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Researching Muslim minorities:
Some reflections on fieldwork in Britain

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Introduction

This paper is about some of the problems and possibilities of researching the Muslim minority in contemporary Britain. In particular, my reflections are based on the experience of living amongst, and writing about, the 50,000 strong Muslim population of Bradford, a city in the north of England long noted for its now largely redundant woollen textiles industry.[1] Muslim men first came to Bradford to work in this and other low-paid sectors of the economy during the post-war boom of the late 1950s and 1960s. They arrived mainly from Mirpur district in Pakistani-administered 'Azad' Kashmir, but also from other parts of Pakistan, as well as Bangladesh and India. Since the 1970s economic restructuring has hit these communities particularly hard, with male unemployment amongst Pakistanis in Bradford running at over 25 per cent.[2] Nevertheless, having reunited their families and built up institutionally complete and culturally vibrant communities, Muslims now consider themselves to be here to stay. Moreover, a majority of the population today is British-born.

In January 1989 however, Bradford's Muslims came to international attention in such a way that their belonging to the British nation was to be called seriously into question. A copy of Salman Rushdie's novel The Satanic Verses - said to defame the character of the Prophet of Islam and his family - was burnt by members of the Bradford Council for Mosques.[3] This was followed, one month later, by Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa calling for the death of Rushdie for blasphemy. In the wake of these events a dominant discourse emerged amongst the liberal establishment which produced Muslims

[2] In 1991, based on the 'ethnic' question asked at the census, it was found that of one million or so Muslims estimated to be living in Britain, approaching 460,000 were Pakistanis. Relative to the majority 'white' population, Pakistanis (along with Bangladeshis) experience some of the highest levels of deprivation in the country. In many cases, this can be seen as a consequence of migration from places like Mirpur, which have a long history of political marginalisation and socio-economic underdevelopment. See M. Anwar, 'Muslims in Britain: 1991 Census and other statistical sources, Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations (CSIC) Papers, No. 9, Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, 1993.
[3] The Bradford Council of Mosques was instituted as a forum for the representation of Muslim concerns in the city during 1981. For an account of its work see P. Lewis, Islamic Britain, (I.B. Tauris, London, 1994). For useful commentaries on the Rushdie Affair see M.M. Ahsan and A.R. Kidwai (eds.), Sacrilege versus Civility, (The Islamic Foundation), Leicester 1989, and L. Appignanesi and S. Maitland (eds.), The Rushdie File, London 1989.

as fanatical, intolerant and ignorant 'outsiders' who should either embrace the 'responsibilities' that come with 'a British way of life' or make their homes elsewhere.[4]

This then was the context when late in 1993 I began a year's fieldwork in Bradford to collect material for a doctorate in anthropology. Mine was an attempt to explore the different ways in which Muslims were representing their identities, both to each other and to wider society, in a post-Rushdie context. Given the size and diversity of Bradford's Muslim communities, this meant that I had to draw upon a number of methodological approaches to carry out my work. Nevertheless, while I consulted historical and contemporary sources and analysed quantitative data sets, my main research tools remained broadly anthropological. Following the pioneering ethnographer, Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942), most anthropologists have sought to actively immerse themselves in the lives and languages of distant 'exotic' cultures by taking up residence in situ.[5] In common with anthropologists who have worked overseas, my methodological approach combined participant observation with unstructured interviews. I also recorded my observations, reflections and any developing theories in a field diary. However, working at home did make a difference to the conduct of my research. The people that I was studying were in the process of reconstructing their worldviews in a pluralistic context dominated by English culture and language, the 'habitus' within which I myself have been socialised. Moreover, as the Rushdie Affair illustrated, Muslims' calls for greater recognition of their religious beliefs and practices represent an active challenge to just what it means to be 'British' in a multi-ethnic society.

Undertaking fieldwork 'at home' in an urban setting is just one of the things I want to write about in this paper. In what follows, I begin with a general overview of the new Islamic presence in Western Europe. Thereafter, I come to a series of reflections on the practicalities of making contacts with Muslim communities in Bradford. As we shall see, my work was conducted mainly in English with Muslim leaders and youth. I met people in public spaces such as mosques, community centres, schools and colleges, although it was, of course, easier to gain access to some of these contexts than others. This discussion is followed by a consideration of the role of my own subjectivity in the process of collecting data. Given a widespread recognition amongst social-scientists that no knowledge is 'value-free', it is important to locate the way in which I was positioned in the field vis-à-vis my respondents.

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[4] A fatwa is a formal opinion in Islamic law promulgated by a specialist, a mufti. However, there is now some doubt as to whether, technically speaking, Khomeini did in fact issue a fatwa in this context. An article in The Guardian (13 November 1996) has argued that it was Western observers who first used the term in relation to Rushdie's book.

[5] For a recent introduction to the anthropology of religion, with useful references to Islam, see C. Bennett, In Search of the Sacred: Anthropology and the Study of Religions, London 1996.

Finally, in the wake of well-established critiques of western scholarship on Islam, I briefly examine the possibilities for representing Muslims after Orientalism.

Reconstructing Islam in Western Europe: Global and Local Contexts

A recent volume edited by two anthropologists with an interest in Muslim society, Ahmed and Donnan, begins by insisting that Islamic Studies today must change, 'in response to the fact that the lives of many ordinary Muslims have been changing, and…as a reflection of the equally dramatic changes taking place in the world more generally'.[6] Partly, but only partly, in sympathy with Said's polemic on the essentialism of 'Orientalist' scholarship - to which we shall return in the final section - their statement contains an implicit critique of what many have traditionally seen as a textually based field of study, one which has not much concerned itself with the everyday practice of Islam.[7] Of course, this is just the sort of critique that one might expect from anthropologists who tend to examine the working of things from the 'bottom-up'. Such an approach, of course, has its own problems. However, what is perhaps most important about Ahmed and Donnan's intervention is that, even as two established social-scientists, they still want to (re)claim Islamic Studies as their own field.[8] For them, Islamic Studies is broadly construed as multi-disciplinary; it is bounded only by an interest in 'the study of Muslim groups and their religion Islam'.[9] This, I think, is significant and moreover captures the spirit of an increasing number of publications that seek to explore contemporary Muslim societies. While sacred texts often remain a central focus of attention, not least in terms of the commodification of Islamic culture, themes such as travel, space and the media have begun to organise interesting volumes on ordinary Muslim lives.[10] They have in common the insistence that religious identities are always fluid, contextual and contested. Moreover, in most of these works, where there is a shift in scholarly emphasis

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[6] A.S. Ahmed and H. Donnan (eds.), Islam, Globalization and Postmodernity, (Routledge, London, 1994), p.1.

[7] E. Said, Orientalism, (Penguin, London, 1978).

[8] According to B.S. Turner, Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism, (Routledge, London, 1994), few social-scientists were working on Islam in the 1970s. Brief reflection on why interest has renewed since the 1980s suggests a number of explanations including: 1) the Islamic resurgence, following the failure of secular-nationalist regimes to deliver significant social, economic or political development in the Muslim world; 2) the decline of Communism in the late 1980s, it has been argued rightly or wrongly, leaves Islam as the only 'world system' that currently offers an 'alternative', or indeed a 'threat', to the cultural and economic hegemony of the West; and 3) during the 1980s postmodernism and globalisation became established as a significant, if controversial, trends in contemporary social theory. I say more about both of these later on in my paper.

[9] Ahmed and Donnan, Islam, Globalization and Postmodernity, p.1.

[10] See for example, D.F. Eickelman and J. Piscatori (eds.), Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration and the Religious Imagination, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1990; M. Fischer and M. Abedi, Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogues in Postmodernity and Tradition, Wisconsin, 1990; B. Metcalf (ed.), Making Muslim Space in North

to include cultural practices as well as classical texts, there is also an interest in the margins of the Muslim world, as well as its centre. The study of Muslim minorities appears to have come of age.

Around seven million Muslims now live in Western Europe.[11] This figure compares with the eleven and a half million Muslims in the former Soviet Union who trace their roots to the medieval empire of the Mongols, and the five million Muslims in the Balkans (Yugoslavia, Albania, Bulgaria and beyond) whose heritage is marked by Ottoman interests in that area. While there were of course historical centres of Islamic civilisation in Sicily and Andalusia until the eleventh and fifteenth centuries respectively, the Muslim population of Western Europe today has only recently been established. Muslims have come mainly as economic migrants and political refugees from North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia, settling in several nations including Spain and Italy in the south, and Norway and Denmark in the north. However, by far the largest concentrations of Muslims have been in the following countries: France (2.619 million), especially from Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey; Germany (2.012 million), especially from Turkey; and Britain (1 million), especially from Pakistan, Bangladesh and India.[12]

The notion of migration (hijra) has a prominent place in the history of the Islamic community, given the Prophet's journey from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE. Although migration leading to a life under non-Muslim rule is quite a different matter, it is interesting to note that historically, the permissibility of travelling and trading in Christendom, as Muslims have done for many centuries, prompted only minor debates in Islamic law.[13] This changed somewhat during the colonial period when many Muslims around the world found themselves ruled by non-Islamic governments such as the British in India. The main issue under these circumstances was whether it was desirable for Muslims to migrate to lands still ruled by their co-religionists.

In any case, there is no precedent for the numbers of Muslims that have voluntarily sought a life 'amongst the unbelievers' in the modern period.[14] For the majority, men who came to work in low-paid sectors of western labour markets from the late 1950s onwards, the most common justification for their migration was economic necessity (darura). Debates about the status of migrants in Islamic law were, therefore, never uppermost in their minds. Nevertheless, many ordinary Muslims have tirelessly sought to reconstruct the institutional, ritual and customary 'life support systems' of Islam in the West, most

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America and Europe, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1996; and D.F. Eickelman and J.W. Anderson (eds.), New Media in the Muslim World, Indiana 1999.

[11] S. Vertovec and C. Peach (eds.), Islam in Europe: The Politics of Religion and Community, Basingstoke and London 1997, 14. See also T. Gerholm and T. Lithman (eds.), The New Islamic Presence in Western Europe, London 1988, and J. Nielsen, Muslims in Western Europe, 2nd edn, Edinburgh 1995.

[12] Vertovec and Peach, Islam in Europe, 14.

[13] See B. Lewis and D. Schnapper (eds.), Muslims in Europe, London 1994.

[14] Lewis and Schnapper, Muslims in Europe.

especially since families began to be reunited in the 1970s. Yet, as Werbner has observed of this process, Muslim settlers

> ...do not simply share a culture deriving from their place of birth; the taken for granted features of this culture are no longer natural and self-evident. They have to be renewed and relocated in this new context.[15]

So, as contexts change, so too do interpretations and styles of religion. Indeed, Metcalf considers that the transformation of contemporary Islamic symbols and institutions is probably most evident, and perhaps most innovative, at the margins of the Muslim world.[16]

Starting more or less from scratch then, Muslims have taken a number of steps towards establishing themselves in the West, both in terms of building up their own community organisations and institutions, and negotiating with the authorities for a greater recognition of their public needs. For example, across Western Europe, mosques, madrasas and religious associations have been instituted to provide facilities for prayer, education and a wide range of other community functions. The halal meat trade is well established within the European Union, which currently exempts both Jews and Muslims from stunning animals before ritual slaughter. The question of regulation remains an issue however, as does concern about the open-air slaughtering of animals during 'id al-adha.[17] Reflecting more their interactions with wider society, Muslims have lobbied for accommodations within the work place and public institutions with regard to religious holidays, prayer rooms and the availability of halal food. State schools have perhaps received most attention, with concessions sought by Muslim parents in terms of the availability of single-sex schools and modest uniforms for girls, Islamic collective worship and multi-faith Religious Education. In many schools there is now more attention to Muslim concerns about the curriculum in sport, art and music and in some countries there are state-funded Muslim schools. In other areas of public life, some diasporized Muslims would like a separate system of personal law, most especially in respect of marriage, divorce and the custody of children. However, like the calls for state-funded Muslim schools, such claims have been met with the charge of separatism. A state's system of law is routinely seen, again like its schools, as providing a common and, as such,

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[15] P. Werbner, The Migration Process, Oxford 1990, 1.

[16] Metcalf (ed.), Making Muslim Space. Indeed, it has been argued that the novelty of the circumstances in which diasporised Muslims find themselves 'has facilitated changes in religious institutions and practices at least as important as those inspired by earlier generations of elite Muslim intellectuals in the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent', Eickelman and Piscatori (eds), Muslim Travellers, 5.

[17] The Muslim News, 25 December 1998.

integrating reference point, for the nation's diverse ethnic groups.[18] Finally, although many dead are still sent 'home' for burial overseas, there are an increasing number of Muslim bodies being buried within Western Europe. Negotiations with the authorities have sought to ensure that, according to Muslim custom, the deceased are laid to rest in a cloth shroud as soon as possible after death.

While Muslims have been broadly successful in reconstructing many of the main features of their religious worlds in Western Europe, levels of institutional completeness and public recognition do, of course, vary within and between nation-states. Muslims have been most successful in areas where there are large enough numbers to demand concessions from the local state. However, given the proliferation of Muslim organisations following migration, organising single bodies to make representations on a national level has proved more difficult.[19] Moreover, in contexts where 'race' and culture, as well as religion, mark their 'difference' from majority populations, Muslim leaders have often been required to rationalise Islamic religious beliefs and practices to wider society. This is by no means commonplace in majority Muslim countries where Islam, for the most part, remains taken for granted as part of the overall cultural context.[20]

The status of religion and minorities can also vary greatly in the pluralised secular democracies of Western Europe. In England, for example, most Muslim migrants and their families have always been 'citizens' of the nation although there is a Head of State who is head of the established Anglican Church too. Islam therefore has no official status as a religion but the integration of Muslims is encouraged on a communal basis. In contrast, while Muslims in Germany have been able to secure a degree of recognition from the state, a biological rather than a political construction of national belonging has impeded this process. Until very recently, Muslims - even those born in Germany - were seen not as citizens but as 'guest workers'.[21] In France, where the state recognises, and seeks to

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[18] For a discussion of the situation in England see S. Poulter, Ethnicity, Law and Human Rights, Oxford 1998. Poulter argues that the very diversity of Islamic law would make an accommodation difficult to achieve.

[19] For example, during 1994, Conservative Home Secretary Michael Howard advised Muslim organisations to 'speak with one voice' if they wanted to have more influence on government policy-making in Britain (Q-News, 25 March 1994). Muslims responded when, in November 1997, another umbrella organisation, the Muslim Council of Britain, was inaugurated with the specific objective of representing 'Muslim issues' to the (now Labour) government (The Muslim News, 26 December 1997).

[20] That said, there is highly charged political contestation over the signifier 'Islam' throughout the Muslim world and for some 'Muslim' minorities especially, such as the 'Alawis from Turkey or the Ahmadis from Pakistan, migration to the West allows much greater freedom of religious expression. See Metcalf, Making Muslim Space.

[21] The Muslim News, 25 December 1998, reports that the new German government has announced a revision in the nationality laws, which will allow all immigrants to become citizens, should they fulfil various criteria. One such qualification is being able to demonstrate economic self-sufficiency. This rules out the 25% of Turkish settlers who are currently unemployed. Accounts of Muslims in Germany can be found in Gerholm and Lithman, The New Islamic Presence in Western Europe; Eickelman and Piscatori, Muslim Travellers; Nielsen, Muslims in Western Europe; Lewis and Schnapper, Muslims in Europe; Metcalf, Making Muslim Space; Vertovec and Peach, Islam in Europe.

integrate, the individual rather than the group, the situation is different again. Given that religion and the state are formally separated, expressions of religious identity in the public sphere have been interpreted as an unwelcome challenge to the cherished French principle of laicity. For example, in 1989 three Muslim girls were banned from wearing Islamic head-scarves to a state school in Creil.[22]

Islam in the contemporary West must therefore be seen as the product of complex and ongoing interactions between Muslim minorities and the states and societies in which they now reside. However, the continuing influences of migrants' homelands and international Islamic currents are also important. Such links are facilitated by the ever-expanding possibilities of rapid communication across the boundaries of contemporary nation-states, that is, globalisation.[23] The impact of globalisation has undoubtedly been rather contradictory, most especially in terms of the power geometry, which constitutes the relationship between 'the West' and 'the Rest'. Nevertheless, technological innovations, such as affordable international air travel, satellite media systems and the Internet, have had the effect of increasing contact between people around the world in such a way that many are experiencing the globe as a 'time-space combination' in common. Of course, the circulation of languages, people, goods, capital and ideas is nothing new, not least within the Muslim world or, indeed, its relationship with the West.[24] However, there is little doubt that the revolution heralded by modern communications technology has accelerated the rate, and highlighted the significance, of these social, cultural, economic and political processes. For example, elite Muslim organisations can reproduce their ideas and imagine global communities as never before, both in terms of speed and coverage. Notably, the Muslims in Britain who lobbied for Rushdie's book to be banned in 1989 were first alerted to its contents when photocopies, faxes and telexes were sent to Britain by a network of Islamic activists based in India.[25]

So it is then that Muslim migrants, apparently on the periphery of the Islamic world, can not only maintain linkages with 'old' Muslim centres in their homelands, but also create multiple 'new' Muslim centres of their own. The globalisation of Muslim communities does not suggest some united or

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[22] For accounts of Muslims in France see the listings for Muslims in Germany above.

[23] S. Hall, 'The Question of Cultural Identity', in S. Hall, D. Held and T. McGrew (eds.), Modernity and Its Futures, Cambridge-Oxford 1992, 273-325. On the one hand, it has been argued that globalisation has given rise to a process of cultural homogenisation where the consumer-capitalism of the West has been exported worldwide to such an extent that it is now routinely considered 'universal'. On the other hand however, some have maintained that because globalisation has had the effect of relativising notions of cultural discreteness, it has also given rise to a revivalist defense of particularistic identifications by national, ethnic and religious groupings.

[24] There is, of course, a credible argument that Islamic civilisation played a significant part in the formation of modern Europe. See, for example, N. Matar, Islam in Britain 1558-1685, Cambridge 1998.

[25] C. Bhatt, Liberation and Purity: race, new religious movements and the ethics of postmodernity, London 1997.

undifferentiated umma however.[26] As noted above, unity on a national or even local level is difficult enough to sustain, and the diversity of all Muslim communities can be enumerated in the many different ways that religious identity is qualified and crosscut by identifications of sect, region, language, gender, ethnicity, generation and class. So, while many Muslims may increasingly 'imagine' their religious communities globally, they have to contextualise them locally. Moreover, if we take the idea of a locally contextualised Islam seriously we should be wary of measuring the 'new' margins of the Muslim world against 'norms' determined by 'old' Islamic centres. Urban communities such as those I studied in Bradford are no more or less representative of 'Muslim society' than the villages of Mirpur in 'Azad' Kashmir from which many of my respondents' families originate. Finally, it is surely a matter of note that, as Voll has observed, this implosion of the local and the global is also gradually breaking down some of the boundaries which have traditionally made for a radical separation of scholarly Western 'selves' and objectified Muslim 'others'.[27] The fact of 'the Rest in the West' rather than 'the West and the Rest', as Hall has put it, has created the conditions of possibility for scholars such as myself to write about the realities of researching 'Islamic Britain' or 'Britannia's Crescent'.[28]

Going to the Field: Encountering British-Muslim Communities in Bradford

Beginning my fieldwork in Bradford, I found a bewildering number of 'texts' competing to represent Muslims, most especially in public spaces. These were not communities waiting to be 'discovered' by some intrepid anthropologist. Produced by the state, media, civil society and, ever increasingly, Muslims themselves, such 'texts' were diverse in terms of the medium of their production, the patterns of their consumption and their ideological perspectives and goals. Indeed, all of the following were all available to me in supplementing material collected through participant observation and unstructured interviews: state policy-making documents on minority issues; minutes of local council meetings concerning Muslim affairs; educational syllabi for a multi-cultural society; oral history projects recording the formation of Asian communities in Bradford; television and radio programmes, newspapers and magazines including those produced by Muslims for Muslims; desk-top published tracts distributed by competing Muslim movements; tourist information leaflets selling 'Bradford's

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[26] For further discussion see my paper, S. McLoughlin, 'In the name of the umma: globalisation, 'race' relations and Muslim identity politics in Bradford', in W.A.R. Shadid and P.S. van Koningsveld (eds.), Political Participation and Identities of Muslims in non-Muslim States, Kampen, 1996, 206-228.

[27] Cited in T. Sonn (ed.), Islam and the Question of Minorities, Atlanta 1996, 23-25.

[28] Hall, 'The Question of Cultural Identity'. See also Lewis, Islamic Britain, and D. Joly, *Britannia's Crescent*, Aldershot 1995.

flavours of Asia'; and novels by authors such as Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi who have written about the experiences of being Asian and Muslim in Britain.

Of course, one of my main concerns in Bradford was to find out just what ordinary Muslims themselves made of these various representations of their identity. Given the size and scale of the urban fieldsite, public religious and cultural events were the single most useful way of meeting people when I first arrived in the city. Regular fairs, talks, camps, conferences, exhibitions, plays, films and charity dinners all provided opportunities for occasional conversations with British-Muslims and allowed me to begin to gauge what issues people really felt were important. It was quite usual then for me to check local libraries, shops, community centres and restaurants for posters and flyers advertising events in the inner-city ward where I chose to live.

After a few weeks of rather general activities involving, for the most part, fleeting contact with a wide range of people, I was keen to immerse myself in more specific projects that would provide me with opportunities for in-depth participant observation. In this regard, I found that it was public meetings organised by the local Racial Equality Council and Inter-Faith Centre that were most important for the progress of my research. At discussions of the educational 'underachievement' of minorities, council funding cuts or the new Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education in schools, I met the local 'community leaders' who eventually became some of my key informants. They held positions of influence in local mosques, voluntary organisations and schools so I quickly learned the importance of being in regular contact with them. Indeed, establishing relationships with some ordinary Muslims might well have been impossible without the co-operation of these 'brokers'. The state's attempt to manage racialised and ethnicised minorities through immigration legislation and the monitoring of welfare benefits has created - not surprisingly - some suspicion of 'outsiders' without established bona fides.

In all of the field sites I was eventually to work in, I sought, as far as possible, to write about the way in which different contexts brought together the discrepant representations of Muslim identity made in turn by the state, community leaders and 'ordinary' people themselves. Given this concern, freedom of movement between contexts and groups of people was essential. Certainly, I can understand why involving oneself in reciprocal relationships confined to a limited range of contexts has brought all sorts of benefits to traditional anthropological practice. However, when in the 1970s the anthropologist Verity Saifullah-Khan 'became a female relative' in an extended Pakistani-Muslim family in Bradford, she had to accept all sorts of restrictions on her activities.[29] For example, her adopted 'parents' prevented her from taking a role in a local play as they saw it as an 'unrespectable' activity. By

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[29] V. Saifullah-Khan, Pakistani Villagers in a British City, (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Bradford 1974).

contrast with Saifullah-Khan, I had neither the hindrance of such restrictive relationships or, by the same token, the benefit of such intense reciprocal connections.

I did hope, nevertheless, to be able to 'give something back' to the people I wanted to work with. As we shall see in the next section, such a statement reflects a general move away from impersonal and dispassionate approaches to fieldwork in anthropology. It begins to summarise the ethical difficulty of 'observing' respondents without 'participating' in some sort of mutually agreed 'project' with them. Even in the 1970s, Anwar notes that he made good contacts with Pakistani-Muslims in Rochdale because he helped and advised people on a range of community affairs.[30] In any case, as we shall see now, three of the main projects I settled on produced quite different results. I sometimes failed in securing the participant-observer status I was so keen to develop, often for reasons far beyond my control.

One of the issues that many Muslims suggested would be a useful focus for my research was the call for Islamic schools to be funded by the British State. Fortunately, during the period of my research in Bradford, Feversham College, a Muslim girls' school, put in an application for financial assistance from the government.[31] However, when I spoke to both the Head Teacher and Chair of Governors, it soon became clear that I would not be given permission to participate in, or observe, the life of the school. They were quite happy to give me interviews, as were other key figures involved in the application process. Moreover, I did eventually visit the school for an 'open evening' in October 1994. Nevertheless, it is worth exploring briefly why my proposed presence at the school was not welcomed. My gender was certainly an issue; the call for Muslim schools is in large part an expression of the desire amongst many Muslim parents for their daughters to be educated in a single-sex environment and I was, after all, a single white male. However, there was also the question of whether I could be trusted. Although Feversham College had welcomed a number of (mainly female) visitors in the past, not least to try and underline that the institution was not simply 'separatist', this has not always had positive effects. Some have written less than complimentary accounts of their visits to the school.[32] So, given that an important application for state funding was in progress, the school's representatives could not, understandably, afford discrepant accounts of their project to emerge unchecked.

York Road mosque proved to be a more successful focus for intensive fieldwork because a ready-made role emerged for me at the institution. For nine months, every Sunday afternoon from 2

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[30] M. Anwar, The Myth of Return: Pakistanis in Britain, London 1979.
[31] See S. McLoughlin, 'A-part of the community? The politics of representation and a Muslim school's application for state funding', Innovation: the European Journal of the Social Sciences, 11.4 (1998), 451-470.
[32] See, for example, S. Khanum, 'Education and the Muslim girl', in G. Saghal and N. Yuval-Davis (eds.), Refusing Holy Orders, London 1992, 124-140.

p.m. to 4p.m., I taught the basics of English and Maths to a group of around a dozen Muslim boys. I was paid £12 per week for my work as the mosque was part of a study support network of schools and community centres organised by Bradford Local Education Authority (LEA). The aim of the network was to assist Muslim children with their homework and exam revision at a time when their 'underachievement' at school had become very high profile in the city.[33] Indeed, I was first introduced to the President of the mosque over lunch at a large conference organised by Bradford LEA to explore ethnic minority underachievement. It was there that he invited me to become one of two tutors on the study support scheme. My teaching, and in particular the friendly relationship I developed with the President, secured the opportunity to meet the parents of children attending the mosque and the freedom to observe the day-to-day functions of the institution.[34]

In the summer of 1994 I began fieldwork on another in-depth project. Having become aware that the LEA was encouraging inter-cultural exchanges between schools in Bradford and Pakistan, I was told that Belle Vue Boys' School, which has a 90% Muslim intake, was interested in organising such a project. Unfortunately, no LEA funding was available so the school had to take on the funding of their visit to Pakistan themselves. Making my first visit to Belle Vue on the occasion of an ﻋﯿﺪ party, I met with the students and staff involved in planning for the trip which was to include a cricket tournament at Karachi Grammar School. The students, who were about to go into sixth form, soon involved me in organising various activities which eventually raised £2600 towards the cost of sending a 'team' of thirteen overseas. The plan was to go first to Karachi to play cricket, and then up to Mirpur and the Panjab, to visit students' families and see the sights. During our fund-raising activities I built up strong relationships with the 'cricketers' and was able to observe them and question them about their identities as British-Pakistani-Muslims. Indeed, it was my intention to accompany the tour to Pakistan and explore how my respondents 'played' out their multiple identities both 'home' and 'away'. However, due to the prolonged, violent expression of ethnic tensions in Karachi, and the threat that this posed to personal safety, parents and teachers decided that the tour – and with it my research plans - would have to be postponed indefinitely.[35] As I learned the hard way, the experience of fieldworking can be very unpredictable.

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[33] Figures released as a part of the government's controversial secondary schools' league tables in 1993 indicated that when it came to GCSE examination results, Bradford came seventy-fifth out of one-hundred and eight local authorities (The Bradford Telegraph and Argus, 17 November 1993).
[34] See S. McLoughlin, 'The Mosque-Centre, Community-Mosque: multi-functions, funding and the reconstruction of Islam in Bradford', The Scottish Journal of Religious Studies, 19 (1998), 211-227.
[35] I did eventually travel to Pakistan and, together with a colleague from Leicester University, recently published the following: S. McLoughlin and V.S. Kalra, 'Wish You Were(n't) Here: Discrepant Representations of Mirpur in Narratives of Migration, Diaspora and Tourism', in R. Kaur and J. Hutnyk (eds.), Travel-Worlds: Journeys in Contemporary Cultural Politics, London 1999, 120-136.

Partial Connections: Reflexivity and the Researcher[36]

> According to ethnographies written in the classic mode, the detached observer epitomizes neutrality and impartiality. This detachment is said to produce objectivity because social reality comes into focus only if one stands at a certain distance. When one stands too close, the ethnographic lens supposedly blurs its human subjects.[37]

In recent years, with the 'postmodern' turn in anthropology, there has been an increasing recognition that no method of academic enquiry is 'value-free'. Lyotard, for example, describes 'the postmodern condition' in terms of a pervasive incredulity towards the grand-narratives of legitimation such as 'science' which hold a modernist view of the world in place.[38] The universal claims of post-Enlightenment thinking are therefore seen as giving way to more contingent and fragmentary, more local and particular, constructions of knowledge. In anthropology, this crisis of certainty can be linked to the work of Asad, Said and others who have shown that anthropological representations of 'other cultures', knowingly or unknowingly, helped to justify Western colonial hegemony.[39] The limitations of Said's critique are briefly considered in my final section, but for present purposes he very clearly anticipates the methodological root of the postmodern predicament,

> No one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position or from the mere activity of being a member of a society. These continue to bear on what he does professionally.[40]

Having sought to deconstruct the authority of the author, 'postmodernists' have encouraged various new strategies for 'writing culture' in anthropology. For example, the incorporation of the voice of the 'other' into ethnographies is almost taken for granted today while a greater reflexivity amongst anthropologists, in terms of writing themselves more explicitly into (rather than out of) their texts, is also common.[41] I have certainly supported the former strategy in my own ethnographic work but it is

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[36] An earlier, much shorter, reference to some of the issues mentioned in this section can be found in S. McLoughlin, "An Underclass in Purdah", BJRULM, 80 (1998), 89-106.

[37] R. Rosaldo, Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis, London 1993, 168.

[38] J.F. Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: a report on knowledge, Manchester 1984.

[39] A. Grimshaw and K. Hart, Anthropology and the Crisis of Intellectuals, Cambridge, 1993. See also T. Asad (ed.), Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter, Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1975.

[40] Said, Orientalism, p.10. Even Malinowski, who at the beginning of the twentieth century claimed to have pioneered 'scientific' ethnography, has now 'come to be seen as a purveyor of fiction and a fraudulent self-publicist whose fieldwork diaries posthumously revealed the strain between his professional and private personalities' (Grimshaw and Hart, Anthropology and the Crisis of Intellectuals, 14-17).

[41] See A.S Ahmed and C.N. Shore (eds.), The Future of Anthropology, London 1995.

the latter – reflexivity - that I want to focus on in this section. Strathern maintains that a reflexive alertness to one's own subjectivity during research can begin to reveal and assess the effects of a methodology in practice.[42] Attention to subjectivity illuminates, of course, that fieldworkers, as well as respondents, 'speak' from a variety of identification positions, all of which are context bound and implicated in relations of power. So it is then that I now want to make explicit some of the ways in which my own subjectivity, as a white, male, university student of Irish-Catholic descent, impacted on the fieldwork I undertook amongst Muslims in Bradford. In particular, I consider how I was positioned vis-à-vis my respondents and the partial connections I was able - and unable - to make with them.

Not all ethnographers who have written about the Muslim presence in Britain mention the role of their own subjectivity in their work. However, those that do have added an important dimension to their studies in terms of contextualising the way in which knowledge is negotiated between the observer and the observed, the outsider and the insider. For example, writing about fieldwork amongst Bengali-Muslims in Bradford, Barton reports that he was variously understood to be 'a friend of the imam'; 'a journalist'; 'a Christian priest'; 'a student'; 'a police officer'; 'a new convert to Islam' and 'a Home Office representative'. Each ascribed identity predisposed potential respondents to him in very different ways. As Barton himself observes, 'few people were indifferent to a stranger'.[43] Elsewhere in the literature, Jeffrey notes how she and her husband became engaged in obligations to 'fictive kin' during her work with the Pakistani Christians and Muslims of Bristol.[44] She recalls how respondents creatively associated their surname, Jeffrey, with Ja'fari denoting 'honorary' descent from the sixth Shi'ite imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 765). With respect to her study of Manchester, Werbner prefaces her work with the recognition that she is a migrant herself and that this gave her a deep affinity with the experiences of her Pakistani respondents.[45] In contrast to these 'outsider' accounts, Anwar acknowledges the importance of contacts he established as a result of his 'ethnic' identity as a Pakistani, his Islamic 'orthodoxy' and his membership of the local Community Relations Council in Rochdale.[46]

My own experience of fieldwork in Bradford was made up of precisely these sorts of partial connections with the people I got to know. Indeed, it was the dynamics of particular relationships that shaped the depth and detail of the data I was able to collect. I usually introduced myself to respondents

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[42] M. Strathern, 'The limits of auto-anthropology', in A. Jackson (ed.), Anthropology at Home, London 1987, 16-37.

[43] S. Barton, The Bengali Muslims of Bradford, Community Religions Project, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Leeds 1986, 16.

[44] P. Jeffrey, Migrants and Refugees: Muslim and Christian Pakistani families in Bristol, (Cambridge, 1976).

[45] Werbner, The Migration Process.

[46] Anwar, The Myth of Return.

as a 'university student' and 'part-time teacher' with an interest in Muslim communities in Britain – both very much 'outsider' categories. However, in some contexts, I was able to re-negotiate the way in which I was initially perceived and go on to establish the sort of close relationships necessary for producing in-depth accounts of personal and communal identity. For example, one morning, I found myself sitting in a sixth-form common room for the first time, talking with a group of teenagers. Introductions were going well when suddenly another group of students returned from classes only to aggressively enquire, 'What's he doin' here?'. My new acquaintances answered, 'it's ok; the gora's (white man) is safe', a reply that at once supported my presence but clearly marked my continuing 'outsider' status.

Some of my most productive research activity in Bradford was the result of interactions with young British-born Muslims. They were the group of respondents with whom I usually had most in common. It was therefore fairly easy to identify interests we shared such as contemporary music, football or computers. Indeed, contacts such as those made at Belle Vue Boys' School often 'snow-balled', leading on to invitations to students' homes to meet their parents, to family weddings, to afternoon and evening parties at local night clubs, to local pool halls and to football matches. However, I soon realised that nothing was to be gained by hastily asking new respondents about 'being Muslim in Bradford'. When, early on in my research, I announced to an assembled class of students that I would be happy to meet with anyone interested in talking about 'Muslims in Britain', the only response I received was from an enthusiastic young woman who promptly advised me that, 'everyone else, they're part-time Muslims – you don't need to talk to them 'cos they know nothing'. On a number of occasions like this then, I had to be wary of associating myself exclusively with a 'loud and proud' minority of religious activists. I did not want to be alienated from the 'silent majority' whose religious identity was routinely 'ethnic' and unconscious. Both groups were of equal interest to me as both represent important trends in British-Muslim identity formation.

As the issue of identity was at the forefront of what I wanted to explore, one way of gently raising the subject in conversation was to talk about my own experiences. So it was then that I routinely presented the fact that my family are economic migrants from Ireland and was able to recount experiences of my own that I anticipated might generate some discussion amongst respondents. For example, I shall never forget visiting my uncle's farm in Ireland as a teenager and being met with the salutation, 'Welcome, Englishman'. Having grown up in Britain with a profound ambivalence about 'belonging' - if not living - 'here', there could have been no more uncomfortable mode of greeting from a relative at 'home' in Ireland. This was an experience that some of my younger respondents and I shared in common. Many had visited Pakistan or 'Azad' Kashmir and had their 'difference' objectified

for them by relatives. For example, Shamas, a young man studying at Belle Vue Boys' School, recalled how relatives in Mirpur had called him a 'wilayati chicken' a 'foreign' weakling unable to undertake the strenuous daily tasks that rural people might routinely do. Others reported being 'ripped off' by locals who always charged wilayati visitors over the odds: 'They see you coming; the way you walk, dress and talk and they're supposed to be your own people'. It was not surprising then that while walking down Allama Iqbal Road, Mirpur's main street, I made instant links with people that I could not have made in Britain where being 'white' is unremarkable. With the simple greeting, 'All right mate', my similarity was produced by those on holiday who wanted to make a 'British-connection'. Indeed, my hotel room became a place for fellow (male) 'wilayatis' to escape the boredom of village life and catch up on the latest football results via satellite or maybe tuck into a plate of 'English' fish and chips. However, when I spent some time with older British-Pakistanis that I knew well from Bradford, in a place rather less well used to white British visitors than Mirpur - Gujjar Khan - I was constructed in a rather different way. They parodied the (dis)respect that a gora still routinely 'commands' in the sub-continent by playfully referring to me as 'Seán sahib' whenever we were out and about in the town, a measure of the unease that we all felt now that the context of our relationship had changed.

I would not, therefore, want to essentialise my migrant heritage as a point of connection with my Muslim respondents. It was very much dependent on the situation. In other contexts 'being Irish' was crosscut by the experience of racism in contemporary Britain. For example, when I spoke to the Head Teacher of Feversham College about the possibility of me undertaking fieldwork at the school, I naturally enough attempted to put the case for my involvement. I naively thought that we had a point of connection when she referred to a speech that she had recently listened to from an Irish-Catholic councillor at a meeting about state-funded religious schools. Catholics, of course, have had such schools for decades. However, despite some commonalties with the councillor, the Head Teacher had found his argument that, 'We understand what you are going through' unconvincing. Indeed, she met my own equally banal platitudes with a gracious lesson in the politics of identity. In my field-notes I wrote-up the following clumsy reflections:

> She explained the difference between us. I was not, she said, 'brown', 'black' or a 'Paki' and I did not wear shalwar qamis . I spoke English as a first language and I was white. My colour and culture marked the boundary that divided us. Here was a Muslim woman, strong and pious – in sha'a Allah (God-willing) she would say, time and time again as we chatted - who recognised the nature and need for politically constructed identities. She was 'black' because I was 'white', because 'white' people in Britain had categorised her as such.

As noted in the previous section, my failure to gain access to Feversham College can also be explained in terms of my gender. Jeffrey considers that during her fieldwork in Bristol her gender allowed her access to spheres of life not usually open to male researchers.[47] Indeed, it should be no surprise that women researchers, Muslim and non-Muslim, have produced the best accounts of Muslim women in Britain.[48] By contrast, Anwar witnesses to the fact that the social segregation of Muslim women and men in Rochdale restricted his access to female respondents even though, in many respects, he was an 'insider' in the local community.[49] While, in time, he was able to speak to some women, in general he had very little contact with them, at least in domestic contexts. This was certainly my experience. Nevertheless, while it is fair to say that my work often reflects the experiences of men more than women, I did find that meeting and talking with young women in schools and colleges was usually as straightforward as meeting and talking with young men, so long as conversations were held in a group situation. I was also able to meet professional women who were activists and professionals in 'community' and related arenas. All such women were, of course, used to formal face-to-face relationships with men on a daily basis.

Factional divisions along the lines of religious sect and baradari ('brotherhood', a patrilineal inter-marrying caste grouping) have become tropes in the literature on South Asian Islam in Britain.[50] For example, Barton, writing about his work with Bengali-Muslims, and in particular the role of the imam (prayer leader and religious functionary), warns the researcher against associating with just one religious 'sect'.[51] He argues that this is likely to restrict mobility beyond that circle, as was his own fate. While, as noted above, I was wary of associating exclusively with religious activists for fear of alienating 'ordinary' Muslims from my research, for a number of reasons I experienced none of Barton's particular problems during my time at York Road mosque, a Barelwi institution.[52] Firstly, a majority of Muslims in Bradford are Kashmiri Barelwis so I was routinely working amongst the largest Muslim constituency in the city. Secondly, I attempted to establish close relationships with no other mosques preferring to confine myself to a single institution where I could concentrate on specific

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[47] Jeffrey, Migrants and Refugees.
[48] See, for example, A. Shaw, A Pakistani Community in Britain, Oxford 1988; Werbner, The Migration Process; G. Saghal and N. Yuval-Davis (eds.), Refusing Holy Orders, London 1992; and K. Knott and S. Khokher, 'Religious and ethnic identity among young Muslim women in Bradford', New Community, (19, 4, 1993), 601-622.
[49] Anwar, The Myth of Return.
[50] See Shaw, A Pakistani Community in Britain and P. Werbner, 'Factionalism and Violence in British Pakistani Communal Politics', in H. Donnan and P. Werbner (eds.), Economy and Culture in Pakistan, London 1991.
[51] Barton, The Bengali Muslims of Bradford.
[52] Barelwis seek to defend the popular Sufi beliefs and practices of Muslims from the Indian subcontinent including the intercessionary power of a pir and visitation at the shrine of such a 'saint'. Their main detractors, of course, claim that Barelwi practices must be seen as bid'a (heretical innovation). See F. Robinson, Varieties of South Asian Islam, Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, University of Warwick 1988.

aspects of its everyday life. Thirdly, my work did not involve me in continuing close contact with the imam, the figure at any mosque that is most likely to court sectarian controversy. In fact, I was most interested in the funding of the institution's various functions, something that was not overseen by the imam. Finally, and perhaps most crucially, it struck me that many 'ordinary' Muslims, old and young alike, did not really identify with sectarian labels. Most did not have a conscious sense of being 'Barelwis' or indeed anything else - they were just 'Muslims' or 'Sunnis' or, when pressed 'not Wahhabis'.

Issues of religious affiliation were rather more important when, over a period of a couple of months, I began to attend meetings organised by Young Muslims UK. This revivalist organisation with a national profile has a vibrant branch of activists in Bradford.[53] While I had made the nature of my presence and interest as a university student known to key figures in the movement, and so attempted to dispel the initial impression that I was a 'brother Muslim', other members occasionally challenged my motives for being present at events. Some may have become weary of a 'hanger-on' whose interest did not translate into conversion to Islam. Indeed, the fact that I presented myself as being of 'Irish Catholic heritage' but, when engaged in debate, was rather too woolly and liberal about 'what I believed', probably did not help matters. Others may have been concerned about the alleged 'undercover' surveillance of Muslim organisations, given that Britain is one, increasingly important, node in the network of Islamist organisations world-wide. Finally, on one occasion I was asked whether I worked for the Church of England and, as such, was the 'right hand man' of so and so who had become known to Muslims in Bradford for his work on Islam in Britain.

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[53] Young Muslims UK is youth wing of UK Islamic Mission which in turn can be located within the tradition of political Islam represented by Jamaʿat-i Islami in Pakistan. See Lewis, Islamic Britain.

Representing 'Muslim Voices' After Orientalism[54]

In this final section I want to reflect very briefly on the significance of contemporary debates about Orientalism for undertaking research on Muslims (including Muslim minorities). Said, of course, maintains that, during the colonial period, the quest for an ever more systematic knowledge of the East by Orientalists, consciously or unconsciously, legitimated the Western will to power.[55] Although the authority of Western scholarship seems to have been relativised in the post-colonial world, not least by the rise of a global mass media, Said's work still raises important questions about how the academy should seek to represent Islam today.[56] This is a problem that Said himself does not choose to address. Having deconstructed Western representations of the Orient, he does not put forward a new or more positive representation of the East or Islam and, as such, has been taken to task for failing to give voice to the ways in which 'Orientalised' peoples themselves have sought to resist Western stereotyping.[57] Of course, Said was very much influenced by Foucault's argument that every representation reveals only a representer, so it seems that for him to try and represent Islam would have associated him with just the essentialism that, he argues, is so characteristic of Orientalism.[58]

In adopting this position Said falls into the most extreme of postmodernist traps, that is, deconstructing himself into silence. However, not everyone has been as reticent as Said when it comes to putting forward accounts of Islam after Orientalism. Given that traditional Orientalist scholarship seemed to generalise far too readily about the 'unchanging' characteristics of Muslim society, another postmodernist strategy - one that was mentioned in the previous section - has been to deconstruct Islam and emphasise the plural and contested nature of particular 'Muslim voices'. The importance of this approach is underlined by the following quotation from Fischer and Abedi's introduction to their account of contemporary Muslim identities:

> There are times, increasingly, when we need touchstones, reminders and access to the humanism of others. The following essays are intended to explore genres of access. The opening essay is a response to requests for reading material on the lives of people in the Middle East, lives that can reach through the numbing opaqueness of news accounts of confrontation, ideological war, and

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[54] This section is necessarily brief. For a more elaborate form of my argument, see McLoughlin, Representing Muslims.

[55] Said, Orientalism.

[56] See Ahmed and Shore (eds.), The Future of Anthropology. For example, they consider that some of the most informative books written recently on India and Pakistan have been not by academics but by journalists such as Mark Tully.

[57] For recent critiques of Said on a wide range of fronts, see B.S. Turner, Religion and Social Theory, 2nd edn, London 1991; B.K. Smith, 'After Said, After Ayodhya: New Challenges for the study of Indian Religions', Religion, (26, 1996), 365-372; B. Sayyid, A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism, London 1997; J.J. Clarke, Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter Between Asian and Western Thought, London 1997; R. King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'*, London 1999.

[58] For an account of the influence of Foucault on Said, see King, Orientalism and Religion.

endless killing; through the reifying opaqueness of histories of political regimes, kings, dictators, coups, and revolutionary masses; through the idealizing opaqueness of theologies of Islam or symbolic analyses of ritual. Lives that make narrative sense, that are not just sentimental soap operas, that do not tell us that people everywhere are the same. [59]

Nevertheless, there are some residual theoretical difficulties with this perspective, as we shall see now.

El-Zein, for example, takes the notion of the plurality of Islam to its logical conclusion. He maintains that because of the variety of cultural forms and meanings that 'Islam' assumes around the world, we should cease to use such a 'unified' category at all.[60] In its place, he suggests the term 'islams' which is, of course, in the plural and without capitalisation, and so can be seen as a simple but helpful way of deconstructing the notion that there is only one way of being Muslim, and that one interpretation of Islam has more intrinsic value than another. Unfortunately, as Sayyid comments,

> The problem with El-Zein's account is that he believes that by demonstrating the multiplicity of the uses of Islam he can refute the orientalist idea that Islam is one entity…anti-orientalists mark not so much a break from orientalism, as its reversal...Whereas Islam occupies the core of the orientalist explanations of Muslim societies, in anti-orientalist narratives Islam is decentred and dispersed.[61]

So, El-Zein tends to ignore the fact that there is a certain 'unity in diversity' about 'Muslim voices'; they do actually share 'fundamental' symbols in common, such as the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad. Indeed, it is these symbols that have facilitated an imagined continuity of experience amongst Muslims through time and across space for nearly fourteen hundred years. Moreover, as Cohen maintains in his study of the symbolic construction of community, it is the form rather than the content of symbols that people hold in common.[62] So, for example, the general sacredness of the Qur'an for all Muslims does not require uniformity in its interpretation. Indeed, symbols are effective in constructing a broadly recognised sense of community precisely because they have a general elasticity, because they allow people to supply part of the meaning.[63]

Another residual problem with a postmodern emphasis on the plurality of 'Muslim voices' is that, having criticised the essentialising discourses of Orientalism, one might have expected that the essentialising discourses of Muslims themselves would be subject to criticism. However, because a naive reading of postmodernism routinely suggests that our knowledge of the world can only ever be

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[59] Fischer and Abedi, Debating Muslims, p.xix.
[60] A.H. El-Zein, Beyond Ideology and Theology: The Search for the Anthropology of Islam', Annual Review of Anthropology, (6, 1977), 227-254.
[61] Sayyid, A Fundamental Fear, 37-38.
[62] A.P. Cohen, The Symbolic Construction of Community, (Routledge, London, 1985).
[63] Cohen, The Symbolic Construction of Community.

culturally relative, such moral and political interventions are often left well alone.[64] Of course, ideologies of, say, Islamic 'purity', cannot be assumed to be coercive or authoritarian. One cannot prejudge where and how the social effects of a particular discourse will be concentrated.[65] Nevertheless, exclusionary, and even exterminatory, practices continue to be pursued in the name of religious 'authenticity', and mere deconstruction does not, of course, dissolve their efficacy.

The engaged anthropologist must surely make an intervention then, and position herself or himself carefully, when confronted with a situation where there is a perceptible imbalance of power. This question of standpoint epistemology is taken up in a roundabout, but very pragmatic, way in the recent report into 'Islamophobia' in Britain by the Runnymede Trust.[66] The report recognises that while the British government officially seeks to include Muslims in the nation, pervasive 'closed views' of Islam as uniquely monolithic, threatening and unchanging, have been central to the exclusion of Muslims from the mainstream of public life. Very much in the Orientalist tradition, 'closed views' continue see Islam as 'the other', the total inverse and opposite of 'the West'. In contrast, more 'open views' of Islam point to the profound heritage shared between the two. Nevertheless, the report is quite clear that it is legitimate to remain 'open' to disagreeing with, and even criticising, Islam and Muslims in certain situations, and not to be forever hamstrung by the charge of 'eurocentrism'. For me, this is an important point. I was confronted with all sorts of dilemmas about how I would finally represent the variety of 'Muslim voices' when my fieldwork was completed. The relations of power between actors, Muslim and non-Muslim, shifted around all the time as contexts changed. Accordingly, as these closing remarks from my field diary reveal now, I was always being challenged to define and redefine what, for me, was 'acceptable' in the name of Islam:

> It is one thing to advance the argument that mosques are 'safe spaces' from the racism of wider society, but something else to maintain this when a young woman confronts you with her anger at being excluded from such institutions. It is one thing to valorise the 'voices of the people' vis-à-vis the reified representations of community leaders, but a rather different matter when the latter are trying to make themselves heard by the powerful state bureaucracy. It is one thing to consider Islamism disruptive of the universalisation of Western modernity but when the same discourse is deployed to disparage the beliefs and practices of ordinary Muslims or members of other faiths, one has to think again.

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[64] Turner, Religion and Social Theory.

[65] For an elaboration of this argument about 'strategic essentialism', see D. Fuss, Essentially Speaking: feminism, nature and difference, New York-London, 1989.

[66] Islamophobia: A Challenge For Us All, (The Runnymede Trust, London, 1997), available from 133, Aldersgate Street, London, EC1A 4JA.