)

ijtihad: intellectual effort; exercise of critical faculties in independent interpretation of primary sources

ikhtilaf: juristic disagreement; *adab al-ikhtilaf*: ethics and etiquette for engaging in debate and handling disagreement

ikhtiyar: free choice

ikrah: coercion

'ilm (pl. *'ulum*): knowledge

imam: leader of Muslim congregational worship; Muslim religious or political leader; one of the succession of Muslim leaders, beginning with 'Ali, regarded as legitimate by the Shi'a

iman: faith

al-insan al-kamil: the Perfect Man or Universal Man

jihad: struggle, effort: *al-jihad al-akbar*: the 'greater struggle' against the lower self

kalam: theological reasoning

kamal: perfection

khalifa: vicegerent, representative, trustee or steward charged with the care of God's creation; *khala'if al-ard*: vicegerents of God on earth; *khilafa*: human vicegerency

kufr: denial of the truth

madhhab (pl. *madhahib*): school of Islamic law founded on the opinion of a master jurist (*faqih*)

madrassa (pl. *madaris*): lit. a place of study; a school that teaches traditional Islamic knowledge and practice. In Britain, it usually refers to a supplementary school run in the evenings or at weekends

maqasid al-Shari'a: the higher objectives or principles of the Shari'a

ma'ruf: that which is good by common consent

maslaha: the public or common good

mu'allim: teacher, transmitter of knowledge

mukallaf: accountable; legally competent as a sane adult

munkar: that which is evil by common consent

murabbi: the teacher as a nurturer of souls and developer of character

nashid: Islamic song

niqab: veil which covers the entire face, including the eyes.

nushuz: violation of marital duties by husband or wife

rahma: mercy

ruh: the spirit which gives life

Sahaba: Companions of the Prophet Muhammad

salihat: good deeds

shahid: a witness, someone who testifies

Shari'a: the path of moral living in Islam

shaytan: a devil, particularly Iblis, one of the *Jinn*

shura: consultation

Sira: biography of the Prophet Muhammad

Sunna: the practice of the Prophet Muhammad and the first generation of Muslims

sura: 'chapter' of the Qur'an

ta'aruf: learning from one another

tadabbur: pondering; carefully considering the consequences entailed by precepts or plans

ta'dib: discipline of body, mind and soul

tafakkur: deep thinking, reflection, contemplation; *al-tafkir al-naqdi*: critical thinking

takaful: mutual support

ta'lim: instruction, transmission of knowledge

taqlid: imitation; unthinking acceptance of religious doctrines or assertions

taqwa: consciousness and awe of God

taqwim: mould, symmetry, form, constitution

tarbiya: upbringing, nurturing, education of the whole being

tawassum: observation and understanding of the signs of nature

tawhid: Divine Unity

tazkiya: spiritual purification

'ubudiya: servanthood, humble veneration

'ulama' (sing. *'alim*): Muslim scholars

umma: lit. a 'people' or 'nation'; often used to mean the spiritual communion of Muslims, but can also mean a 'nation' that includes non-Muslims

yaqin: unshakeable certainty, spiritual certitude

ENDNOTES

¹ Supporting the discussions were presentations by Michael Mumisa, Dilwar Hussein, Akeela Ahmed and Maleiha Malik.

² The symbiosis and affinity between the 'Protestant ethic' and the 'spirit of capitalism' have also been explored in Max Weber's classic analysis. See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells, London: Penguin Books, 2002.

³ One example of such erosion is the decline in inter-generational relationships. This is identified as one of the important factors that led to Britain being placed bottom of the league in child welfare in 21 developed countries in a major study conducted by UNICEF in 2007. See *An Overview of Child Well-Being in Rich Countries: A Comprehensive Assessment of the Lives and Well-Being of Children and Adolescents in the Economically Advanced Nations*, UNICEF, 2007. Over 40 indicators were factored into this report, identifying not only relationships with adults and peers, but also poverty, neglect, experience of school, mental health and happiness.

⁴ Qur'an 13:11.

⁵ *And every human being will come forward with his erstwhile inner urges and his conscious mind, and will be told: 'indeed, unmindful hast thou been of this Day of Judgement; but now We have lifted from thee thy veil, and sharp is thy sight today!'* (Qur'an 50:21-22).

⁶ *Fi ahsani taqwim* (Qur'an 95:4). Yusuf Ali notes that the various connotations of *taqwim* include 'mould, pattern, symmetry, form, nature, constitution'. God endowed mankind with the purest and best nature, and the duty of men and women is to preserve the pattern on which they have been made.

⁷ *And Lo! Thy Sustainer said unto the angels: 'Behold, I am about to establish upon earth one who shall inherit it.'* (Qur'an 2:30). See also Qur'an 6:165, 26:72 and 35:39 where all human beings are spoken of as *khala'if al-ard*, 'vicegerents of God on earth'.

⁸ *For, every community faces a direction of its own, of which He is the focal point. Vie, therefore, with one another in doing good works* (Qur'an 2:148).

⁹ *Help one another in furthering virtue and God-consciousness, but do not help one another in furthering evil and enmity* (Qur'an 5:2); *Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong* (Qur'an 3:104).

¹⁰ In al-Farabi's (d. 950 CE) 'Virtuous City', individuals compete and collaborate with each other in performing good and noble acts with the aim of reaching perfection and achieving happiness (*sa'ada*). For al-Farabi 'it is not possible for any individual to achieve the perfection to which he is naturally predisposed except through the mutual collaboration of many groups'. In this way, he argues, a Virtuous City functions just like a healthy human body in which all the organs and limbs collaborate in order to maintain the health and life. See Abu Nasr Al-Farabi, *Ara' ahl al-Madinat al-Fadila*, Beirut: Dar Maktabat al-Hilal, 1995, pp. 112-113.

¹¹ Muhammad Asad defines *taqlid* as 'the unthinking acceptance of religious doctrines or assertions not unequivocally supported by divine revelation, the explicit teachings of a prophet, or the evidence of unprejudiced reason'. See his note to Qur'an 23:23-25, *The Message of the Qur'an*, Bath: The Book Foundation, 2004.

¹² See Gary R. Bunt, *Muslims: Rewiring the House of Islam*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009.

¹³ See the section on Patriarchy and Masculinism under Gender – Equality, Identity and Sexuality, and, in particular, the three sub-sections entitled The Control of Muslim Women: Sexuality and Marriage, Muslim Family Law, and Interpretive Approaches to Problematic Texts.

¹⁴ See Libby Brooks, 'Our ignoble tradition of racialising crime is revived', *The Guardian*, 7 January 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jan/07/grooming-racialising-crime-tradition> .

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ E.g. the Chief Executive of the charity Barnardos, and David Niven, former chairman of the British Association of Social Workers, who told the BBC that he was 'certain that there isn't a particular ethnic element to it', 8 January 2011. See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-12144411>.

¹⁷ Mohammed Shafiq, Chief Executive of the Ramadhan Foundation. See <http://www.ramadhanfoundation.com/grooming08012011.htm>.

¹⁸ See Samira Shackle, 'Professor sparks "Muslim outrage". Or does he?' *New Statesman* blog, 30 May 2011. See <http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-staggers/2011/05/british-muslims-marriage>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ E.g. in Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

²² Samira Shackle, op. cit.

²³ An-Nisa Society, an organisation managed by women, has produced *The Cycle of Life* series of booklets on sexual health from an Islamic perspective. See 'Adolescence, Marriage and Women', 1997.

²⁴ The Muslim Youth Helpline (MYH) is a registered charity offering pioneering faith and culturally sensitive support services to Muslim youth in the UK. See <http://www.myh.org.uk/>.

²⁵ See *Connecting with God and Your Child: A Father's Guide to Prayer and Praise*, An-Nisa Society booklet.

²⁶ *The Training and Development of Muslim Faith Leaders: Current Practice and Future Possibilities*, report for the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG), October 2010.

²⁷ In April 2007 the National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE) was asked by the DfES Further Education Reform Unit to set out a proposal for continuing professional development for faith leaders, workers and volunteers. Following the successful completion of the first pilot phase, NIACE was commissioned by DCLG to deliver a second phase programme of targeted pilots for faith communities. These pilots will deliver the new Faith Community Development qualification in partnership with a variety of providers including Further Education colleges, local authorities, and community adult education providers and training organisations.

²⁸ For a discussion of the application of good stewardship models to educational administration, see Aref T. M. Atari, 'Christian "Service-Stewardship" and Islamic "Khalifah": Emerging models in educational administration', *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 17(2), Summer 2000, p. 29 ff.

²⁹ Supporting the discussion were presentations by Maleiha Malik, Erica Timoney, Sajjad Rizvi, Yahya Birt and Farah Zeb.

³⁰ Orientalism is a pervasive Western tradition, both academic and artistic, of prejudiced outsider interpretations of the East, shaped by the attitudes of European imperialism in the 18th and 19th Centuries. See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, London: Routledge, 1978.

³¹ Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 139.

³² For example, certain groups may be said to 'keep their women indoors, marry off their girls young to unknown and unwanted partners and to force their daughters and wives to wear veils'. See Anne Phillips, *Multiculturalism Without Culture*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007, p. 2.

³³ See Norman Cigar, 'The Role of Serbian Orientalists in Justification of Genocide Against Muslims of the Balkans', *Islamic Quarterly: Review of Islamic Culture*, 30(3), 1994.

³⁴ See Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002, p. xii.

³⁵ See Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, op. cit., p. 143.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 139.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 139.

³⁸ Qur'an 4:34.

³⁹ Qur'an 7:11-12.

⁴⁰ According to the World Health Organization (WHO), FGM is practised in 28 countries in western, eastern and north-eastern Africa, in parts of Asia and the Middle East and within some migrant communities in Europe, North America and Australasia. The WHO estimates that 100-140 million women and girls around the world have experienced the procedure, including 92 million in Africa. See *Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: Data and Trends*, Population Reference Bureau, 2010. See also <http://www.prb.org/pdf10/fgm-wallchart2010.pdf>

⁴¹ These statistics came to light on 3 December 2011, following a freedom of information request by the Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (Ikwro). Of the 2,823 reported cases, almost 500 were in London, followed by West Midlands (378), West Yorkshire (350), Lancashire (227), Greater Manchester (189), Cleveland (153), Suffolk (118) and Bedfordshire (117). See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-16014368>

⁴² See http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/forcedmarriage/introduction_1.shtml#h2.

⁴³ The implementation of the legislation in Scotland was announced on 28 November 2011. See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-15909237>.

⁴⁴ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 16(2).

⁴⁵ General Recommendation No. 21, UN Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.

⁴⁶ The address by Dr Rowan Williams, entitled 'Civil and Religious Law in England: A Religious Perspective', was delivered as the foundation lecture inaugurating a series of talks on Islam and English law at the Royal Courts of Justice on 7 February 2008.

⁴⁷ E.g. 'Archbishop Williams sparks Sharia law row', *The Daily Telegraph*, 7 February 2008. See

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1577928/Archbishop-Williams-sparks-Sharia-law-row.html>.

⁴⁸ See http://www.socialcohesion.co.uk/files/1236789702_1.pdf.

⁴⁹ To address concerns raised in the aftermath of the Archbishop's lecture, a report on religious courts and tribunals in the UK entitled 'Social Cohesion and Civil Law: Marriage, Divorce and Religious Courts' was published in July 2011 by researchers at Cardiff Law School and the Centre for the Study of Islam in the UK at Cardiff University. This examined the workings of three religious courts in detail: a Jewish Beth Din, a matrimonial tribunal of the Roman Catholic Church, and a Muslim Sharia Council. The project asked 'What is the legal status of these courts?' and 'How do they operate in relation to marriage, divorce and remarriage?' The full report can be found at: <http://www.law.cf.ac.uk/clr/research/cohesion.html>.

⁵⁰ See Jeevan Vasagar, 'Bravo, Rowan: The Archbishop of Canterbury is right that sharia must be accepted and understood, but his quiet voice is getting drowned out in all the hysteria', *The Guardian*, 8 February 2008.

⁵¹ See Ayelet Shachar, *Multicultural Jurisdictions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

⁵² See Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, op. cit., p. 6.

⁵³ See the *Developing Diversity* directory, compiled by Faith Matters, <http://faith-matters.org/resources/publicationsreports/developing-diversity>.

⁵⁴ Qur'an 4:34.

⁵⁵ Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, op. cit., note to Qur'an 4:34.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ See Abdulhamid A. Abusulayman, 'Marital Discord: Recapturing the Full Islamic Spirit of Human Dignity', *Occasional Papers Series 11*, Richmond: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2003.

⁵⁸ Qur'an 4:34.

⁵⁹ Adapted from Tariq Ramadan, 'An International call for a Moratorium on corporal punishment, stoning and the death penalty in the Islamic World', 30 March 2005. See <http://www.tariqramadan.com/An-International-call-for,264.html>.

⁶⁰ See Khaled Masud, 'A Muslim Jurists Search for the Normative Basis of the Sharia', Inaugural lecture, ISIM, Leiden, 2000. This is especially relevant in the context of gender.

⁶¹ See Scott Kugle, *Homosexuality in Islam: Islamic Reflections on Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Muslims*, London: Oneworld, 2010.

⁶² Ibid. p. 66. The Qur'anic verses concerned are 42:49-50, 24:31 and 24:60.

⁶³ See Amina Wadud, 'Towards a Qur'anic Hermeneutics of Social Justice: Race, Class and Gender', in *Journal of Law and Religion*, 12(1), 1995-1996, p. 37.

⁶⁴ Qur'an 23:62.

⁶⁵ See Taha Jabir Fayyad 'Alwani, 'The Ethics of Disagreement in Islam', *Issues in Islamic Thought* 5, Richmond: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, Herndon, 1993. This is an English Translation of Abdul Wahid Hamid's *Adab al Ikhtilaf Fi Al Islam*.

⁶⁶ Supporting the discussions were presentations by Abdullah Sahin, Tahir Alam, Jeremy Henzell-Thomas, Ibrahim Mogra and Humera Khan.

⁶⁷ In Britain, when the word *madrassa* is used, it usually refers to a supplementary school run in the evenings or at weekends, and is thus, in the true sense of the word, carrying out the role of a Muslim elementary school (*maktab*).

⁶⁸ The majority of British Muslims trace their background to South Asia and are predominantly Sunni Muslims belonging to two broad Islamic revivalist traditions in the region: the Deobandi and Barelvi (Brelwi) movements.

⁶⁹ See, for example, 'One Incident of Child-abuse is One Incident Too Many', the response by the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) to Channel 4 *Dispatches*, 'Lessons in Hate and Violence', 14 February 2011 (http://www.mcb.org.uk/media/presstext.php?ann_id=434).

⁷⁰ See Abdullah Sahin, 'The Contribution of Religious Education to Social and Community Cohesion; an Islamic Educational Perspective', in Michael Grimmitt (ed.), *Religious Education and Social and Community Cohesion*, Great Woking: McCrimmon Press, 2010, pp.134-165.

⁷¹ E.g. Qur'an 23:24.

⁷² For evidence that such an approach fosters a predominantly foreclosed religiosity, see Abdullah Sahin, 'Exploring the religious life-world and attitude toward Islam among British Muslim adolescents', in L. Francis et al. (eds.), *Religion and Adolescence: International Perspectives*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005, pp.164-185.

⁷³ *The Training and Development of Muslim Faith Leaders: Current Practice and Future Possibilities*, Communities and Local Government report for DCLG, 2010.

⁷⁴ See *A Way Forward for Madrasahs*, a report by the Leicester Complementary Schools Trust (www.lcst.org.uk) established by Leicester City with support by the School Development Support Agency (SDSA), 2004.

⁷⁵ E.g. Andrew Gilligan, 'Ofsted praises Islamic schools which oppose Western lifestyle', *The Daily Telegraph*, 6 November 2010; David Barrett, 'British schools where girls must wear the Islamic veil', *The Daily Telegraph*, 2

October 2010; Denis MacEoin, *Music, Chess and other Sins: Segregation, Integration, and Muslim Schools in Britain*, Civitas Report, February 2009; John Ware, 'British Schools, Islamic Rules', *Panorama*, BBC, 22 November 2010; *Faith Schools We Can Believe In*, Policy Exchange Report, November 2010; Andrew Gilligan, 'Extremist Muslim schools: Islamism's most worrying manifestation of all', *The Daily Telegraph* blog, 22 November 2010; *Dispatches*, 'Lessons in Hate and Violence', Channel 4, 14 February 2011.

⁷⁶ E.g. *File on 4*, BBC Radio 4, 23 October 2011.

⁷⁷ The model described here is Khazinatul-'Ilm Madrasah of Arabic and Muslim Life Studies in Leicester, UK, which is taught in a local community college and conforms to the state school calendar.

⁷⁸ Another very good example of this model is the Saturday Islamic School run in the East End of London – see <http://saturdayislamicschool.co.uk/>

⁷⁹ The Islam and Citizenship Education Project has been developed and coordinated by the School Development Support Agency (SDSA) and was funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department for Communities and Local Government. See <http://www.theiceproject.sdsa.net/index.php>. A government approved award bearing course is now available based upon the ICE materials. It has been developed and trialled in 10 madrasas and 10 independent schools in England (see info@asdan.org.uk). The ICE short course is the first government accredited course available to madrasas in the UK.

⁸⁰ The study by the Pew Research Centre's Forum on Religion and Public, published in August 2011, found that five out of 10 countries with a substantial rise in social hostilities are in Europe. They are Denmark, Sweden, Bulgaria, Russia and the U.K. Substantial increases in government restrictions on religion occurred in Nigeria, China, Thailand, Vietnam, Russia and the U.K., largely due to a rise in social hostility levels. The study was based on 18 publicly available information sources that have been widely cited, such as reports by the United Nations, the U.S. State Department and Human Rights Watch. See <http://www.interfaith.org/2011/08/10/restrictions-on-religion-increase-globally/#>.

⁸¹ A. C. Grayling, *Moral Maze*, BBC Radio 4, 1 June 2002.

⁸² A. C. Grayling, 'Ghettos of Superstition', *The Guardian*, 11 September 2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/sep/11/ghettoesofsuperstition>.

⁸³ See Dr Rowan Williams, *Islam, Christianity and Pluralism, The Zaki Badawi Memorial Lecture Series 1*, Lambeth Palace and the Association of Muslim Social Scientists: Richmond, 2007.

⁸⁴ L. Blaylock (ed.), *Listening to Young People in Secondary Religious Education*, Professional Council for Religious Education (PCfRE) Report, September 2001.

⁸⁵ E.g. Qur'an 49:13.

⁸⁶ Ministerial statement, Lynn Featherstone M.P., 28 June 2011, <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/about-us/parliamentary-business/written-ministerial-statement/equality-duties-regs-wms/>.

⁸⁷ E.g. marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy, maternity and breastfeeding.

⁸⁸ See <http://www.insted.co.uk/legal-frameworks.pdf> for a detailed analysis of the legislation.

⁸⁹ The Foundation for Science Technology and Civilisation (FSTC) is a British educational organisation which explores and promotes the cultural roots of science and inventions for social cohesion and inter-cultural appreciation. See www.fstc.org.uk. The web portal MuslimHeritage.com was the first major project of FSTC. It is a unique online education community of Muslims and non-Muslims seeking to advance human civilisation through the study of Muslim heritage. FSTC's highly successful initiative, *1001 Inventions: Discover the Muslim heritage in Our World* (www.1001inventions.com), engages with the public through educational media and interactive global exhibitions in order to highlight the shared cultural and technological inheritance of humanity. In 2010 alone, the *1001 Inventions* exhibition was viewed by over 800,000 visitors during its current tour to the Science Museum in Istanbul, and the New York Hall of Science. Sponsored by the Al-Jameel Foundation, the exhibition was one of the cultural blockbusters of 2010. It has received world-wide press coverage and an overwhelmingly positive public response. FSTC also works through its subsidiary company Curriculum Enrichment for the Common Era (www.CE4CE.org) to enrich school curricula in order to highlight the shared cultural and technological inheritance of humanity.

⁹⁰ See Maurice Irfan Coles, *Every Muslim Child Matters: Practical Guidance for Schools and Children's Services*, Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books, 2008.

⁹¹ See Saied R. Ameli, Aliya Azam and Arzu Merali, 'Secular or Islamic? What Schools do British Muslims want for their Children?', *British Muslims' Expectations Series 3*, Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC), 2005, http://www.ihrc.org.uk/file/BMEG_VOL3.pdf.

⁹² G. G. Grace, *Catholic Schools: Mission, Markets and Morality*, London: Routledge-Falmer, 2002, p. 14.

⁹³ See 'One in nine adults has no qualifications', *The Guardian*, 20 July 2011 (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/jul/22/one-in-nine-no-qualifications>).

⁹⁴ See 'Third of adults have no education qualifications in worst education blackspots', *The Daily Telegraph*, 22 July 2011. The study referred to is based on Office for National Statistics figures showing the proportions of

adults of working age (16-64) with no qualifications in 2010.

⁹⁵ 'Ethnicity and Education', DfES, 2006, pp. 56-58.

⁹⁶ DfES 2006, reported in Coles, *Every Muslim Child Matters*, op. cit., p. 6.

⁹⁷ National Statistics, reported in Coles, *ibid.*, p. 7.

⁹⁸ See Elham Asaad Buaras, 'Muslim schools surpass national GCSE averages', *The Muslim News*, 26 February 2010.

⁹⁹ Blackburn-based Tauheedul Islam Girls' High School and Sixth Form College. See 'Blackburn Muslim School granted outstanding status by Ofsted', *The Muslim News*, 28 May 2010.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, the Ofsted reports on Al-Muntada Islamic School and London Islamic School.

¹⁰¹ E.g. Coventry Muslim School.

¹⁰² For details of educational achievement of Muslims in various European countries, as reported by OECD, see the individual country profiles on the Euro-Islam website (www.euro-islam.info).

¹⁰³ Mohammed Abdul Aziz, *Understanding British Muslim Alienation and Exclusion: Exploring the Challenges and Developing Working Solutions*, unpublished document (personal communication), 2004.

¹⁰⁴ Qur'an 96:1.

¹⁰⁵ Qur'an 20:114; 39:9. Hadith include: *The acquisition of knowledge is a sacred duty imposed on every Muslim, whether male or female; The best form of worship is the pursuit of knowledge.*

¹⁰⁶ See Frank Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970, pp. 1-2.

¹⁰⁷ Robert Briffalt, *The Making of Humanity*, London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1919. The various initiatives associated with the work of the Foundation for Science and Technology (FSTC) in advancing public understanding of Muslim heritage have already been mentioned. See also Jack Goody, *The Theft of History*, Cambridge University Press, 2006, and *Renaissances: The One or the Many?*, Cambridge University Press, 2010; John Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*, Cambridge University Press, 2004; and Jonathan Lyons, *The House of Wisdom: How the Arabs Transformed Western Civilisation*, Bloomsbury Press, 2009. According to Muhammad Asad, it was the 'insistence on consciousness and knowledge' in the Qur'an that 'engendered among its followers a spirit of intellectual curiosity and independent enquiry, ultimately resulting in that splendid era of learning and scientific research which distinguished the world of Islam at the height of its cultural vigour, and the culture thus fostered by the Qur'an penetrated in countless ways and by-ways into the mind of medieval Europe... and was largely responsible for the birth of what is described as the 'age of science', the age in which we are now living'. Muhammad Asad, Foreword to *The Message of the Qur'an*, op. cit.

¹⁰⁸ This equates to 0.34% of GDP. The data was collected by the World Bank and UNESCO.

¹⁰⁹ Steve Paulson, 'Does Islam stand against science?' *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 24 June 2011, review of The Symposium on Islam and science at the University of Cambridge, sponsored by the Templeton-Cambridge Journalism Programme in Science & Religion, May 2011.

¹¹⁰ See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, London: Kegan Paul International, 1987, p. 123.

¹¹¹ Qur'an 95:4.

¹¹² Qur'an 91:9.

¹¹³ See Abdullah Sahin, 2010, op. cit., p. 166.

¹¹⁴ The discussion centred on three Turkish-based approaches: Said Nursi, the Imam-Khatib schools, and schools inspired by the Gülen movement.

¹¹⁵ See Sayed Sikander Shah and Mek Wok Mahmud, 'Critical Thinking and its Implications for Contemporary *Itjihad*', *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 27(4), 2010, pp. 45-67.

¹¹⁶ See Abdullah Sahin, 2010, op. cit., p. 177.

¹¹⁷ 'Philosophy for Children' is an international educational programme developed more than twenty years ago by Dr. Matthew Lipman and represented in some thirty countries around the world.

¹¹⁸ Qur'an 39:17-18. Razi notes these verses as expressing 'a praise and commendation of following the evidence supplied by one's reason (*hujjat al-'aql*), and of reaching one's conclusions in accordance with critical examination (*nazar*) and logical inference (*istidlal*)'. According to Muhammad Asad, they describe people who 'examine every religious proposition (in the widest sense of this term) in the light of their own reason, accepting that which their mind finds to be valid or possible, and rejecting all that does not measure up to the test of reason'. Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, op. cit.

¹¹⁹ See Fatimah Ali, *Worldview, Metaphysics, and Islamic Art*, in *Knowledge is Light: Essays in Honor of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, Zailan Morris (ed.), ABC International Group, Inc., 1999.

¹²⁰ Robert Bunting, 'Muslim Music and Arts in the Curriculum', Birmingham City Council, 2006, p. 121.

¹²¹ Tariq Ramadan, *To be a European Muslim*, Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1999.

¹²² See Malik Badri, *Contemplation: An Islamic Psychospiritual Study*, Richmond: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2000.

¹²³ E.g. Qur'an 16:78, 46:26 and 67:23. Muhammad Asad explains in his notes to two of these verses that the noun *fu'ad* (pl. *'af'idah*). encompasses both intellect and feeling, and he himself gives various translations of the term in different verses as 'minds', 'hearts' and '[knowledgeable] hearts', Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, op. cit. In the same way, Yusuf Ali translates the term as 'intelligence and affections', 'feeling and understanding' or 'heart and intellect'.

¹²⁴ See also verses in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible: *The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord has made both of them* (Proverbs 20:12); *If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear* (Matthew 11:15; 13:9, 43; Mark 4:9,23; 7:16; Luke 8:8; 14:35).

¹²⁵ See the report on science teaching at GCSE level drawn up by Dr. Ian Gibson, Chairman of the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, *Times Educational Supplement*, 12 July 2002. See also Warwick Mansell, 'Attack on science "by numbers"', quoting Jonathan Osborne, Professor of Science Education at King's College London, *Times Educational Supplement*, 2 January 2004.

¹²⁶ See <http://www.primaryreview.org.uk/>. The Cambridge Primary Review is directed by Robin Alexander, a Fellow of Wolfson College, University of Cambridge, Emeritus Professor of Education, University of Warwick, and President, British Association for International and Comparative Education (BAICE) 2008-9.

¹²⁷ Research by the University of London Institute of Education, which brought together a number of studies on bilingual and trilingual children, reported in *The Independent*, 9 October 2003.

¹²⁸ See <http://www.dofe.org/>.

¹²⁹ One farmer who runs such a project has described how children love the contact with the land and the animals, and above all they thrive in an environment in which they feel useful and where there is communal effort in which everyone's contribution is valued (BBC Radio 4, 2 December 2001).

¹³⁰ Qur'an 25:63.

¹³¹ This is the crux of Muhammad Asad's explanation of the term *'aqd* (covenant) in his note to Qur'an 5:1.

¹³² Supporting the discussion were presentations by Abdelwahab El-Affendi, Anas Altikriti, Fiyaz Mughal, Rokhsana Fiaz and Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed.

¹³³ Martin Luther, 'On Secular Authority: To What Extent It Should be Obeyed'(1523), in *Luther, Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960.

¹³⁴ Qur'an 2:256.

¹³⁵ Muhammad Asad, note to Qur'an 2:256, *The Message of the Qur'an*, op. cit.

¹³⁶ See *Contextualising Islam in Britain: Exploratory Perspectives*, University of Cambridge in association with Universities of Exeter and Westminster, 2009, p. 28. (See further the chapter 'Support for Procedural Secularism'.)

¹³⁷ See Peter Mandaville, *Global Political Islam*, London: Routledge, 2007, p. 111.

¹³⁸ *An Overview of Child Well-Being in Rich Countries*, UNICEF, op. cit.

¹³⁹ *Review of the Evidence Base on Faith Communities*, DCLG, April 2006.

¹⁴⁰ In 2004, 28% of 16-24 year old Muslims were unemployed, and 69% of Muslim women were economically inactive (*Social Trends* No. 36, 2006, reported in Coles, *Every Muslim Child Matters*, op. cit. p. 7). 35% of Muslim households have no adults in employment, more than double the national average (*Muslim Housing Experience*, Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, reported in Coles, *ibid.* p. 7).

¹⁴¹ Department for Work and Pensions, reported in Coles, *Every Muslim Child Matters*, op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁴² National Statistics, reported in Coles, *ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁴³ National Statistics, reported in Coles, *ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁴⁴ FOSIS Survey 2005.

¹⁴⁵ E.g. the 2004 report of the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia and the 2006 Review of the Evidence Base on Faith Communities by the DCLG.

¹⁴⁶ E.g. Peter Osborne, 'Hatred of Muslims is one of the last bastions of British bigotry', *The Daily Telegraph*, 21 January 2011, <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/author/peterosborne/>.

¹⁴⁷ Report on Ethnicity and Education, DfES, 2006.

¹⁴⁸ These findings emerge from meticulous research in the UK by Quintan Wiktorowicz, now senior director for global engagement at the National Security Council in the USA. See <http://www.npr.org/2011/01/24/133125267/new-terrorism-adviser-takes-a-broad-tent-approach>.

¹⁴⁹ See Saeed A. Khan, 'The Phenomenon of Dual Nihilism among the British Muslim Youth of Bradford', in *Muslim Youth: Challenges, Opportunities and Expectations*, Papers of the AMSS Conference, University of Chester, 20-22 March 2009.

¹⁵⁰ *Understanding Muslim Ethnic Communities*, The Change Institute for DCLG, 2009.

¹⁵¹ The late President Izetbegovic of Bosnia wrote eloquently of the common ground between what he called the Anglo-Saxon spirit and Islamic values in the idea of the 'middle way'. See 'Alija 'Ali Izetbegovic, *Islam Between East and West*, Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1994. See also Abdal Hakim Murad, 'British and Muslim', *American Muslim Network*7 (November 2001), based on a lecture given to a conference of British converts on 17 September, 1997. Here, the convergence between 'Islamic moderation and good sense with the English temper' is also highlighted.

¹⁵² Pew Global Attitudes Project, 'The Great Divide: How Westerners and Muslims View Each Other', Washington DC: Pew Research Center, June 2006. See <http://pewglobal.org/files/pdf/253.pdf>. See also Richard Wike and Brian J. Grim, 'Widespread Negativity: Muslims Distrust Westerners More Than Vice Versa', Pew Global Attitudes Project, 30 October 2007 at <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/625/widespread-negativity>.

¹⁵³ See Jacques Semelin, *Purify and Destroy: The Political Uses of Massacre and Genocide*, London: Hurst, 2009.

¹⁵⁴ See www.hum.uva.nl/~teun/cda.htm for a survey of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). 'Blaming the victim' has been identified even in such atrocious acts as those committed in Solingen in Germany in 1993 when a Turkish family perished after their home was set alight by racists. See 'Germany's angry Turks fight back: Marchers clash with police as teenager is arrested over firebomb killings', *The Independent*, 1 June 1993. See also Sameera Mian, 'Europe's Islamophobia', *Muslim News*, 28 November 1997.

¹⁵⁵ See Norman Cigar, *The Role of Serbian Orientalists in Justification of Genocide Against Muslims of the Balkans*, op. cit.

¹⁵⁶ Qur'an 49:13.

¹⁵⁷ Muhammad Asad, note to Qur'an 28:15, *The Message of the Qur'an*, op. cit.

¹⁵⁸ See *The Training and Development of Muslim Faith Leaders: Current Practice and Future Possibilities*, DCLG report, 2010.

¹⁵⁹ See http://www.mcb.org.uk/media/presstext.php?ann_id=436.

¹⁶⁰ See the Deputy Prime Minister's speech on 3 March 2011 in defence of multiculturalism and an 'open confident society' at <http://www.dpm.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/news/deputy-prime-ministers-speech-open-confident-society>.

¹⁶¹ *The Training and Development of Muslim Faith Leaders: Current Practice and Future Possibilities*, DCLG report, op. cit.

¹⁶² Rowan Williams, *Islam, Christianity and Pluralism*, 2007, op. cit.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ See Hamza Yusuf and Zaid Shakir, *Civic Involvement: An Islamic Imperative*, *Islamica Magazine*, Issue 20, 2007, pp. 84-86.

¹⁶⁵ See Jehangir Malik (UK Director of Islamic Relief), 'Somalia famine: Our agency is able to deliver aid' (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/poverty-matters/2011/jul/29/somalia-famine-islamic-relief-response>).

¹⁶⁶ See Coles, op. cit. p. 36.

¹⁶⁷ Christopher Bagley and Nader Al-Refai, 'Muslim Youth and Citizenship Education: Idealism, Islam and Prospects for Successful Citizenship Education', in *Muslim Youth: Challenges, Opportunities and Expectations*, Papers of the AMSS Conference, University of Chester, 20-22 March 2009.

¹⁶⁸ Gallup Poll, <http://www.gallup.com/se/social-economic-analysis.aspx>, reported in *The Times*, 17 April 2007.

¹⁶⁹ Legal and General survey, April 2011. See <http://www.legalandgeneralmediacentre.com/Press-Releases/Everybody-needs-good-neighbours-Communities-urged-to-foster-the-street-party-spirit-to-help-reduce-burglaries-384.aspx>.

¹⁷⁰ Robert Lambert, 'Muslims tackle looters and bigots: British Muslims' reaction to the riots should dispel any continued demonisation in the media'. See

<http://english.aljazeera.net/indepth/opinion/2011/08/2011181210928899563.html>.

Robert Lambert is the co-director of the European Muslim Research Centre and is a member of the EC Expert Panel on Radicalisation. Prior to retiring from the Metropolitan Police in 2007, Lambert was co-founder and head of the Muslim Contact Unit.

¹⁷¹ Such principles and values include justice, equity, mercy and human well-being. See *Contextualising Islam in Britain: Exploratory Perspectives*, University of Cambridge in association with the Universities of Exeter and Westminster, 2009, pp. 53-54. (See further the chapter 'The Objectives of the Shari'ah Embody its Ethical Vision'.)

¹⁷² Qur'an 2:164, 3:137, 21:30-33 and 22:46.

¹⁷³ Qur'an 81:27.

¹⁷⁴ Qur'an 21:107.

¹⁷⁵ Qur'an 42:7.

¹⁷⁶ Qur'an 3:104.

¹⁷⁷ Qur'an 2:30, 6:165, 26:72 and 35:39.

¹⁷⁸ Qur'an 7:181. See also Qur'an 6:115: *And the Word of your Lord is fulfilled and completed in truth and in justice.*

¹⁷⁹ Ali Ibn Abu Talib, *Nahj-ul-Balagha: Peak of Eloquence*, London: Alif Publishing, 1985.

¹⁸⁰ The Prophet is also reported to have said: *All creatures are God's children, and those dearest to God are the ones who treat His children in the best way.*

¹⁸¹ Imam 'Ali, *Nahj-ul-Balagha*, 'Letter to Malik al-Ashtar', op. cit.

¹⁸² See Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Justice and Remembrance: Introducing the Spirituality of Imam 'Ali*, London: I. B. Tauris, in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2006.

¹⁸³ See *Contextualising Islam in Britain: Exploratory Perspectives*, University of Cambridge in association with the Universities of Exeter and Westminster, pp. 39-43. (See further the chapter 'Islam and Pluralism'). Key Qur'anic verses are 2:148, 5:48, 14:4, 22:67, 30:22 and 49:13.

¹⁸⁴ Qur'an 2:256, 10:99-100 and 15:3.

¹⁸⁵ Qur'an 109:1-6.

¹⁸⁶ Qur'an 5:69.

¹⁸⁷ Qur'an 4:122-125.

¹⁸⁸ Qur'an 2:190, 2:193, 4:90, 8:61 and 60:8.

¹⁸⁹ For instance, the Prophet is reported to have forbidden the killing of old people, women, children, the wounded, prisoners, monks, and those sitting in places of worship. He is also reported to have prohibited looting, plunder and any destruction of infrastructure.

¹⁹⁰ Qur'an 15:19 and 55:1-9.

¹⁹¹ Qur'an 24:41.

¹⁹² Qur'an 6:38.

¹⁹³ Qur'an 7:56, 28:77 and 30:41.

¹⁹⁴ Qur'an 7:31 and 26:151-152. In commenting on one of the most powerful and prophetic passages of the Qur'an, Muhammad Asad elucidates the meaning of its title (*At-Takathur*) as follows: 'The term *takathur* denotes man's obsessive striving for more and more comforts, more material goods, greater power over his fellow-men or over nature, and unceasing technological progress. A passionate pursuit of such endeavours, to the exclusion of everything else, bars man from all spiritual insight and, hence, from the acceptance of any restrictions and inhibitions based on purely *moral* values – with the result that not only individuals but whole societies gradually lose all inner stability and, thus, all chance of happiness'. See Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, op. cit.

¹⁹⁵ In Medina, the Prophet established a historic precedent when he confirmed that sacred precincts should simultaneously be considered natural reserves. He established several 'hima' zones – protected areas of wildlife and natural resources where development, habitation, or extensive grazing were proscribed. These areas were considered public property or common lands.

Symposia Questions

Symposium 1: The Individual and the Community

1.1: Defining the Individual

- How is the individual defined within Islamic intellectual traditions?
- If it is possible to generalise, how does this idea differ from, or how is it similar to, the liberal conception of the individual? Are Muslims necessarily communitarian?
- Are the differences important, and if so, why are they?
- What is at stake in emphasising the compatibility between these two conceptions?
- Is there a need to rebalance the emphasis in Islamic law, ethics, theology, philosophy and spirituality towards the individual?

1.2: The Individual, Liberty and Rights

- How is the idea of the individual linked in Islamic intellectual traditions to the concepts of (i) free will, and (ii) moral agency?
- Is there an Islamic frame of reference for the ideas of personal freedom, individual conscience, liberty and autonomy?
- How far can the idea of the individual be linked with or be used to ground human rights?
- Are human rights universal and inalienable according to Islam?
- Can Islamic law and ethics address all of humanity or does it address believers alone?
- What implications do these considerations have towards how Muslims view the moral agency and goodness of non-Muslims?
- Are Muslim virtue ethics too theoretical to apply to practical problems? Is there a basic fissure between ethics and *fiqhi* realities?

1.3: Authority, Consensus, Community

- Does an authoritarian conception of religious authority, community consensus and family control vitiate individual autonomy and freedom?
- Can a legitimate space of alternative views and dissent not only be affirmed, but endorsed as a necessary good in itself? Is difference above and beyond the narrow confines of juristic opinion in secondary issues a good?
- How does freedom and dissent relate to concepts like the search for consensus and the idea of fostering unity?
- How much does authoritarianism play into intergenerational change and cultural conflict in British Muslim communities?

- How does radicalism of all kinds relate to freedom and autonomy or conversely to authoritarianism?

1.4: Defining the Community in a Secular Age

- Is the Muslim presence best described as 'a community', or in more plural terms as 'a community of communities'?
- What is a Muslim community in the context of liberal secular democracy in theological terms? An ideal, a structure, a network, a set of institutions, a means to reproduce values etc?
- What are communal rights? If so, how do they work in this political and social context?
- How are communal and individual rights balanced within Islam?
- And how does that balance in Islamic thought interact with human rights discourse and liberal theory of individual autonomy?
- Is the 'community good' inherently a conservative notion?
- How does 'the community good' relate to 'the public or common good', the individual good or the good, however so defined, of the umma?
- How does the notion of 'community' relate to the idea of the neighbour in Islam, and to the idea of citizenship?

Symposium 2: Family and Education

2.1: Defining the Family

- What is the theological status of the family in Islam?
- Is the value of 'family' related to particular social forms of the family, e.g. nuclear, extended, clan, patrilineal etc?
- Does the family uniquely embody certain Islamic virtues?
- What social, economic and political, religious and other factors shape the institution of the family in British Muslim communities today?
- What state of health is that institution in presently? As it is experiencing radical transformation in many circumstances what are the core essential features of Muslim family life that should be preserved and strengthened, e.g. mutuality, the reproduction of values (*tarbiyah*), language and culture, networks of support etc. What can be discarded?
- Is it right to assume that shedding homeland cultures is an unqualified good?
- What form should *tarbiyah* take in liberal society where freedom and individual autonomy are so central?
- Should *tarbiyah* be expressed more in terms of rights than in terms of duties?

2.2: Muslim Educational Institutions

- How well are informal and formal British Muslim educational institutions (the family, the supplementary school, the faith school, the religious movements etc.) performing?
- What is the relationship between secular and religious education?
- Are they creating open or foreclosed religious identities?
- What critical assessment might be made of the curricula available in these institutions?
- Is all the political attention around Muslim education entirely unjustified or are there grounds for taking some of this criticism on board?
- How far should a new Muslim pedagogical method be developed that promotes critical thinking, rationality and hermeneutics at the core of Muslim thinking and Muslim identity formation?
- What role is there for critical thinking, rationality, and hermeneutics within Muslim pedagogies?
- What role should science and empiricism play in these curricula? Or creativity and cultural expression in the arts and music?

2.3: Sex and Relationships Education

- How effective is sex and relationship education in our communities? Who delivers it?
- What are the roles of the family, informal religious education and schools in fostering healthy attitudes?
- What sort of sex and relationship education do we need to promote to deal with relationship and family breakdowns and other forms of dissonance?
- If we believe that the family as a basic unit in society is a good, how do we promote and understand this and inculcate values across the generations?
- What examples of best practice can we share in this area?

Symposium 3: Political Participation and Community

3.1: Community Activism

- How far should our traditions of community activism and its relationship with mainstream political participation be critically revisited?
- Is there a balance between the public good and the Muslim good, and if so, what is it?
- How much does Muslim activism really differ from ethnic activism within Muslim communities?
- What political role should community institutions like mosques and representative organisations realistically be expected to play? How should we

view the development of organisations such as Mosques And Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB)?

- How far should the secular argument that politics based on religious identity can be divisive be taken on board?

3.2: The Secular Public Space Revisited

- What do we understand by the secular public space?
- To what extent is the commitment to the secular public space conditional?
- What is the role of the Muslim voice in modern Britain? Does this differ from the function of the Established Church, or other religious voices?
- Do Muslims only have natural allies among other faiths, or can secular trends also present common interests?
- How do we address the growing problems of bigotry and Islamophobia that raise new barriers in engaging in the secular public space?
- How can we move Muslim public theology in Britain to be broader than a counter-terrorism agenda and strategy?

3.3: Engaging in Party Politics

- How far have these traditions been able to balance out community mobilisation through identity politics with participation in mainstream politics?
- Is it more realistic to acknowledge that Muslim politics and mainstream British politics will always have a dynamic, sometimes confrontational relationship?
- What role can Muslims in mainstream politics play in a post-Prevent world?

Symposium 4: Gender – Equality, Identity and Sexuality

4.1: Justice and Equality

- What resources within the Islamic intellectual traditions are there to respond to claims of gender justice: equal rights for Muslim women to education, work, political participation, leadership within the core religious and community institutions, within the family, and so on?
- How much are these fundamental claims to equality with men denied to British Muslim women within families and communities, even if they are upheld in law?

4.2: Feminism and Theology

- What grounds are there for an Islamic feminism? Are there grounds for an Islamic feminist theology?

- What strategies can one adopt towards a hermeneutics of equity and fairness?
- Has much of classical and contemporary Islamic scholarship is informed by patriarchal and even misogynist assumptions that need to be challenged? Has patriarchal thinking undermined the Qur'anic principle of equality?
- How much have verses in the Qur'an that talk about gender difference been used to shore up male privilege? Is 4.34 a statement of male responsibility rather than of male privilege and superiority? [Meaning of the verse in translation (Yusuf Ali): *Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds (and last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance): for Allah is Most High, Great (above you all).*]
- How far have British Muslims been influenced by the development of Islamic feminism, as opposed to the much earlier secular nationalist feminism, in the Muslim world from the 1990s onwards?

4.3: A Gender-Facing Jurisprudence?

- How does a theology and jurisprudence based on gender equality instead of patriarchy relate to issues such as (i) marriage and divorce, (ii) the role of women within marriage and the extended family, (iii) so-called 'honour' killings, (iv) opportunities in employment and education, (v) inheritance laws, (vi) the nature of social roles of women in family life, (vii) sex and intimacy in marriage, and the concept of 'marital rape', (viii) domestic violence, (ix) cliterodectomy, (x) full participation and role in governance and leadership of congregations, community institutions and structures and so on?

4.4: Gender is also about Men

- How is the idea of masculinity within Islamic thought to be reassessed if the notion of patriarchy is critically assessed?
- Should the social role of masculinity in Islam be defined largely by economic responsibility to the family or more generally to the notion of control and authority? If so, are such concepts meaningful today?

4.5: Gender Relations

- How is the relationship between men and women defined in Islam with regard to equality, reciprocity, duty, right, service, *ihsan*, virtue; and in the family, marriage, community, society, work, public life, culture and the arts, in the mosques and community organisations?
- Is gender biologically determined or socially (and juristically) constructed?

- Should these relations be defined by gender equality or gender difference?
- Can difference and equality be combined in any meaningful sense or are they fundamentally incompatible?

4.6: Sexual Orientation

- How far should the Qur'an, the Prophetic tradition and the schools of Islamic law be revisited critically to reassess issues of sexual orientation?
- How relevant are arguments about the ground of values ('natural' law or a command theology) in relation to sexual orientation?
- Is the Muslim notion of family at odds with stable and long-term same-sex relationships?
- Should Muslims today imbibe uncritically the shift from acts to public identities, i.e. there was no such identity as 'homosexual' in pre-modern Muslim societies?
- Does that distinction between acts and identities enable a more tolerant and compassionate approach to this issue?
- How should British Muslims deal responsibly and compassionately with gay Muslims and gay Muslim groups, rather than rendering them invisible and ignoring their issues about discrimination and bad treatment with the community?
- How far should British Muslims recognise that the denial of gay rights can fall foul of discrimination law and is driving new forms of right-wing anti-Muslim politics across Europe? How feasible is public advocacy for Muslim rights to equality and recognition while denying the same to gay people?