

## What happened? What changed? What now?

Transcript of a meeting held jointly by *QNews* and *openDemocracy* on 21 July 2005

4 August 2005

*Two weeks after the London bombings, openDemocracy and Q-News convened a meeting at London's Chatham House (Royal Institute of International Affairs) to debate the origins and consequences of the attacks. In this transcript, Muslims and non-Muslims thrash out the issues*

### The Panel

**Isabel Hilton** is editor of openDemocracy

**Hisham Hellyer** has a doctorate from the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations at the University of Warwick. His research covered multiculturalism, integration debate and European Muslim communities.

**Humera Khan** works to improve policies for services for the Muslim community. She is a founding member of the An-Nisa society, which is a British Muslim volunteer organisation that provides support and counselling for the families.

**Fuad Nahdi** is the founding editor and the current publisher and edito- in- chief for Q-News.

**Robin Soans**, is an actor and playwright and his earlier play, *The Arab Israeli Cookbook* explored the problems in the area. His new play, *Talking to Terrorists* is currently running.

### Isabel Hilton

It's been an interesting two weeks in London. In the [www.openDemocracy.net](http://www.openDemocracy.net)

two weeks since the bombs, we have listened to many people advancing many explanations and many complaints and there are competing and overlapping narratives that build around these events. There is the narrative of social alienation, theological and doctrinal debates in Islam, the post 9/11 narratives on the war on terror and the way it's been conducted and other narratives that go much further back: the jihad in Afghanistan, the situation in Kashmir, the nature of the Zia regime in Pakistan, the Sykes-Picot agreement, the question of oil, Israel-Palestine, all these have been advanced. There are all questions of patterns of migration, inter-generational strains within migrant communities, integration and multiculturalism. Each of us tends to attach ourselves to the story that we most recognise as the prime explanation. But these are complex events and we at openDemocracy and Q-news feel that if we confine ourselves to the narrative that we feel most comfortable with and we are not open to new facts, then we will be tethered to explanations that don't necessarily work.

*Question: Is Islam in Britain failing its young generation?*

Humera Khan

Young Muslims have been failed by more than one factor. Within the British context, they have been failed by the establishment and by warped radical ideologies rooted in the angst of the Muslims world. The first generation of Muslims that came to this country did not come with dysfunctional families and politicised views. I can remember, being someone who is from a migrant family in the early 60s, a passive community, keeping themselves to themselves.

The question to ask is how this peaceful community can have children who are full of anger, hatred and susceptible to radical ideas. In my opinion there is a tragic triple heritage to these ideas. Firstly, the failure to invest in any significant way to a positive British Muslim identity. The failure of the race relations act of 1979 and the subsequent amendments to take on board institutional racism and particularly Islamophobia. Why is this legislation important? It is because this legislation would provide mechanisms and commitment to systematically deal with the barriers that Muslims face in society as a whole and in areas such as education, housing, employment etc. It will also by law provide positive initiatives to engage mainstream Muslims; it would mean service providers are required to actively eliminate stereotypes and prejudices against Muslims and it would make the community feel that it has a stake in society. At this level, ordinary Muslims have been let down for the last 30 years, allowing the festering of social ills and discontent.

Secondly, there has been a failure to implement appropriate legislation due to a lack of investment in both social and human resources. The Muslim community, on the whole, being a poor community did its best to invest their little money in two key areas: halal butchers and mosques. The mosques were built by simple people with simple expectations. This situation changed to a great extent with the advent of oil money from the Middle East, which not only contributed to the development of more purpose-built structures, but also to evangelical-type organisations and influenced the theological ideologies that began to be taught in them. These were not home-grown and rooted in politics of the Middle East. These institutions

that were set up were never there to deal with the problems of the British Muslim community and their needs. They were conservative and often politicised evangelical groups that operated as if they had arrived off an alien spaceship from another planet with their own agendas.

Thirdly and finally, the ongoing failure of Western governments, the UN and other bodies to act justly in the Muslim world: Palestine, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Kashmir and so on. On top of this, there has been the stifling of debate concerning the Muslim-Islamic perspective and experience. Some young Muslims, feeling marginalized at home, are increasingly identifying with their co-religionists abroad and become susceptible to the calls of extremism and jihad. Being alienated already from British society and seeing no way of working diplomatically, strategically or democratically to get their concerns understood and taken on board at home added fuel to an already hopeless situation. Anti-terrorist legislation being introduced in haste by the government without any previous underpinning of legal or social engagement of the Muslim community has pushed some onto the edge of the cliff to jump.

Young Muslims have indeed been failed by vested interests and blinkered views on two fronts, both political and ideological. But I would like to contradict the assumption of the question that Islam failed young Muslims. How can they be failed by something that they did not receive in the first place? The vast majority of young Muslims have risen above the rot. They have not bought into fear and hatred and it is Islam that has driven this renewal. But sadly their voices are not sexy enough to be heard by the modern world.

Hisham Hellyer

Nobody seems to be talking about the crisis of authority that exists in the community. We are talking about everything but this in wider civil society. We have to recognise that there is no church in Islam, there is no ecclesiastical hierarchy in Islam, however, this does not mean that there is no systematic authority in Islam. This is something that society has to get to grips with. Though we don't have a church, there is something else. We have an historical system of education that is time proven but which has not been understood by both Muslims and non-Muslims.

### Fuad Nahdi

The question is a loaded question and came to me as a surprise. The honest answer is yes. But we have to define. And we have to ask what kind of Islam and what kind of British Muslims. Over the last two weeks we have been caught up within this political and media circus. Everything has been made simple and palatable to a large section. We talk about British Muslims as if we are one monolithic group; we talk about Islam as if it's one unified text book ideology that has a headline, introduction, body and conclusion. Unfortunately, like all great things, the characteristic of religions and so Islam, is ambiguity. And in the modern world we do not want to deal with this. It is not surprising to me that when the police went to Leeds to investigate, one of the places they ended up in is a Muslim bookshop. I have said for sometime that if someone bothered to go to any Muslim bookshop and saw the kind of filth that is on the bookshelves, that has been circulated around, I am not surprised by this kind of Islam, the Islam that has failed us. If someone from a century ago came to our times, he would be surprised and shocked and not recognise the Islam and the Muslims we have today.

However, the Islam and Muslims we have today have to be seen in context within the crazy world that we are living in. I can speak as a Muslim that believes that there is a power in Islam that can overcome the evil that now confronts us, but the struggle is much more complex than picking 25 people and having a photo opportunity or collecting 90 people from all over the world and sitting in a room and discussing. But discussions have to start somewhere and I hope that tonight we can hear things that are honest and unashamed. Sometimes fear stops us from airing things outside but fear is a thing that not only affects people on trains that have been bombed but also affects people that have been living in fear after the bombings. We were shocked but not entirely surprised.

### Robin Soans

When I was researching 'Talking to Terrorists', one of the questions I asked was why were the people who got involved so young? So I invoked the help of a psychologist to answer this question. I would say that yes, Islam's youth has been failed in Britain but an enormous number of other youth has been failed as well. They are part of a huge syndrome of having to do very well very quickly, where the temptation of being 'blinged up' by the time your 21 is a very difficult thing

for any young person to handle. My own son had a mental collapse because he had to do well in everything he did, had to come top in all his exams and didn't have a proper adolescence. There are tremendous pressures within our society to do well and though some people are, the majority are not doing well and leading fulfilling lives by the time they are 22. One of the reasons organisations have an influence on people is that they offer openings which society does not and I think with Islam, there are not enough openings. In the wider context, when Humera says a stake in society, that's an absolute key phrase. If you don't give people a stake in society, then you will have young people who, using psychologist phrases, are 'bright but blocked', everywhere they turn there is an impediment whether it be physical, mental, psychological, philosophical. If people are in pessimistic situations, somebody will offer an alternative route which may be attractive.

*The debate is put to the floor*

### Shaheed Salim, (audience member)

Within wider white society, there are different political opinions. For example, within the Left is the idea that struggle can be successful without violent action and that violence is an illegitimate means through which to pursue your political aims. Why is it that white society is not blamed for the actions of its people whereas the Muslim community is blamed for the actions of a minority? Why can't strands of opinion within the Muslim community be available, where the whole community does not have to be called into the headmaster's office for a flogging, which I think is more humiliating than anything else.

### Stephen Howe, Bristol University, (audience member)

What would each of the panel recommend should be in Muslim bookstores? Or more pointedly, what one book or film or piece of music would they recommend for a young Muslim tempted by militancy? What would they most recommend to non-Muslim politicians and journalists to understand better?

### Azad Ali (audience member)

Has there been any analysis or research done into this question? Is there any authority behind the answers

that have been given? Secondly, do we allow a mixture of opinions right and left, extreme and moderate, where people can read and find a balance between the two?

#### Humera Khan

There is lots of research which focus on social problems; maybe they are not adequate enough and whether you feel the research is appropriate is a subjective matter. On the issue of Islamic books, I stopped reading Islamic books about 18 months after getting back into Islam when I was in my mid 20s- particularly the issue of women, which is a big issue- as I didn't feel the books gave a true picture. I think bookstores are like horror stores! Books or a piece of music may be slightly inspirational but they are not enough- what you need rather is a responsible teacher and I have been fortunate enough to have two teachers. However, many young people do not have that and I get calls from a lot of youth around the country who ask "Where can we go, where can we get this information, who do we go to?". Hence, it is essential that we develop infrastructure with reliable and decent people at the helm.

#### Hisham Hellyer

In terms of books, I don't recommend many books. I would like to say that if you have an extremist within your community, then tell him to read the Qur'an and leave it at that. I can't say that anymore because people treat the Qur'an as a do-it-yourself kit and this is really dangerous as we have thousand of years of study on how to view the Qur'an and the life of the Prophet.

#### Humera Khan

The knee jerk reaction of many young people is to regurgitate the Qur'an. But the thing about the Qur'an, and Imam al-Ghazali has written extensively on this, is that unless you have some good adab or a balanced personality before you approach the Qur'an, you will approach it with your personal angst. Like with any literature, depending on the context of your life, you will approach it with that particular mentality. Therefore, you need to have a balanced personality.

#### Hisham Hellyer

I recently spoke to a former extremist who spent five

years in a far-right Muslim political group and then left. It wasn't books that did it for him, it was people. We are told that the Prophet was the Qur'an walking and this is poignant as it necessitated a human being to teach people and I don't see why we think that in this day and age we are not in need of good people to teach us.

#### Saqeb Moeen, (audience member)

You are right that the community needs better leadership but I could see the journalists scribbling away when Humera Khan spoke about how bad Islamic bookshops are. I can see it in the headlines now, 'We must do something about Islamic bookshops, let's close them down.' I think these retrogressive activities won't work, making martyrs out of these people. Also Islamic bookshops aren't the sole source of information. We also have the internet. There are a myriad of fatwas; you type in your angst and you will get a response. Regulating won't help, rather it's the force of argument and the changing of the culture of the community.

#### Fuad Nahdi

Something happened on 7/7, we wanted a solution the very next day. No. This violent form of Islam has not formed overnight. It has been invested in physically, intellectually, monetarily. And it has taken many decades to form. We have something really serious now. I am not surprised by suicide bombings. I said before that it was coming. The issue about this is a very sexy topic; that Islam needs to go through a reformation. Three years ago when I wanted to go into TV after years as a print journalist, the people I was training with told me, "Somebody like you is going to be a problem because you can't film god and the issue is (the fact is) that religious issues are very good." We are in the middle of what people would like to call a 'Reformation in Islam' but because it is not on TV, we are not noticing what is happening. Suicide terror and the millions that have died in the numerous conflicts in the last few decades in the Muslim world are actually the product of this reformation. Those familiar with the Christian reformation are familiar with what happened. A third of Christendom had to die for the Reformation. It has been the genius of Islam that has not allowed this kind of development to take place. Over the 80 years, the authority that was there in the Islamic world has slowly been peeled off and the last layers are ready to come off and this will have massive

consequences for humanity. I talk about books, this is just one of the issues. I'm not talking about burning. There needs to be room. During the Rushdie affair of 1989, I disagreed in principal. But I believe that one the best ways of dealing with bad books is producing good books and this is why I created Q-News because for young Muslim men and women, there was no place for this creativity. The issue is the more militant and more radical the ideologues within the community, the easier it is for them to adapt to technology. Look at Marxism, Bolshevism etc. So the more radical control the internet and books and in the war for intellect, hearts and minds, they are far ahead. This particular ideology that we have is very dangerous. A report from the DOS states that between 1973 to 2003, more than \$15bn has been invested in the particular brand of Islam that has resulted today. So we are not going to change minds overnight. Just reading the titles of these books in the bookshop makes you want to come out and kill the first person on the road.

#### Tania Loa (audience member)

It is remarkable that we have started with the question 'Is Islam failing the youth in Britain' because it is not Islam's young generation, it is Britain's young generation and this is absolutely symptomatic of the way that white liberalism has always viewed the problem. Whenever there is a problem with black, Asian or Muslim youth, suddenly they become a problem of that community. When they are winning medals, they become British. How is it that our Britishness is so much more fragile than that of the white people? When David Copeland is planting bombs you do not hear people asking whether or not people who are in a Far Right movement, their nationality should be withdrawn from them; the minute you have someone from an Islamic group doing something, suddenly the whole community is collectively punished. The fact that we have kicked off this question is symptomatic of one of the problems. In terms of the books, I think liberal intelligentsia would be up in arms having their freedom of speech curtailed by not being able to have radical books. It's not worthy for us to start with this question. These are British kids and we need to see what British society has done to make these kids move to these extremes.

#### Robin Soans

One of the troubles with the present set of politicians is that they go to university, they read law, and they

become lawyers or go into politics. They go into office without any real knowledge of what life is like anywhere but the confines of the ministerial Rover and what develops is an irrational fear of young people. They see subversive forces everywhere and what they do is slap ASBOs here and ASBOs there, curtailing freedom and this only blocks people and diminishes their horizons. And it is the British establishment that is failing young people. When I researched my play about heroine abuse on an estate in Bradford, the amount of desperation I saw was heartbreaking. People dying at night in the gutter, it was shocking. There are people who are doing well but there is a stratum of people whose vision is been blurred and blunted the whole time.

#### Turi Munthe, (audience member)

One of the reasons why there is a focus on Islam failing its youth is that a very odd form of Islam is providing justification for these acts. There is a lot of youth that Mr Soans speaks about who will join and be influenced by these radical ideologues. There is an idea that this kind of terrorism only happens when Islam and the West mix. This individualism of OBL and others is a borrowed notion from the West as Islam is more communitarian than the Judo-Christian society. It's a combination of these two things, it's a globalised thing.

#### Humera Khan

There is an odd kind of secular liberalism that our government is applying. That such a significant amount of the population does not agree with foreign policy suggests that the discontent is not a Muslim thing only. It has been led by non-Muslims. I feel heartened that these issues are beyond my faith and community. I was asked in a radio programme whether the Muslim community is in denial and I responded "How can we be in denial?" I find it difficult to understand, I find it difficult as a Muslim and a human being, Dunblane, that a 14 year-old boy raped four girls in a park and the atrocious things that are happening. There is a crisis in society, a crisis of authority a crisis of leadership and a failure of the social welfare system. There are bigger things underpinning these acts and it doesn't start in one place and in one community. All people have elements of evil working together and it's the elements of justice within people that will make things change.

*Question: Is British society failing its Muslim Community?*

Hisham Hellyer

I was asked is British society failing its Muslim community. Now I am not sure what British society is or isn't but I am glad we are asking the question in the manner that reflects that the Muslim community is part of British society. The rump of the question is, 'Are Muslim communities an integrated part of British society?'. There are two sides to that equation and it is a standard fear for every demographic minority community. In an integrated society, unfair and unnecessary barriers to access are removed, reasonable pluralism is respected with unrestricted relativism and the individual is freely able to become an integral part of it. Is that what we see here? We raise foreign policy in this regard, identifying it as a barrier to integration for many British Muslims and thus it is far easier to talk about integration into cities like the Glaswegian Muslim community or the Bradford Muslim community or even different parts of the country. It's far easier to talk about city or country integration rather than country integration in the heads of some people. I think this is a particular objection, and it is one that I do not entirely agree with, simply because British foreign policy is objected to by both non-Muslim and Muslim and it does not have to result in national apostasy. Similarly the foreign policy of many Muslim countries is not to the liking of many Muslims living in that country and I don't hear the same logic being applied. Nevertheless it's a psychological problem and a psychological factor in the integration of British Muslims.

When I compare British Muslims with other European Muslims, I do not see an idyllic picture but I do not see a terribly bad one. There are problems and after thinking about both the problems and the benefits of the society in which I live (England), I can't help but be grateful. This is not to denigrate other societies in Europe but there are certain things which this society has that other European societies do not have. But this isn't an excuse to rest on our laurels as there are problems. These (problems) will exist until we, as British people, recognise that the 'we' in our discourse includes Muslims and Islam as a British phenomenon. It is not an alien thing that we can neatly pack away. Even Tony Blair in the aftermath of the bombing, while

being very careful not to claim that Islam was the problem, still employed this 'we and they' idea. This is a failure at the top of British society and we cannot allow the current crisis to draw us deeper into this sort of paradigm, on the contrary. This leads us to the question of what British Muslims need to do and what Britain needs to do. The most basic thing that needs to be done is to develop a civic identity that is inclusive whilst meaningful and that reveals what to be British really means, taking into account the different experiences of our people around the country. In this regard, Muslims and non-Muslims have important roles to play. In particular one task needs to be accomplished. Demographically, minor communities have to be willing to make themselves integral to this society and do away with the minority discourse, which stipulates that minorities have minor concerns. That is a facet of some communities and it simply compounds any failure of the British society towards this Muslim community. Thankfully that is not the case for many. We can see this by flicking through magazines such as Emel, Muslim news and Q-news. Even websites like deenport.com, they all actively support an authentic and rooted British identity.

Fuad Nahdi

Yes seriously so...British society has failed its Muslim communities. It could have done a lot more and needs to do a lot more. I think one of the big problems, and I am walking evidence of this failure, is that it has been a serious struggle over the last 20- odd years to fight and be recognised as a Muslim in this country. People don't understand how uphill it has been. I publish a magazine and the biggest compromise that we could make is that we called it Q-News and made it serious. This allows Muslims to identify with it. We could have just called it the Weekly Jihad for all it mattered. But we said we would compromise the name as we had to work with a society that has always been hostile to the Muslim identity. During the last 13 years that I have been doing this publication, everybody else has been given the intellectual space to find their identity but not the Muslim community. If you are Asian or black is fine and the more liberal a person is the more hostile they will be to religion. Religion is an anathema. It is only recently, after 2001, that religion has been included as a section in the national survey.

*The debate is put to the floor*

**Douglas Murray (audience member)**

Lies have already been propagated here that this is not a problem of Islam; it is manifestly obvious to anyone in this country that the problem is Islam. I am not a Muslim and so I cannot talk about the theological divide that is happening in Islam at the moment and, for myself and all British people, this would be an interesting subject to watch but it wouldn't affect us. It is affecting us now because people from the Islamic community are now walking onto buses and blowing them up having spent several years in many countries doing the same thing, including, of course, Israel. Now, if we want to start this conversation by pretending that this is a societal failure, you're simply going to spend your time apologising for terror. David Copeland is not an important or equivalent example to draw. David Copeland, when he planted his bombs, was not loudly supported by any community, was not apologised for by any community in this country. When Dunblane happened, there was no pack of people behind the man claiming that the shooting was right. Now the problem for the Muslim community in this country is that your very spokespeople from the top down fail to realise that what you are saying is off key with what British society as a whole is feeling. When Newsnight a few nights ago was able to get three supposed leaders of the Muslim community, a member from the head of MAB, a representative of the appalling extremists MPAC and a member from the council of mosques, not one of that panel of three people, represented a cross-section of Muslim opinion. Not one of them would condemn suicide bombing as it happens in Israel and the people [on this programme] could take this on board. They are willing to say that if you can blow up Jews in one country then it is okay to blow up the British people. Now, that's a problem for the Muslim community and it is a problem for your spokespeople but its no use in pretending this is a problem that only exists at the very bottom of that society.

**Abdal Aziz Brown (audience member)**

I'm trying to keep my composure and not bubble over! That's exactly what the lady in front was talking about. You talk about Muslim society and British society as if they are different things. My parents are from Britain and my grandparents were British and I was born here and I am Muslim. And this has nothing to do with race or anything else. But you are talking about them as if

they are separate things when they are manifestly not. I agree that they are problems within the Muslim community that touch on how we reform Muslims- that is a problem and it needs to be addressed. We need to put out good books to counter the bad books and there are good books about but they don't have the money behind them. In terms of changing narratives, what the gentleman before has done, is exactly what the lady in the front said is the problem- separating Muslims and British. Why did Muslims come to this country? How long have they been in this country? What have they contributed to this country? And I mean this for all communities. We need to change totally what British means. We are a mongrel nation. Was it Swift that said it? It's true. We always have been and I hope we always will be. People think that Muslims and Afro-Caribbeans turned up in the 50s and started nicking jobs. That's absolute rubbish. They have been here hundreds of years and they have contributed a lot here and abroad. And it makes my blood boil to hear these kinds of comments. When you have some bloke in Bolton sitting in the mosque and some man comes up to him and says "The English hate you, they hate your religion, and think it stupid, come with me and I will show you a different way". They get Boris Johnson's article and say "Look, look what they are writing about you. They think you are stupid". Boris said Islam is paranoid, it is medieval and the problem. He made numerous unsubstantiated claims. You are contributing to the problem by saying that Muslims cannot be a part of British society.

**Dominic Casciani, BBC (audience member)**

I have been able to spend a lot of time with Muslims in various communities. I found that all the evidence suggests the opposite of what Douglas Murray said. The battles within Islam and for the heart of Islam really have a profound effect on what will happen in this country. There is an organisation called Muslim Youth Helpline, and with their sister website they have begun to challenge the preconceptions within their own community about what it is to be Muslim and what it is to be living in the West. They wrote a very provocative article about homosexuality and drug abuse within their community. Now if British society views the kids that are involved in this project as separate to the rest of society, a lot of problems that they are trying to solve and the young people that they are trying to address will effectively be excluded from the rest of society. By talking about it through the prism of their faith, they are trying to bring young

people closer into society. The evidence suggests that anyone who tries to do this then has a positive effect.

The additional problem linked to that is how, as the white majority, we go and address the Muslims.. Perhaps in too many respects, governments and policy seem to view them as Muslims first and citizens second and it goes with a lot of communities, for instance the Irish. They have tried to change this. Black on black gun crime used to be viewed as a black problem; now they see it is an urban problem as it is not just blacks that are involved but white kids as well. Essentially, what has happened in the last couple of weeks has been a wake up call. If you do integrate people, the problems happen in all sorts of different ways and in all sorts of communities but the problems will manifest themselves. In the Muslim community, these poor lads that blew themselves up, that was their expression of their disillusionment. For the Irish Republicans, it was joining the IRA. The parallels are there.

#### Shahid Avada (audience member)

I have been part of Muslim community groups for a while now. I read an article about suicide bombing by Professor John Pappé at the Washington University who studied suicide bombing, and the occupation of a people's land is pivotal to the occurrence. And the minute that foreign troops withdraw, suicide bombing ceases. I'm not solely blaming suicide bombings on foreign policy, knowing that it is multi-factorial, but he drew on people like the Tamil Tigers. We have to look at the link between Islam and terrorism and not talk about a clash of civilisations but to try and look at this fallible connection between the two.

#### Sundar Katwala, Fabian Society (audience member)

Hisham said that we need social integration and offered a nuanced description of what that was. The debate of integration leads to a fear of why you demand we integrate. Are you demanding we assimilate? But integration is understood as a two way street that there must be a breakdown of the barriers to integration and there must be a willingness to integrate. There also needs to be civic integration, and identity which is shared and across us and therefore we need to form a British identity that provides the meaningful civic ties that bind our society together. Britishness was created as a political identity that

eventually faded away. It was built on Protestantism that Linda Collier and other writers on this subject have shown. This made it difficult when you wanted things like Catholic emancipation and so on. And there have been battles over Britishness and how to describe it and it will continue. The issue about what stake that, I as a non Muslim, have within the debate within Islam is that I want British Muslims to want to be British Muslims and want to have a form of Islam that allows them to be part of that broader project that will define whether we can have citizenship or integration at all. What I find the discussion about so far is who we should blame the most. If the question was what should be done about it, then we need a nuanced sense of what is actually going on. There probably will not be a white majority. Do people feel that British society is not interested at all and at war with Islam, demanding to keep Muslims down? There are issues for us about claims that we used to accept on grounds of race that are being made on grounds of religion; now that is quite confusing because of where we have got in terms of religion in today's society. We are in a secular society and religion is not really part of the picture. How we deal with religion is an important question we need to address. We have been having debates on integration that are always based on the belief that integration will never happen but over generations it has been happening, however weak.

#### Jalal Patel (audience member)

The subject of integration is key. I speak to many Muslim youth around the country. When we speak to them we need to ask what it is that they are really saying to us. What I found is that when the subject of integration is raised, in many of our eyes the subject is pushing us to take sides which we find unpalatable. Is integration an acceptance of values that we disagree with or is integration an acceptance of a common notion of citizenship that I can accept, that I can agree with, that we can live with? If it's the former, which some Muslim youth disagree with, then how can we deal with this constituency of Muslim youth? Shall we deal with them by coercing them to accept values or shall we deal with them but discussing and accepting differences. Maybe there is a difference in political ideology, in political concepts. Maybe they do not ascribe to the four-point agenda that Daily Telegraph mentioned last week as being the core concepts of integration.

### Jamal Khashoggi (audience member)

When we look at terrorism in Saudi Arabia, we do not have to consider integration because it is one society; it is a very religious society but we still had terrorists who were willing to kill Saudis and non-Saudis. So I am wondering why the Muslim community is concentrating on the issue of integration of their own particular problems within the society. Those problems will continue with terrorism or without terrorism. The problem is terrorism. The problem is why, which the Saudis asked, a small number of people are willing to convert to this particular cult, the cult of Al-Qaeda. It should be seen as a cult separate to Islam, which has different aims and objectives to the majority of Muslims. We saw what they have done in Iraq, and Saudi et cetera.

### Hisham Hellyer

There was a man who left 15 minutes after the start of the discussion. He was blonde, blue eyed and very white and he was my father. I have always thought that suicide bombing was against my religion and I got in trouble with certain people. And I consider myself to be a Muslim Britain and I don't think Douglas Murray really cared about where I am from, where my father was from and what I feel. I am his neighbour and whether he likes it not I am here to stay.

### Humera Khan

A large significant population has the same feelings as articulated by Douglas Murray and we have to face it and we have to address it. In response, the problem with the rhetoric on both sides, is that we are dealing with people that are at end of their empires. The Muslims have not got to terms with the fact that they are not longer the ruling power. The western civilisation also does not realise that it is at the end of its empire so the rhetoric from both camps is this highfaluting irrelevancy that does not make any sense to the vast majority and at one level the clash is at that level. My own view is that Islam is not to blame. In secular liberal perspectives you have a spectrum of views but the focus on the Muslim community has been on our extremists. If we were to focus on that segment in English society, you would get a warped version of that society. But outside of Britain, there are people who only see a snapshot of British society and think that all British are lager louts doing all kinds of stupidity. We have to recognise that we are living with

stereotypes. Living in a secular liberal democracy, I hope we can rise above these stereo types. Western society is such a big word...as there are so many westerners that do not agree with their governments. We as Muslims have to stand up and say there is no justification for suicide bombing. There are people out there who we share the same values with.

### Fuad Nahdi

We now have to look to the future. We have to generally invest to a positive dynamic Muslim community. We must encourage and allow the debate on what this Muslim identity is. It has been stifled but it is an important issue. This debate, to be genuine, has to be inclusive of all opinions within the Muslim community and not to just pick the people whose opinions we are comfortable with at the exclusion of others. Omar Bakri is a good friend of mine but I never call him a sheikh because there is no institution within traditional Islam that would entitle him with the title sheikh except for the BBC and the jihad that we are seeing today has been sanctioned by Washington, the first that we have seen where jihad has been sanctioned outside the Muslim world. So we have to go back to the roots of the religion to combat this situation.. It is important in identity forming to find the co-essence of the religion. We are going through this reformation. After the treaty of Versailles, Germany went through humiliation which gave rise to Hitler after 12 years of the treaty. The humiliation of the Arab world has been much worse than what the Germans went through. Thank god we have not seen a Hitler in the Arab world, largely because of Islam. Islam has held it together but it has been eaten away and we have the core and it is on the verge of bursting. If we didn't have traditional Islam to protect us, then imagine 1.2 billion Muslims latching onto the Islam that promotes suicide bombing, then think of 10% of 1.2 billion as suicide bombers. So it is in our interest to go back to the values of Islam. Books need resources. It needs money. The equal opportunities [commission] gives £3.2million in advertising to ethnic publications every year...but it stops short with Muslim publications as they are dubious about religion. We have not had support. The problem in the Muslim community, is that there are generational gaps, cultural gaps but more importantly theological gaps. The real issue is a theological one. With suicide bombings the issues is theological and moral and it can only be dealt with by people who have acknowledged of the nuances of the religion. If there was a chemical

bomb attack in London, the people who would be sent to sort out the problem would be people who know about chemical weapons, and not just anybody. We need members of the community who are trained soldiers in the art of theology and morality and this is a complex situation. The people who do have this training are ignored by the establishment and we have to change that. When you have young British people fighting in Palestine, Iraq, Chechnya, Kashmir, Bosnia, two things you have to remember. Firstly, is the extent to which we have integrated and become British because it is part of British tradition to interfere. We interfered in Spanish civil war, South African boar war etc....its part of our tradition to interfere. The second thing is that we now live in the so called global village and the beauty is that we are connected by technology which we have part control and part of it is outside our control. The TV is there but we cannot dictate what the people see. We are watching one set but we are not seeing the same pictures. The day 56 people were killed in London, there were 42 people killed in Iraq, a normal day in Baghdad. People make moral equivalences whether we like it or not but the anguish of our young people, living day in day out getting their sob stories out. I was talking to an editor at channel four news and he said hundreds of thousands of people died in the tsunami and we gave at most 90 minutes of coverage and what happened in London, we gave 160 hours. People react to this kind of thing, this anger that is in us, we want to do something. We are responsible for the consequences of our foreign policy around the world. Young people are angered. The ones that blow themselves up are not stupid people. They are the crème de la crème of our society. They are people who are aggrieved by the injustices within the society. The theological door has to be closed. You have to find the right people to close it. We have the responsibility to make sure that people do not die. We are told by Bob Geldof that one person dies a second but they die because you want to have fresh mangos.

**Abdul Waheed (audience member)**

I felt like reacting to so many of the points that have been raised. I am struggling to think why I could not add so many of the threads together; I would add to the chairs introduction that there are many different strands of thought related to what has happened in the last few weeks by saying that we have our own different

logic and definition regarding certain issues. I am not sure we are talking about the same things. When we are talking about extremism, I am not sure what that means. I was in a gathering of Muslims and a lot of them were condemning extremism and I asked them what do you mean condemning extremism and their answer was killing innocent people. This is a definition that I can live with. I am from Hizb ut Tahrir which is on the radical fringe threatened with prescription as terrorists and yet we have followed a non violent political path for 50 years in spite of a lot of persecution in the Muslim world. I am told that aspiring to a caliphate in the Muslim world, which is popular amongst Muslims in the Muslim world, is extremist. I'm told that the view of the conflict in Palestine, seeing all the land is being occupied for political and religious reasons is something that is extremist. I take that view as a Muslim, and not a socialist, but I am viewed as an extremist for taking that view. In the last 2 weeks the goal posts have changed radically. Sheikh Qaradawi was banned from the UK and a lot of political groups that would have traditionally been invited to Downing Street are being shunned from there. We have to be frank and honest about what we mean as being extremist and then we can see where we come from and our views on it.

**Abdul Aziz Brown (audience member)**

There are Muslim voices for reform that need to be heard like Tariq Ramadan. They don't need their pictures flashed on the front page of the Sun saying this man is a terrorist. Whatever problems there have been and whatever reasons there are for what has happened, the debate has to involve the whole society, all different groups; we all need to get together and we have an examples for instance the Stop the War movement. Politicians have to listen to that, which they have not been doing and that's a big problem.

**Phil Lewis, Bradford Peace Studies (audience member)**

It might help to look at different analytical levels, when we are looking at relations in communities and especially the problem of integration. A lot of good things have happened in the Bradford experience, in the short term. A group of us from peace studies, church and police, realised months ago that we could be in crisis if there was a Madrid type of atrocity so we have put in place an emerging civic network where we engage with different groups: The business

community, the voluntary sector, the education and media and so on. We would put scenarios to them and ask them how they would respond. We managed to identify young Muslim professionals in the city and the subtext was that this was not us and them but us together responding to a potential assault on all of us. So that is one example of what you can do. Secondly, in Bradford, for 3 years now, we have developed an inter-cultural leadership school where we have identified young professionals in the city. We are a divided city, ethnically and religiously and so we tried to find young professionals who are role models for 13- 17 year olds. We take these professionals and train them in religion, media, literacy, leadership training and conflict resolution skills and they develop a network of trust that can help close the divide in the city. Thirdly, we have begun a dialogue with British educated imams on conflict resolution. I read Ziauddin Sardar's article in the New Statesman where he was talking and demonising the Taliban, Deobandis and Wahabis. Now my sense is that he is not close enough to the ground to realise that these communities are complex. There is a real danger in demonising these traditions, we have to learn to work with them. These are short term measures we can take

The issue of political agency and political action is important. Muslim youth have to find some channel for their political rage and anger. But it does not have to be called rage and anger. If we are talking about the left, it is called a political opinion. Hizb ut Tahrir is one organisation where Muslim people have found a political voice. There needs to be a series of options for people to choose from

#### Neil Ascherson (audience member)

This room is full of British Muslim intellectuals; each of you have been completely astonished by what all the others have said and that's a very bad sign. It shows that people are not talking to each other as they should.

#### Rashad Yaqoob (audience member)

I defended the first British Muslims who were convicted of alleged terrorism abroad in Yemen. I worked with Gareth Pierce on a number of cases including Moazzem Begg. In terms of me getting an understanding of the motivation and intention of our clients; it is a really complicated and fascinating

journey. The conclusions are similar to what Fuad said: these are intelligent, and semi integrated people but there is a massive vacuum in leadership and of clear perception in what Islam is in this country and what the role is also in this country. Anyone the BBC interviews and talks about jihad in the Omar Bakri way, you can assume knows nothing really about what's happening underground. For real answers, there has to be a period with engagement with these people underground. Deviancy in Islamic theology and what these boys have been instructed...that has what has happened...these boys have been instructed....there has been an operation, there has been an entire system and until we have studied the chain of causation and go to that focal point...there are secondary debates which are interesting such as integration, British Muslims getting their house in order and so on...my conclusion is that the lads I have spoken to, who claim to be mujahideen, they served in honourable wars, they see these as honourable missions. Due to the easy flow of information and the ease by which we can travel, this is unfortunately going to happen again. The question is why is Britain being targeted? Why suicide as opposed to what happened in the 80s and 90s jihad...this is a new phenomenon. My answer is, since a lot of these groups have gone underground, this Takfiri concept, this declaration of war from the American world and the reaction of people who are not necessarily scholars like bin laden, has created an exciting and motivating factor for young people, intelligent and motivated to join. So how do we address that?

#### Yahva Birt (audience member)

I think that we want to somehow own the problem and explain it in terms of debates that have been going for years with respect to ethnic minority groups: integration, citizenship and so on. But I would like to reinforce that whatever Al-Qaeda is, it is not a cult, it is a franchise. It's a disembodied idea, and one will not fight it by law but rather by the application of ideas. My main worry after 7/7 is that the government will feel under pressure to legislate first and policy will come much later, which may be too late. In the Muslim community, our political leaders do not have strong grass roots connections with the youth so they cannot lead them, they can only keep up with them and in doing so they are not sufficiently condemnatory for the government's liking. The government thinks in the centralised whereas our community is highly fragmented and highly decentralised. We cannot

contain this debate in the nation state and make it solely British. That has been the focus of the debate tonight but I think that direction is mistaken.

**Roger Hardy BBC World Service (audience member)**

A very intuitive thought...the debate has been rich, sometimes overrich. I think we know the causes of all this. I think the Blair government knew a year ago the causes. Go to the Sunday Times website and read documents they got hold of. The Whitehall reports distilling the advice of experts that have been built up before and after 9/11 and it sets out that cocktail of grievances of the Muslim community, including Iraq. My conclusion is rather stark: I think the broad causes are known and they are series of factors that have produced humiliation and in the words of one of the experts, violence legitimised by religion, wipes away the stain of humiliation which could be individual or collective or both. The policy makers both in Whitehall and Washington know the roots of failure but the failure is to do something...in the longer term dimension, which is now called the battle for hearts and minds, does any thinking person think that the battle for Muslim hearts and minds is being won and likely to be won? It is based on a misunderstanding, captured ironically in a title of a book, 'Good Muslim, Bad Muslim' written by Mahmood Mamdani. Very much in the spirit of Edward Said, he deconstructs the idea that there are these nice cuddly Muslims over there and if only you could mobilise against the others. It's a myth.

**Robin Soans**

Difference and how dangerous is difference. When I was young, the tendency in this country was for everyone to be the same. My parents wanted me to turn out like them and in society everyone should stay in the stratum that they were born and that they should not be any social mobility and that the whole point of my education is that I should grow up and be the same. And then I remember when I was at Oxford where there was a debate 'Vive La difference' that there was a debate of the very thing of 'should we be different'. This was the 60s and there were huge movements in this country which said that there should be social change and be a huge amount of difference and that it became encouraged. At the time of 'Look Back in Anger' a play that changed the mould of British theatre, there was a play at the west end

called 'Hello Darling I am home' and every play up to that point was required to be the same. You had a nice set of French windows at the back and somebody came with flowers and said 'hello darling' and have a drink and that was the play and everyone had a nice time and went home. And then something quite radical happened in our society and we became proud to be different. For example, in my sphere 20 years later if you were a one legged, one eyed hermaphrodite from Indonesia who wrote a play in entirely monosyllabic rhyming couplets about sex in a toilet, you probably got a queue of people who want to put it on because it was different. And we began to be different about our multicultural society, a society that was composed of people that are different and we say now that this is one of community's great strengths. That we rejoice in our liberality, our welcoming of all people. But we are very selective. We say things like 'oh I like that Muslim but I don't really like that one' and so although we aspire to be a multicultural community, and some respects we are, but we are still selective. Having forged this difference, there is a terrific danger lurking here. There is a quote by a psychologist 'the key to the ideology of violence is to see your enemy as subhuman'.....oh they are only jews, blacks, gay and not normal in any sense of the word and that is coupled with the child soldier from the freedom army in the NRA in Uganda who says that when she was being trained to kill [Mobutu's troops] that she should see them as animals. They are different....scary things....you will find it much easier to kill them. There is a possibility in a divided world, in a world where you have Bush saying 'you are either with us or against us' to persuade people that the differences can be widened into violence and that you can take an idea and feed it and harbour it and nurture it until it becomes exceedingly dangerous. This is a problem in our society because at one time we are trying to be liberal, and we are trying to encourage a multi ethnicity but at the same time there are forces which are trying to exploit differences. In Africa, if there were signs of a tribal feud both sides would be armed with arms, sometimes from America, sometimes from Russia, sometimes by both, sometimes by America with Russian rifles to make it look like that the Russians had done it. Basically it was an attempt to exacerbate and continue the tribal feud and in many instances in the world, you can take the notion of difference and feed it until it becomes violent.

### Sarah Waseem (audience member)

There have been quite a few references to youth and I am a Muslim youth working on the ground. Actually I am a Muslim youth working on the ground who found her faith at university. Just on reflection, I found my British identity by finding my faith. Its reflective of a lot of second generation Muslims, born in this country and then find their faith and through that they find they optimise their citizenship and their britishness, instead of an awkward assimilation. It is through their faith they find that they are proud of their Britishness and they wish to contribute to their community. So what is about going to university that facilitates this? I look at it and I see that there was infrastructure for debate with Muslims and non Muslims. The cultural, theological, generational gap, I can relate to it, because we evolve through this when we are at university through education, dialogue and debate. What can we do and reach out to the elusive British youth? It is about infrastructure, creating these community projects and groups in which the youth can feel included. I was raised in the Home Counties and I did not feel included in the society, feeling an awkward relationship between me and my non Muslim friends. But now, by participating and feeling that I am British and am included in the society, that I feel I and many others can reach their full potential.

### Humera Khan

I think we have the wrong Blair in government: there is another Blair doing far better work in the community. I ran a workshop on Muslim fatherhood and one of things that surprised me that the fathers said was that being a father bought them together in this group as fatherhood is universal. But being a Muslim and Islam gave them added value. We are human beings first but Islam gives us an added value to who we are. The thing about alienation of people, youth and others, it is not only about economic poverty, it is also about poverty of opportunity because people do not feel anything positive about themselves. I have dealt with young people from middle class backgrounds suffering from drug abuse. I was part of a dialogue that the Guardian carried out on Muslim youth and I was on the panel. I have worked with the community for 20 years and I was systematically excluded from the panel because I said what the secular media didn't want to hear. It should not be people from outside the community who dictates are

our internal debate. We need to be part of the bigger debate and we need to say what we feel, we have to be sitting in rooms and chucking eggs at each other. As far solutions are concerned, the answer is with women: Muslim women have been systematically excluded from government, and I have personal experience of being excluded from government debates because they don't like what I say. Women are a creative force, they are the nurturing force, they understand the process of change. Get us involved and you will see a big change.

### Hisham Hellyer

In terms of what needs to be done, I need to understand the people who are against us before they can understand me. I want to understand the Muslim suicide bombers; I need to get grips with that before I can do something about it. We need to be able to address the problems in the communities where authority is suddenly a man in a beard and a long robe that can come be an absolute scholar that can override everything that has taken place for the last 1500 years. We need to be able to address that and put forward the case for traditional classical Islam, which is the only thing that can save the Muslim community let alone the non-Muslims. I am a optimist and I see a lot of good things. I see all these eloquent speakers. A lot of people see this time as being a time of fithna. I asked what does fithna mean from an Arab and he told me that it's the process of burning away impurities to reveal gold. I see a lot of gold emerging.

### Robin Soans

It is extraordinary what a potent notion dignity is; personal dignity. One of the problems with young people is that they find it sadly lacking in their lives. It seems to me that anything, whether it be clearer leadership, whether it be more responsibility from politicians, whether it be better understanding and integration, needs to respect dignity. You need to have your dignity intact. It's a curiously potent part of the human make up that you want your dignity and integrity intact. And whatever can be done to increase it, nurture it, harbour it, protect it is a force for good and a way forward. We are not really talking to each other, which is a lack of dignity. We may be listening but we are not talking to each other which erodes a person's dignity and gets us into problems. So I believe that you need to give the people in the community the dignity they deserve.

**Fuad Nahdi**

Despite all the problems, there is no other place I would like to be as a Muslim but Britain. The opportunities here are unparalleled and British Muslims are leading Muslims globally, in whatever good the Muslims are producing. But it is not easy. I would like to quote Mullah Nasiruddin. Once he wanted to learn how to play the guitar so he went to a teacher who told him its very easy but you pay £10 for the first lesson and then £5 for the rest. So he said alright, can I start with the second lesson. This way you will not learn how to deal with the issues that confront us. We hear a lot about how London responded after 7/7. One thing we miss however, is that 1/10 people in London are Muslim. Basically we a part of this London

community. We are neighbours. This is a sad chapter but we need to renew how humanity. Please give us the ring to fight our issues out but make it a levelling field because the last two weeks I had the chance to write in the mainstream but I am sorry, I think that as a British Muslim that knows his community, I have a lot to contribute. But if an editor calls me up asking me for 900 words on something they would like written, that is sensational, I would prefer to say no because its not the way forward. We are as a community are a great resources to the country and to the world. We live in a global village and we need to look at things globally. To fight extremism and terrorism you have to fight with ideas, and the ideas are they but they lack space and a level playing field. We need to talk to each other but we also need to listen and this ability to listen is critical.

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