



**Fresh Perspectives_
Christian Approaches to
'Disaffection' among Young Muslims**

June 2006

Introduction_

In this briefing paper, I have tried to distinguish some of the reasons why young Muslims living in Britain may feel 'disaffected' (if that's the right word) both from their own communities and community leaders, and from the wider mainstream society within which they and their communities are located, and its leaders.

Broadly, this disaffection arises in response to:

- their feeling of being ignored by their own community leaders as well as by local and national political leaders;
- actual or perceived attitudes and policies towards Muslims outside the UK;
- incautious, inappropriate, misunderstood or mistaken language used by national figures or in the media; and
- the perceived moral dissoluteness of the wider communities within which they find themselves.

It is important to recognise that these young people are not disaffected because they are Muslims. Two decades ago, many young people of Black African and African-Caribbean background in London (e.g. Brixton and Broadwater Farm) and elsewhere experienced similar feelings and were involved in violent disturbances. Forty years ago in the 1960s young White British people were involved in violent protests against the civil authorities (e.g. students at the London School of Economics).

These occurrences resulted, at least in part, from a breakdown in relationships between young people and wider society. In the 1960s, some of the reasons adduced for this disaffection were associated with events taking

place in other parts of the world, in Rhodesia, Vietnam and elsewhere, just as now events in Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel/Palestine and elsewhere are cited as contributory factors.

Psalm 119 verse 9 asks, "How can young people keep their way pure?", and provides the answer, "By guarding it according to your word." Among the young people who have not turned their back on religious faith are many who have a profound concern for God's word, whichever faith tradition they seek it in. But all too often they seem unable to find teaching and leadership either within or outside their communities which they feel addresses their multiple identity as 'young' and 'British' and 'Muslim'.

The Churches Regional Commission is committed among its core aims to asserting the significance of faith in the life of the Yorkshire and Humber region. This paper has been written with the invaluable help of Muslim colleagues, and CRC is publishing it as a contribution to the Churches' dialogue and engagement around these very sensitive issues, not as a definitive statement of any organisation's or individual's position.

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With thanks to Young Minds for use of cover picture www.youngminds.org.uk.

What's my culture?_

The vocabulary of 'society', 'community' and 'culture', is extremely unclear and often controversial. Is there even such a thing as 'British society', beyond the obvious meaning of 'the people who live in Britain'? Are there any, or many, ways of defining 'mainstream' and 'non-mainstream'? Does a phrase like 'the Muslim community', in fact refer to a 'community of communities', not all of whom recognise each other even as fellow Muslims, and whose varied distinctiveness goes almost unrecognised among non-Muslims?

Lord Tebbit stated in a radio interview in August last year that a multicultural society is impossible because;
"a society is defined by its culture. It is not defined by its race, it is not a matter of skin colour or ethnicity, it is a matter of culture. If you have two societies in the same place then you are going to have problems, like the kind we saw on 7 July, sooner or later."

Today, BBC Radio 4, Friday 19 August 2005
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/4163484.stm

In other words, he suggests that each society has its own culture, and each culture gives rise to a separate society. According to this analysis, integration would be possible only where one society accepts (willingly or forcibly) the culture of another, or where the two agree which elements of each culture to include in a new cultural basis; in either case forming not a

multi-cultural society but a larger mono-cultural society.

How should commonality of culture be assessed? To which culture does a white British-born Muslim whose first language is English, who regards King Arthur and Robin Hood as part of her cultural heritage, and who wears the hijab (headscarf) and jilbab (full-length over-garment), belong? Does a Black British Evangelical Christian doctor who laughs with *The Kumars at No. 42* and avidly supports England's cricket team, have more in common culturally with a British Asian Sunni Muslim dentist who enjoys *Doctor Who* and supports the Pakistani cricket team, or with someone like me, a white British Liberal Christian, who is not a medic, doesn't watch *The Kumars*, loves *Doctor Who* and couldn't care less which team wins a cricket match?

'Disaffection' – not new and not simple_

Although the issue of 'disaffection' between young British Muslims and the society in which we all live has been catapulted to the top of many people's agenda by the responses and assumptions made in the wake of the 7 July London bombings, and the attempted bombings that followed, the phenomenon itself is not new.

In a report published two years ago, Dominic Casciani, Community Affairs Reporter for BBC News Online, wrote:

There is a political debate within Britain's Muslim youth – and it is getting louder in the wake of

continued scrutiny of their communities and faith... it's about what it is to be British and Muslim, and disaffection with their place in society. Whether or not this disaffection is worsening – and how it relates to political extremism – is difficult to judge.”

Disaffection among British Muslim youth
BBC News Online, 31 March 2004
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/3586421.stm>

Disaffection from mainstream society_

To non-Muslims, the most easily perceived area of disaffection is that between young Muslims and their place in British society, which is continually articulated in the media. The Prime Minister described the London bombings of 7 July 2005 as having been undertaken ‘in the name of Islam’, and placed the blame for them on ‘Islamist extremist terrorists’, ‘the perversion’ and ‘twisted teaching’ of Islam and a hatred of western lifestyle, trying to draw a contrast between these teachings and actions on the one hand, and authentic Islamic doctrine and practice on the other. But any use of language that links or appears to link ‘Islam’ with ‘terrorism’ will be rejected by most Muslims, and to young Muslims already insecure about their position and role in society, the Prime Minister’s words were further evidence of their marginalisation within British society.

Consequently, large sections of the Muslim and non-Muslim

communities refuted what they perceived as the implications of Mr Blair’s analysis, namely that he was putting the onus for rooting out and defeating such an ‘evil’ on Britain’s Muslims, and that disaffection was not related to British foreign policy in Iraq. They publicly united in their tens of thousands, with their leaders, to demonstrate their commitment to addressing in partnership the causes and consequences of these destructive events, a commitment that was echoed and amplified by the thousands of letters and emails received by British Islamic organisations. Both the demonstrations and the correspondence expressed a public perception that the attacks were directed against the whole community, and that extremism is not a uniquely Muslim problem. Comparisons were drawn between the isolation of Muslims in the present decade, and the fear and resentment felt by Irish communities during the mainland bombing campaign in the 1970s.

In his interview, Lord Tebbit drew a contrast between the strong moral code underlying Muslim communities, and the weakness of many aspects of British culture. He suggested that many young Muslims would not want to integrate with the culture of drunkenness and promiscuity observable on Saturday nights in the parts of British cities where they tend to live. (Many white Britons no doubt share this distaste.)

Disaffection from mainstream leadership_

At a press conference last summer, Blair criticised a video from Ayman Al Zawahiri in which the link was made between the war in Iraq and the increasing disaffection felt by young Muslims, arguing that; *“these very self same people who are making those remarks yesterday are the people supporting the killing of wholly innocent people in Iraq, wholly innocent people in Afghanistan, innocent people anywhere in the world who want to live by the rules of democracy, and that’s why when they try to use Iraq or use Afghanistan, or use the Palestinian cause as a means of saying we have justification for what we do, it is a complete obscenity, because what they are actually doing in countries like Iraq or Afghanistan when the people have voted for democracy, is to try and stop them getting it.”*

Prime Minister’s Press Conference
5 August 2005
www.number-
10.gov.uk/output/Page8041.asp

But the Muslim and non-Muslim media alike articulate a frustration felt by many at the Government’s refusal to acknowledge the connection, asserting that; *“the refusal to admit any links with the debacle in Iraq, the failure of the so-called war on terror and the double-standards in both domestic and foreign policy may be politically convenient but is the most damning and damaging of all.”*

‘Perversions’, Editorial, *The Muslim News*, 29 July 2005

“What is undeniable is that the shoddy theology - no matter how “unIslamic” and easily condemned by most Muslims - is driven by political injustices. It is the boiling anger and hurt that is shaping the interpretation of religious texts into such grotesque distortions. Such extreme interpretations exist only in specific political circumstances - they certainly do not predate them, and the religious/political equation breaks down if there is no injustice to drive it. This leaves British Muslims in a very difficult place. To bring in these wider questions requires them to dissent from the government line. This is difficult for them, keen as they are to avoid further marginalisation. However, if Muslim leaders succumb to the pressure of censorship and fail to visibly oppose the government on certain foreign policy issues, the gap between the leaders and those they seek to represent and influence will widen, increasing the possibility of more dangerous routes being adopted by the disillusioned. This cycle of violence has to be broken. By confining analysis to simple religious terms, however, politicians are asking the impossible of our security services as well as Muslim leaders. No number of sniffer dogs or sermons denouncing the use of violence against innocents can detect and remove the pain and anger that drives extremists to their terrible acts. The truth is that shoddy theology does not exist without a dodgy foreign policy.”

Salma Yacoob, Vice Chair,
Respect Coalition
Comment, *The Guardian*, 15 July
2005

Disaffection from Muslim communities_

Disaffection exists not only between young Muslims and their place in British society, but also between young Muslims and their place within their own communities. According to Shareefa Fulat of the Muslim Youth Helpline, there are huge cultural and generational gaps when it comes to issues of family, relationships, sexuality, drugs and mental health among young Muslims.

“What exacerbates these problems is that there are no support services, or support from within the [Muslim] community, for people struggling to resolve their identities.”

quoted in *Disaffection among British Muslim youth*

But Ms Fulat also makes a link between the two areas of disaffection, arguing that young Muslims involved with or on the fringe of extremism may have found their way there because they had basic *“unresolved problems in their life”* (sic). Their anger is being compounded by international events where they believe Muslims are being treated as inferiors.

Disaffection from Muslim leadership_

Bilal Patel, who stood as an Independent candidate in the 2001 General election and picked up 1,300 votes, asserts that young British Muslim disaffection comes from a belief that their elders ‘kowtow’ to politicians who refuse them an equal stake in society. In

Casciani’s report, he is quoted as saying;

“Many of us are annoyed with the older generations. The sort of leadership we need is something more radical than what we have. But if you speak out as a young Muslim you are labelled extremist. And then that makes more of us into activists and creates the strong undercurrent of distrust among the young which exists for the politicians and the media, not least because we see hypocrisy in the treatment of Muslims around the world. At the moment, it’s not enough to make them do anything – but it’s enough to make them question.”

quoted in *Disaffection among British Muslim youth*

Patel also alludes to an accumulation of small factors from outside the Muslim community that add to this alienation, such as the perception that families of recent immigrant origin were instructed by the Home Secretary to speak English at home (David Blunkett: ‘Integration with Diversity: Globalisation and the Renewal of Democracy and Civil Society’, in *Rethinking Britishness*, published by The Foreign Policy Centre, Monday 16 September 2002).

Provisional conclusions_

In a thought-provoking article, Yahya Birt, son of former BBC Director-General John Birt and a Muslim convert, refutes the notion that disadvantage plays much of a role in disaffection among young Muslims, and calls on everyone to take more responsibility:

“People should ask themselves: Do we want to have a Muslim as a neighbour? How many Muslims do you have as friends?”

“It’s about everyday interactions, about having a neighbour round for dinner, and getting to know them. About breaking through the reserve and asking for directions from someone, or giving up your seat. People often hold back out of a fear of being impolite, but perhaps it’s better to make a mistake and experience some human engagement. It sounds wishy-washy but it’s important.

“My work suggests that young Muslims are searching for a form of Islam that makes sense in a multicultural context. They find it hard to get answers, particularly where they rely on imams from overseas who often don’t speak English. Imams should be giving young people tools to integrate on their own terms. Too often they have tended to say ‘Live at peace with your neighbours’ and at the same time, ‘We don’t want to live like them’. So the message has been, ‘Be good but be separate’.

“Finding ways to live together is a genuine issue, and I don’t have the answers. But small daily

interactions between people are important. They have the potential to make people feel comfortable with each other – or not.”

Do you want a Muslim neighbour?

www.flintoff.org/article/208/do-you-want-a-muslim-neighbour

What can Churches do?_

- Pray for young people who are struggling to make sense of their often multiple identity in modern Britain.
- Listen to all sides in any discussion, and avoid sacrificing accurate information to simplistic ‘sound bytes’.
- Contact local interfaith organisations to learn more about Islam – see Resources sections.
- Attend CRC’s ‘Faith Matters’ and ‘Living Islam’ training courses – information available from the CRC website or the Policy Officer.
- Seek to establish and develop good relations with local Muslims, both as neighbours and through their organisations.
- Ask a Muslim to speak to a Churches Together group, with the hope that they might invite a Christian to speak to them in the future.
- Contact your denomination’s interfaith adviser for further help and resources
- Read Q News (a Muslim magazine)

Further Reading_

Birt, Yahya:

Do you want a Muslim neighbour?

<http://www.flintoff.org/article/208/do-you-want-a-muslim-neighbour>

Blunkett, David:

What does citizenship mean today?

<http://www.blacklondon.org.uk/news/2002/20020915a.htm>
<http://politics.guardian.co.uk/homeaffairs/comment/0,,792501,00.html>

Farrar, Max:

Leeds footsoldiers and London bombs

http://www.opendemocracy.net/conflict-terror/leeds_2696.jsp

Hamid, Sadek:

Passionate diversity

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,1555749,00.html>

House of Commons Select Committee on Home Affairs:

Sixth Report especially section 4: 'Britain's Communities and Community Relations'

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200405/cmselect/cmhaff/165/16507.htm#a21>

Muslim Council of Britain:

Secretary General's Report

http://www.mcb.org.uk/downloads/Secretary_General_2005.pdf

The Muslim News:

Editorial: Perversions

<http://www.muslimnews.co.uk/paper/index.php?article=2033>

Neustatter, Angela

Thinking Beyond Fear

<http://www.youngminds.org.uk/magazine/78/neustatter3.php>

Resources: Muslim organisations_

Islamic Foundation

Admin, Sadiq Khokhar
Markfield Conference Centre, Ratby Lane, Markfield, Leicestershire LE67 9SY
tel: (01530) 244944
fax: (01530) 244946
email: i.foundation@islamic-foundation.org.uk
<http://www.islamic-foundation.org.uk/>

Islamic Society of Britain

<http://www.isb.org.uk>
– local branches:
Bradford tel: 07952 051514
email: bradford@isb.org.uk
Halifax tel: 07740 282720
email: halifax@isb.org.uk
Huddersfield tel: 07816 667311
email: huddersfield@isb.org.uk
Sheffield email: sheffield@isb.org.uk

Muslim Council of Britain

Boardman House, 64 Broadway, Stratford, LONDON E15 1NT
tel: 020 8432 0585/6
fax: 020 8432 0587
email: admin@mcb.org.uk
<http://www.mcb.org.uk>

Muslim Parliament of Great Britain

109 Fulham Palace Road, LONDON W6 8JA
tel: 020 8563 1995
fax: 020 8563 1993
email: info@muslimparliament.org.uk
<http://www.muslimparliament.org.uk>

Young Muslims UK (Youth Section of the Islamic Society of Britain)

0845 087 8766
info@ymuk.net
<http://ymuk.net>
– Bradford branch tel: 07740 346738

Resources: local interfaith organisations_

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council Faith Communities Forum
Brian Pitts Barnsley Town Hall,
Cabinet Support Unit, BARNSELEY S70
2TA tel: 01226 773392
email: brianpitts@barnsley.gov.uk

Bradford Concord Interfaith Society
c/o Bradford Interfaith Education
Centre – see below

Bradford and District Faiths Forum
Cath Bromwich, Development Worker
Bradford Vision, Bradford Design
Centre, 3 Peckover Street,
BRADFORD BD1 5BD tel: 01274
435480 email:
cath.bromwich@bradfordvision.com

Bradford Interfaith Education Centre
Lister Hills Road, BRADFORD BD7
1HD tel: 01274 731674
fax: 01274 731621 email:
interfaith@educationbradford.com

Bradford Trident Area Faith Forum
(Bradford 5)
aurangzeb.khan@bradford.gov.uk

Bradford Interfaith Women for Peace
email: awaisdom@hotmail.com

Calderdale Interfaith Council
tel: 01422 392869
email: sail.suleman@calderdale.gov.uk

Doncaster Interfaith Network
Yvonne Teimoori, Chair
111 Sheffield Road, DONCASTER,
South Yorkshire DN4 9QX
tel: 01302 853228
fax: 01302 730047
email: teimorri@blueyonder.co.uk

Faith Together in Leeds 11
email: info@faithtogether.org.uk

Huddersfield Interfaith Council
Secretary: Robin Bowles
tel: 01484 664 290
email: cara@cooptel.net

Hull and East Riding Interfaith
Jackie Lukes
University of Hull
Cottingham Road
Hull, HU6 7RX
Tel.01482-465408
Fax 01482-466133
j.r.lukes@hull.ac.uk

Inter Faith Forum Rotherham
Ms Taiba Yasseen, REMA, Elmfield
House, Alma Road, ROTHERHAM
S60 2HZ tel: 01709 720744
email: taba@rema-online.org.uk

Keighley Interfaith Group
kinterfaith@holyfamily.ngfl.ac.uk

Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship
Cynthia Dickson, Secretary
9 Springhill Drive, Crofton,
WAKEFIELD WF4 1EX
tel: 01924 863956
email: secretary@concord-leeds.org.uk

Leeds Faiths Forum
Pam Butcher, Admin Secretary
Leeds Faiths Forum, Chantry House,
Victoria Road, LEEDS LS5 3JB tel:
0113 388 5096
email: pam@leedsfaithsforum.org.uk

North Kirklees Inter-Faith Council
Mr Kaushar Tai
5 Selbourne Drive, DEWSBURY, West
Yorkshire WF12 9PB
tel: 01924 523672
email: kaushar_tai@hotmail.com

North Lincolnshire Multi Faith Partnership
Linda Smithson, Secretary
Pittwood House, Ashby Road,
SCUNTHORPE DN16 1AB
linda.smithson@northlincs.gov.uk

Scarborough Inter Faith Discussion Group

Rebecca Clare
8 Hay Lane Terrace, Cloughton,
SCARBOROUGH YO13 0AJ
tel: 01723 870099
email: rebecca.clare@ntlworld.com

Sheffield Interfaith

Jan Jamilla Hine, Secretary
205a Rustlings Road, SHEFFIELD
S11 tel: 0114 267 8779
email: p.hine@shu.ac.uk

York Interfaith

Charles Bridge
Fairer World, 84 Gillygate, YORK
YO31 7EQ tel: 01904 655116
email: fairerwrld@aol.com

Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum

Suite 7.2, Joseph's Well, Hanover
Walk, LEEDS LS3 1AB
tel: 0113 380 4861
fax: 0113 380 4870
email:
info@yorkshireandhumberfaiths.org.uk

Leeds Metropolitan University and the University of Leeds

tel: 0113 343 5071
email: chaplaincy@leeds.ac.uk
Muslim Adviser - Dr Hassan Alkatib
email: hassan@hrf.co.uk

Sheffield Hallam University

Ian Maher, Multifaith Chaplaincy
Student Services Centre, Room 525,
Owen Building, City Campus, Sheffield
Hallam University, SHEFFIELD S1
1WB tel: 0114 225 3813
fax: 0114 225 2161
email: chaplaincy@shu.ac.uk

University of Sheffield

Will Lamb, The Chaplaincy Centre
6 Hounsfield Road, SHEFFIELD S3
7RF tel: 0114 222 8923
email: chaplaincy@sheffield.ac.uk

University of York

Muslim Adviser - Dr El-Gomati
tel: 01904 432343
email: mmg@ohm.york.ac.uk

Resources: Multifaith Chaplaincy Services_

These are good sources of local contacts and advice

University of Bradford

Muslim Advisers:
male students - Sufyan Gent
tel: 07980 663221
email: sufaz2@aol.com
female students - Bahia Gent
tel: 07976 028991

University of Hull

Muslim Adviser: The Imam
Islamic Mission, Berkeley Street,
HULL tel: 01482 324833