Young British Muslims: Social Space and Active Identity

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by Sameera T Ahmed

Centre for Mass Communication Research, University of Leicester

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Abstract

Many young Muslims in Britain are becoming more confident about asserting a specifically religious identity. This desire to be ‘Muslim’ is reflected in the social, cultural and educational activities they participate in and other aspects of their behaviour are strongly influenced by the increasing importance of Islam in their lives.

The role of the media, especially Muslim media, in the development of Muslim identities is increasingly evident. As this media form develops it provides a rich resource for the construction of British Muslim identities and presents Muslim communities with a platform from which to communicate amongst themselves as well as to wider society. The processes of globalisation have impacted on the development of media and the information available to young Muslims has become more varied in content, which influences how they see themselves not only as British Muslims but as part of a wider global umma. In order to investigate the relationship between media culture and social landscapes in which Muslims find themselves and articulations of their identity, this research examines the lives of young Muslims in two Midlands cities. Whilst examining how they interact with media and how their social lives are structured, the study also explores other concepts which may potentially shape their experiences, including ideas of family, community, gender relations and global events, and locates media within the wider framework of these influencing factors.

To contextualise their media consumption, an analysis of Muslim publications is undertaken, offering a political economy of Muslim media in Britain. The aims and objectives of editors are analysed giving an insight into how they see themselves as contributing to a knowledgeable society.
INTRODUCTION

The emergence of a distinct Muslim identity in Britain has received much attention in academic and public circles. Various events have contributed to the development and strengthening of an individual and collective sense of belonging based on Islam rather than any other defining feature. These have included incidents particular to Britain (such as the Rushdie affair), the international political scene (for example the Gulf wars) and specific localised issues. This research project aims to examine the media and cultural habits of selected young British Muslims in order to determine how these affect their sense of being - their identity. Furthermore, to understand aspects of the media environment itself, I also examine Muslim media in Britain, focusing on publications.

Young Muslims in particular appear to be in the forefront of the changes taking place to Muslim communities in Britain. These changes are imposed on them through external structures and dynamics but also emanate from within their own communities and through individual experiences. Developments and changes taking place at the global level also impact on Muslims around the world. For many diaspora Muslims the challenges posed by living in a non-Muslim society, one that has no doubt shaped much of their thinking, are being met by the educational, socio-cultural and religious resources they possess. As these resources acquire an increasingly more 'British' outlook, their identities gain greater elements of British Islam. By this I mean Islamic literature is increasingly available in English, events and conferences focus on the problems specific to living as Muslims in Britain and social and cultural consumption is a hybrid of minority and majority cultures. At the same time certain groups of young Muslim Britons are becoming more alienated and marginalised from mainstream society. As these changes occur, individual and collective identities acquire new meanings and develop different ideas of what it means to belong. Transformations in cultural exchanges, facilitated by rapid flows of people and information around the world, have rendered new ways of perceiving communities, which are no longer restricted to geographical proximity.

This PhD proposes to examine a number of related factors. In the first instance it is investigating the development of identity amongst young Muslims in Britain. As the
research area of *identity* has the potential to cover various topics, I am focusing on how identity is being developed and is manifest through the active social habits of my respondents. In particular, I focus on media but will also consider other social and cultural activities. A second focus, stemming from this, is to investigate the role and function of media from the media's own perspective. Though not a comprehensive political economy of the media, I aim to gain basic ideas of how an alternative media form operates. The research question leading from this is how Muslim media has helped develop and enhance identity amongst young Muslims.

Certain terms used in the research need to be clarified. Firstly when saying ‘British Muslim(s)’ I refer mainly to Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and to a lesser extent, Indians. I am aware that various other ethnic groups make up the British Muslim population but as the majority of my interviewees are from these three ethnic groups, I tend to concentrate on them alone. The use of ‘British’ in certain contexts refers to what might be classified as the white, majority values and norms of society as are understood in popular vocabulary. Of course this term is problematised in the work, not least by the respondents themselves, but to illustrate particular points I have used it in this sense. The work often refers to ‘secular’ society, which is a complicated term in its entire definition. For the purpose of my work I use secular to mean a society in which religious values and obligations do not permeate all levels of daily life and in which religion, and its associated rituals, are of weakening importance to many people. By this understanding I also mean that people do not recognise or emphasise that many of the moral and ethical values, as well as laws, in contemporary society actually stem from Christianity. The word ‘West’ (or Western) is often used in my research. Though I am aware this does not represent a monolithic entity, in terms of values, societies or indeed many other differentials, I have used it to denote British and American/USA (and to a lesser extent European) cultural, political and economic hegemonic structures. The term is used by respondents themselves and because of the context in which they have used it, I have assumed they too are referring to it in a similar way.

I often use the term ‘first’, ‘second’, ‘third’ and ‘subsequent’ generations to describe various age divisions within Muslim communities. By first generation I refer to those people who first migrated to the United Kingdom, mainly in the 1960s and 1970s. The
other three terms denote the children and grandchildren (and though less likely, the great grandchildren) of these primary migrants, with the assumption that the majority of these were born or received a substantial proportion of their schooling in Britain.

The research was conducted in Leicester and Nottingham, primarily with young British Muslim university students. These two cities were not chosen for the purpose of comparison but due to practical considerations of conducting fieldwork. However, _locale_ is a key determinant for many of the findings of this research. Focus groups were set up and the interview transcripts were used for analysis. In addition, Muslim media editors were interviewed and a reader survey was conducted. Details of the respondents, media editors and the methodology employed are given in chapter Three.

**Thesis Structure**

**Figure 1. Thesis Structure**

Chapter One outlines the main theoretical debates related to my research. These consist of three themes; identity; globalisation and diaspora (which I have classified as one theme because of overlapping concepts); and media. Other related concepts stem from these, for example ideas of culture and community, and these are referred to whenever appropriate. Chapter Two aims to give a contextual background with specific reference to my respondents. It outlines basic information about Muslim communities in Britain in order to locate my respondents and the issues concerning them. Chapter Three presents the methodology used to obtain data, that is, the questions asked and methods used, and how this links back to the debates in the first two chapters. Chapters Four, Five and Six analyse the data collected. Chapter Four presents the results of the media interviews and maps selected Muslim media, giving some basic facts in order to develop a political economy of Muslim media. This should inform the reader of the diverse types of media available in Britain. The main focus of this chapter however is the results of interviews with editors speaking about their aims, objectives and experiences within Muslim media. Chapter Five analyses the results from the media
survey. Readers of four of the publications whose editors I interviewed present their thoughts on the state of Muslim media. By expanding the notion of ‘media’ to include social activities, I also examine some of the events and activities young Muslims in Britain are involved in, and give a description of two Muslim organisations which can been seen as examples of the new social space being created and occupied by young Muslims. Chapter Six focuses on the analyses of focus group interviews, referring to certain themes which emerged during the discussions.

The final chapter summarises the project and draws conclusions about how young British Muslims articulate their presence and identity, both in words and through their social activities. The research findings are then connected back to the theoretical themes outlined at the beginning of the thesis and I explain how my analysis builds on the theoretical framework, either by confirming or challenging the issues raised. An evaluation of the project is also presented in this chapter, citing shortcomings and gaps and suggesting potential developments in the research area. A glossary of Arabic terms is given at the end.

To summarise, this PhD aims to do the following:

- To gain an understanding of Muslim media by interviewing the editors of selected Muslim publications;
- To examine how young British Muslims are negotiating their everyday lives and constructing their identities, and;
- To then identify how consumption of the media and social activities reflect on their expressions of identity.

In order to give a context to this work it is useful to inform the reader about my own background and interest in the study. Much has been written about ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ knowledge when conducting academic (especially social science) research. This has been of particular significance when ‘interpreting Islam’ (Donnan, 2002). Though I am not interpreting Islam as such, my focus on Muslims will inevitably precipitate linkages to the religion itself. This study is an examination of Muslims rather than a study of Islam, not least because I have no training in the classical sciences which
I feel are required to interpret Islam, nor competence in Arabic. Rather it is an
exploration of the lives of young Muslims that stems from my own experiences in
Muslim communities in Britain. It also arises from my interest in media and in how
Muslims will determine the development of Islam in Britain.

Though my commitment as a Muslim may be apparent in the work, I am confident that
this does not detract from the insights which my work presents about the lives of young
Muslims in Britain. I anticipate that even for a reader with a different perspective, a
considerable understanding of British Muslims is provided by this research.

My standpoint as a Muslim researcher has no doubt enabled me easier access to and
understanding of the dynamics of certain Muslim groups and the common ‘language’
shared with my respondents has further assisted this. The issue of representation,
especially when representing the ‘other’, can often be problematic and in the case of
studying Muslims, has come under criticism (Donnan, 2002). My own background and
sensitivities towards the subject I am examining have influenced what I have seen as
important, or at least interesting to investigate but this is by no means the only approach
that could have been taken. By using respondents’ own words as much as possible I hope I
have done justice to their opinions and experiences, or at least that I have not
misrepresented or misinterpreted what they have said.
CHAPTER ONE
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The objective of this chapter is to examine the theoretical framework within which this study is set. As outlined in the Introduction, the focus of the research is to examine aspects of the lives of a selected group of young British Muslims relating to their identity. The three themes I aim to outline and then develop with specific reference to my own research are a) identity, b) globalisation and diaspora and, c) media. The discussion for each of the three themes will be divided into three broad areas. Firstly, I examine general theoretical debates related to these themes. Secondly, I connect these to my chosen topic (young British Muslims) by presenting specific literature and studies. Thirdly, from these two areas, I identify specific points and develop these into questions that I aim to investigate during my study.

Though globalisation can be seen as influencing various groups of people across the world, diaspora is of particular relevance to Muslim communities in Britain. The close relationship between these two themes (theoretically and in reality) has prompted me to categorise them as one area of theoretical debate, though I am aware that both entail several independent sets of ideas. Any investigation of identity in contemporary society invariably makes reference to concepts of globalisation and diaspora, therefore I want to present the issues relevant to Muslim identity resulting form these two phenomena.

The third theme I employ is media. In presenting an overview of mass communication theories I aim to highlight the increasingly salient role media plays in today’s society. More precisely, recognising the involvement of media in identity formation and its prominent role in globalising processes, as well as in diaspora communities, will facilitate a better understanding of the everyday interactions of my respondents. For example, studying the use of media by diasporic communities, Muslim media in Britain in this case, involves examining issues of media and the dynamics of diaspora communities, thus one theoretical theme reinforces another. Though the focus of the research is not on media representations of Islam, questions on this have been incorporated into the fieldwork as it is an area I anticipate most of my respondents will be conscious of and often provides an easy topic from which to develop discussion.
Each of these three themes, particularly identity and globalisation/diaspora, are prone to 'slippage' between one another. In addition, they are of more interest to my work when assessed in conjunction with one another. For example, examining media in diaspora has greater relevance for my work rather than simply looking at each separately. The same is true when identity is being analysed and issues of globalisation become pertinent. While acknowledging the mutual interdependence of these three themes, for clarity I have divided the three into separate categories. Within the discussion of any one theme, there will be reference to the other two themes, thereby stressing the difficulties of imposing a clear distinction between them. In addition, the fluidity of themes such as identity makes it difficult to impose a static definition. Rather than offer any, what I aim to investigate is how these ideas are being articulated by young Muslims themselves in a variety of settings. Though they may not use these words explicitly in their narratives, indications of how they apply these ideas can be derived from what they say. What the theoretical framework aims to provide is a background from which I can explore what it means to be a young Muslim in Britain today.

I also include ideas of community and culture within the discussions wherever appropriate as they are of considerable relevance to the research area. Both the transformation and development of culture and the dynamics of communities have an impact on identity. Incidentally, community and culture are themselves influenced strongly by globalisation, diaspora and media. The research seeks to explore what the impact of these ideas is and what it means to be a Muslim living within changing cultures and communities.

It is important to acknowledge that there are other theoretical constructs that relate to my research. However, for purposes of brevity and efficiency, I have focused on identity, globalisation and diaspora, and media. These three themes are most significant to my investigation and collectively they present the most comprehensive framework to enable me to examine issues relating to the identity of young British Muslims.

To summarise this chapter I will restate the main issues emerging from the literature and propose questions which I will then explore in the study with my respondents.

\[1\] For example multiculturalism, race and ethnicity and post-colonial discourses.
IDENTITY

Central to this research is the notion of identity. My objective is to examine constructions of British Muslim identity/ies amongst young Muslims. To narrow the area of investigation within the broad topic of identity, I will first look at general issues influencing identity theory in contemporary cultural studies. Secondly, I shall consider how a distinct Muslim identity, in the British context, has developed out of broader categories of 'black' and Asian. By citing various research studies I will outline the developments and current processes that appear to be taking place amongst British Muslim youth relating to their identity. Combining the first and second parts will generate the third part of the discussion and raise questions for the fieldwork, questions which will relate directly to British Muslim identities and probe connected issues.

In recent years 'identity' has become a topic of much debate both within academic and non-academic circles.

"We live in a world where identity matters. It matters both as a concept, theoretically, and as a contested fact of contemporary political life. The word itself has acquired huge contemporary resonance, inside and outside the academic world. It offers much more than an obvious, common-sense way of talking about individuality and community. Principally, identity provides a way of understanding the interplay between our subjective experience of the world and the cultural and historical settings in which that fragile subjectivity is formed... Identity has clearly become a core component in the scholarly vocabulary designed to promote critical reflection upon who we are and what we want" (Gilroy, 1997, p 301-302).

A considerable amount of the work has concentrated on examining what the actual notion of identity is, looking at how identity changes over time and what processes are involved in its development and transformation. Currently, the debate, taking some of its stimulus from the debate on postmodernism², is increasingly focusing on a 'crisis of identity' (Woodward, 1997). As the traditional notion of identity - fixed, stable and linked to a certain place and position in society - moves into the new postmodern world, it is no longer viewed as fixed but fragmented, continuously changing and represented according to the cultural systems that surround us. The 'subject' is now seen less as

² 'Postmodern' and 'postmodernism' are terms which encompass broad and contested concepts and as such can not be rigidly defined. I use the term in my work to refer to the understanding of cultural values and knowledge as being relative, having been disrupted from traditional ideas about the self and society.
composed of a single element but instead of several, sometimes contradictory, identities (Hall, 1996).

The stability previously inherent in identity is being fragmented as new and conflicting notions of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race and nationality are being created (Hall, 1996).

“These transformations are also shifting our personal identities, undermining our sense of ourselves as integrated personal subjects. This loss of the stable ‘sense of self’ is sometimes called the dislocation or de-centring of the subject. This set of double displacements – de-centring individuals both from their place in the social and cultural world, and from themselves – constitutes a ‘crisis of identity’ for the individual” (Hall, 1996, p 275).

The decentring of identity has also challenged the claim to an essentialist conception of identity. Rather than a fixed essence our identities are said to be constructed and represented with reference to our experiences and surroundings, that is, they are socially constructed.

“The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent ‘self’. Within us are contradictory identities, pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously shifted about [and] as the systems of meaning and cultural representation multiply, we are confronted by a bewildering, fleeting multiplicity of possible identities, any one of which we could identify with – at least temporarily” (Hall, 1996, p 277).

Thus a useful way to recognise identities is to see them as *identifications*. This method takes into account the fluid nature of the environment in which subjectivities are created. Identity is then about associating and affiliating, rather than having a predetermined definition of who a person is. In making identifications an individual or group sets up boundaries and these boundaries determine who is ‘in’ and who is ‘out’ (Sreberny, 2002). Consequently identity or identifying becomes relational, constructed against an ‘other’ or a set of ‘others’. But the variable character of identity renders the demarcation of these boundaries as unstable and shifting, such that the definition of ‘us’ and ‘them’ moves according to different circumstances. The boundaries constructed to demarcate groups gives a sense of belonging and security to those who are included and provides a means of delineating who is to be excluded. Having said that, as identities
and communities undergo modifications they challenge the permanency or stability of these boundaries. The constructions of boundaries are at once expanding and yet becoming narrower. In the first case, groups and individuals previously thought of as ‘deviant’ or otherwise marginalised are becoming part of mainstream society, thus opening up the boundedness of certain categories to negotiation and contestation. It is perhaps this liberalisation of perceptions and acceptability that has lead to a closure or at least tightening of boundaries for other groups, particularly religious ones. Within the same religion, these increasingly restrictive boundaries have amplified sectarianism (Geaves, 1996). So whilst core elements of a faith can be found amongst diverse groups, the ‘orthodox’ sect(s) has refused to acknowledge those who have expanded the traditional boundaries of faith, for example, Ahmadis or Ismaili groups amongst Muslims.

The political nature of identity dictates that ‘we’ and ‘they’ (or ‘us’ and ‘them’) can vary according to circumstances and group interests. Coming together with groups normally perceived to be the ‘other’ to achieve certain political or economic goals opens up otherwise restricted borders placed around group definition. This may be temporary or permanent. Sreberny (2002) writes how boundary-definitions are being challenged by globalisation, particularly media and migration. These forces, amongst others, are posing a threat to the territorial nation-state model. The identity of the Muslim umma3 (or identifying with such an entity) offers one such challenge to identity and community circumscribed by national borders. I will explore the transformations identity is undergoing as a result of globalisation and diaspora in a later section. Here though what I would like to note is that identity and even culture are losing their connection with place, becoming disembedded from traditional sources and structures and being transported around the world. Rapid movements and exchanges of people and of cultural resources are therefore resulting in a dislocation of identity. This can be said of those who remain in their place of birth and for those who have travelled as migrants, exiles, refugees or those seeking asylum. Gender relations, patterns of economic activity, urbanisation, changing concepts and forms of family have disrupted previously accepted forms of family units and created new ones (single parents or same sex

3 The umma can be defined as the global Muslim community or community of believers, sharing certain fundamental beliefs in Islam. The concept of umma will be explored further on in this chapter.
couples being two examples). In fact the family is often not seen as the main unit of society any longer because of the emphasis on individuality.

As noted above, one of the key components of debate on identity has been whether it is of an essential or non-essential character. “The debate about essentialism can be expressed as a dualism, that is an opposition between two conflicting, polarized positions, for example, between biological essentialism and social constructionism” (Woodward, 1997). However, as Woodward continues she challenges this rigid dualism and seeks alternative understandings of identity and difference which are not limited to the polarities of binary oppositions and explores the possibilities of political positions in the making of identity. The debate between this dualism can be applied to my respondents, who are beginning with a certain, previously prescribed identity – Muslims – and are then developing ideas of what this can mean in their specific socio-cultural and political settings. It is this process, this becoming, that I aim to explore in my work. Hall (1996) emphasises that identity is indeed a process, continuously changing, adapting and taking shape with time. Not only do I want to investigate this process amongst young British Muslims but I want to see how its articulations manifest themselves.

**From ‘Black’ to Muslim**

Before the establishment of a specific Muslim identity became apparent in Britain, most Muslims (mainly of Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian origin) were classified as Asians, South Asians or ‘blacks’. Probably more a reflection of their shared experience of racism and discrimination as immigrants in Britain, their treatment and responses from the host (white) community seems to be a strong reason in creating a ‘black’ identity. Working under this broad umbrella ethnic minority communities anticipated that many of their common socio-economic and political concerns as minorities might be addressed more effectively. The solidarity of greater numbers would increase the probability of better representation at local and national levels. In this way the label black reflected the political struggle of non-whites in Britain.
Although some Asians and Asian activists welcomed this solidarity, there has been resistance to this idea. Modood (1988) fears that this identity, which has been imposed on Asians through race relations 'speak', is not actually effective in resolving the specific concerns of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi, and indeed other, people. Organisations such as the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) and Racial Equality Councils (REC) endorsed 'secular' identifications based on ethnicity and race at the expense of others such as religion and these were legitimated by funding bodies such as the Greater London Council (GLC) (Samad, 1998). But South Asians have opposed this idea because they believe their cultural and religious needs are often very different from those of the Afro-Caribbean and African communities. By only allowing Asians to enter the political debate already subsumed under the banner of black, it may not be possible for them to campaign on issues which are relevant to them as Asians.

The inadequacy of 'black' in fully describing what Asians feel is important to them is one of the reasons people have rejected this identity. The specific ethnic background, and particularly religion, is not explicit in a broad black identity. Another main critique of this notion was that it ignored discrimination that in fact was not based on colour but culture (Modood, 1994). The increase in 'cultural racism' could not be tackled if this broad category was going to be used to describe all racial problems. So although colour racism may have been the main contributory factor in coining the term black, more subtle versions of racism affected different groups within this category. Certain cultural and religious practices of say Indians or Bangladeshis would attract hostile reactions, rather then the colour of their skin *per se*. Modood (1988) argues that 'the choice, then, is not between a separatist Asian ethnicity and unity of the racially oppressed; the choice is between a political realism which accords dignity to ethnic groups on their own terms and a coercive ideological fantasy' (p 403).

The distinction between African, African-Caribbean and other minorities and Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian people developed into the label of Asian (or more precisely South Asian) being used by government and other official bodies, service providers, academia and media. This category, though more accurate in describing cultural roots, was still seen as too broad and ignored the varied languages, cultures and religions present amongst South Asians (Samad, 1998). Members of the Asian community
perhaps found the label Asian was not very informative unless it was qualified with the country of origin and even the specific area within that country, which would give a better idea of a person’s religion. The realisation that certain service provision (health care, counselling, adoption, food, education) and similar facilities were inadequately dispensed using the classification of (South) Asian further subdivided this identity. This, as well as the events of 1989, brought a specifically Muslim identity into focus. That year the controversy surrounding the book *The Satanic Verses* politicised Muslims and marked a watershed in their development and experiences in British society (Asad, 1993).

Once Muslims had entered the public arena, numerous events acted as catalysts to further entrench the notion of Muslim-ness in the minds of people. Not long after the *Satanic Verses* affair the first Gulf war took place in 1991. This again served to highlight the presence of Muslims in Britain and for many non-Muslims it made the connection between ‘unfriendly’ Muslims abroad and those living within the UK. Efforts to establish state funding for Muslim schools, the second attack on Iraq, genocide in Bosnia and most recently the attack on the World Trade Center in New York, have all accentuated debates on being a Muslim in Britain. In many such debates the ‘loyalty’ of Muslims to Britain has been questioned and the compatibility of living according to Islamic precepts in a non-Muslim country has been discussed. To counter any accusations of not being ‘properly British’, especially on the part of generations of Muslims born, educated and working in Britain all their lives, a consciously British Muslim identity has been forged. There have of course been other, less reactionary reasons for this development such as the genuine desire to live an Islamic life whilst appreciating the British social, cultural and political structures.

Muslims also began to be recognised by their religion by non-Muslims – individuals and institutions. The Muslim population welcomed this for the most part but it also meant that discrimination was targeted at the ‘Muslim-ness’ of people. This ranges from the explicit rhetoric of the British National Party (BNP) to more subtle institutionalised structures that operate unfairly against Muslims. A host of Islamophobic attitudes and practices exist in between these. The campaign for changes in the Race Relations Act to deal with this trend has been one Muslims have undertaken for over a decade now.
Overwhelming evidence has been collected by Muslim organizations (for example, Islamic Human Rights Commission) and independent bodies (mainly The Runnymede Trust) indicating the prevalence and indeed increasing occurrence, of anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic discrimination. Arguments have therefore been presented to government to outlaw incitement to hatred and discrimination on the grounds of religion as part of the legislation. The example of Northern Ireland, where until recently the opposite situation existed (religious discrimination was outlawed but not racial) is presented as a model of good practice and of how legislation against religious discrimination can be introduced to the rest of Britain.

A resurgence of religious affiliation in a secular liberal society has puzzled some people. Whereas one might have expected religious adherence - at least in its public manifestation - to have declined, Muslims are in fact becoming more vocal and assertive about being Muslim in all aspects of their lives. British society, structures, institutions and individuals have made provision for religious practice to a certain degree and this is something that Muslims appreciate. However, they feel further steps need to be taken in order for Muslims to be fully included and accepted in British society as equal citizens.

**Muslim Identity - Terminology**

For the purposes of my research, a sociological and cultural study, I mainly use the term Muslim identity as opposed to Islamic identity. Though the two no doubt overlap in many aspects, not least in the way they are used interchangeably, the former is more appropriate for my study whilst the latter requires an examination of theological definitions and criteria. I will give a brief description of some ideas about Muslim identity to provide a better understanding of how the term is being applied by Muslim academics and how these applications may reflect usage by my own respondents. Ramadan (1999) suggests that Muslim identity, from an Islamic perspective, is “altogether Faith, rulings, emotions and feelings which have to be organised, shaped and harmonised within a spiritual and active way of life” (p 179). He states that the
essence of Muslim identity is the *shahada*⁴ (declaration of faith) and by testifying to this a Muslim provides a clear picture of his identity. Because this essence is common to all Muslims, the *shahada* also signifies a linkage to the rest of the global *umma*. For the situation of Muslims in Europe, Ramadan expands on the types of Muslim identity that exist, being manifestations of whether a person has assimilated, isolated or taken the middle path of integration. The first two of these he sees as natural reactions to the new circumstances and society Muslims have found themselves in. One instinctively either tries to become least visible or otherwise separates oneself from society for protection. But he sees these precisely as *re-actions* and as extreme, though understandable, attitudes. The case of assimilation (becoming least visible) he describes as ‘Muslims without Islam’. The second (isolationist) he sees as ‘living in Europe out of Europe’.

“On the middle path between being a *Muslim without Islam* and a *Muslim in Europe out of Europe*, there is the reality of a Muslim aware of his four-fold dimension of identity and who is ready, while respecting those requirements, to be involved in his society and play a role which is his, as a Muslim and citizen” (Ramadan, 1999, p 196). What is this four-fold dimension?

“These four elements draw the appropriate picture of what the fundamentals of Muslim individual and social identity are, outside its cultural reading in a specific part of the world: the core of faith, with practice and spirituality, is the light by which life and the world are perceived; intelligence of texts and contexts makes it possible to structure one’s mind as regards oneself and one’s environment; in a broader sphere, education and transmission allow both to pass on the trust of faith and to transmit the message, and finally, more broadly still, action and participation are the fulfilled manifestation of this identity through the way one behaves for oneself, towards others and the Creation (action) and with one’s fellow citizens and mankind at large (participation)” (p 195).

At a sociological level the definition of Muslim identity becomes difficult because of the immense diversity amongst Muslims. Bahmanpour and Bashir (2000) suggest that the manifold differences in terms of political, ideological, ethnic, national, gender and generational factors to be found amongst Muslims need to be considered when trying to find an all encompassing definition of Muslim identity. They state that all these specifics attached to different Muslim ethnicities have to be ignored and in so doing

⁴ The *shahada* is the Islamic declaration of faith which is to testify that ‘there is none worthy of worship except Allah and that Muhammad (saw) is His slave and Messenger”.

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“Muslims could generally be defined as the people who believe in the Holy Qur’ān and the Sunna (practice) of the Prophet Muhammad (saw [see glossary]) as a source of, and as the frame of reference for their belief and behaviour” (p 3). These criteria may also be applied to define who belongs to the Muslim umma. Interpretations and practice may vary but this could be used as a ‘working definition’. Ansari (2000) also acknowledges the diversity to be found amongst Muslims and is therefore also aware of the difficulty of offering a definition of Muslim that will encapsulate this diversity. He notes that the term Muslim has been “applied to those for whom Islam is considered to have some significance in the ordering of their daily lives”, whilst recognising the range of differing factors, such as, social, economic and cultural, that can actually contribute to this ordering (p 95).

These writers often categorise types of Muslims. For example, Ansari (2000) goes on to note that not all Muslims necessarily possess ‘cultural’ competence in things Islamic or conscious attitudes towards Islam, nor do they view Islam as a political or religious system to adhere to. Others draw upon a Muslim cultural tradition that they have internalised as a result of being socialised into it and use it as a frame of reference. But even within this group there are considerable variations. According to Ramadan’s (1999) classification (above) assimilationists have reduced the message of Islam to theoretical values and manifestations of good and moral intent but which, henceforth, are at the periphery of social life. In this way Muslim identity is just a set of general prescriptions and is normally exhibited only at particular functions (for example, marriage or festivals). Although, as he says, they are “either by the strong influence of the environment or by choice, Muslims without Islam, still they are Muslims” (p 186). His second category comprises Muslims who have created a microcosm of cultural or ethnic Islam as it was in their country of origin. They feel that to be faithful to Islam means being faithful to, for example, the Asian model of Islam, and have therefore been unable or unwilling to incorporate aspects of European life into their Islamic existence.

In describing how he uses the category ‘Muslim’, Mandaville (2001) says “these are people who conscientiously try to live their lives as Muslims, seeking wherever possible to make religion relevant to their daily lives” (p 111). This seems a useful way to describe the respondents of my study because I am searching for those who have made
this conscious decision about the prominent role faith plays in their lives. He also includes the idea of ‘culturalist’ Muslims in his work. This definition is self-explanatory in that those who are nominally Muslim or participate in cultural activities rather than religious rituals are included in this. I would like to add though that Muslims are generally able to distinguish between what is religion and what is culture – prayer is religion and clothes can be cultural. There can be no such thing as cultural salaat (ritual prayer) or cultural fasting for that matter. However, conflicts may arise when this distinction is not made and a cultural practice is seen as a religious obligation, something which younger Muslims often observe in their parents behavior. In many instances though what this means is that Muslims have an appreciation of their culture as a way of maintaining their identity as Muslims because Islam has itself shaped that culture. Perhaps a more accurate way to describe the difference between Muslims manifest in their practice of Islam, is to say knowledge of the fundamental principles of faith and belief are religious\(^5\). Whether these pillars are practiced or to what extent they are practiced is another matter. For whatever reasons the levels of adherence to the ritual practice will differ but if a Muslim is asked whether these comprise his religion, the answer will be in the affirmative. Different schools of thought and a range of opinions on certain matters would be recognised as legitimate diversity within Islam at a theological level. What then becomes cultural is the implementation of religion, evident through factors such as dress, food, customs and habits. So what is a ‘cultural’ or ‘culturalist Muslim’? From what I have said it would be fair to say a cultural Muslim is one who adheres to the cultural practice of his religion more so than the religious aspect of his religion. He is aware of the distinction in most cases but appreciates that the culture will help maintain his religion. Some Muslims may not see the particular importance of actually having to practice the fundamentals and have in practice adopted many non-Islamic norms or culture. Practicing and non-practicing (and all the levels in between) is probably a more useful scale along which to measure someone’s Muslim-ness – at least as manifest in outwardly actions. Ultimately it is the religion that makes a Muslim a Muslim and not their culture.

\(^5\) Such that the shahada (declaration of faith), salaat (prayer), sawm (fasting), zokat (poor due) and hajj (pilgrimage) are requirements of religion. An acknowledgement of these and the six articles of faith (Allah, Angels, Books, Prophets, Predestiny, Afterlife) would make a Muslim a Muslim.
The use of term ‘Muslim’ is obviously subject to interpretation. A devoutly practicing person can describe themselves as Muslim and so too can someone who professes to be a nominally practicing Muslim, both with as strong a conviction as the other. The difficulty of what actually constitutes Muslim-ness in self-definition then becomes an issue. If respondents are describing themselves this term can potentially encompass a broad range of practices and associations and what the respondent takes it to mean may vary to how others perceive its use. It may also hold different connotations for the researcher. Similar to the terms British or Pakistani, the term Muslim encompasses so many different characteristics or variations that it needs further elaboration for it to be meaningful. It also masks any kind of sectarian or other differences that amongst Muslims may set people apart to a great extent, but to an outsider may not be obvious. This notion of self-definition will be apparent in my work too and understanding how respondents use the term ‘Muslim’ will be needed to determine its multiple meanings. I myself am not imposing any definition of ‘Muslim’ on my respondents and have used the term without any clarification in the fieldwork. Consequently the respondents are able to use the term however they perceive it or whatever they understand by it. Though I ask a question on religiosity in the Activities Diaries (see chapter Three), in general the issue of being Muslim or what is meant by a ‘practicing Muslim’ has been left open. Indeed I anticipate the definition of such terms will generate some debate.

I have presented these ideas about how to think of Muslim-ness and what constitutes Muslim identity because of its relevance to my research. The different ways of articulating Muslim identity will be of significance to my respondents. As I am interested in examining how identity is articulated through action or activity, the above discussion provides a useful framework from which to develop notions of how British Muslim identity is expressed.

Muslim Identity - Being Muslim

Developing and maintaining a distinct Muslim or Islamic identity has been a central concern for Britain’s Muslim communities. Whereas previously aspects of religion were undertaken more privately, being a Muslim has now assumed a more public character. One of the clear indications of the renewed focus on identity has been that
distinguishing between culture and religion is becoming common practice. Jacobson (1998) shows this clearly in her study of young British Pakistanis in London. Her findings indicate “not only that young British Pakistanis are tending to differentiate between religion and ethnicity as sources of identity, but also that, in doing so, they are stressing that the former plays a more significant part than the latter in their lives” (p 239). This is probably due to what she describes as the clear-cut and pervasive nature of religious teachings as compared to ethnicity which is perceived to be semi-permeable. The universalism of Islam offers a stability and clarity that “provides a means of dealing with the ambiguities and contradictions contained within the social environment” (p 240). Perhaps the nature of cultural or ethnic affiliation is perceived to be exposed to erosion from outside forces whereas the appeal of fundamental beliefs enshrined in texts attracts young people in an environment that is full of uncertainties. This echoes what Hall (1996) predicts to be the appeal of religious identity in a constantly changing world. The boundaries that are constructed around ethnicity and those around religion tend to be defined by different levels of rigidity. Whilst ethnic or cultural boundaries are permeable, thus allowing intrusion or erosion, religious boundaries remain clear-cut and impenetrable and can therefore protect and enhance attachments to Islam. I do not think by this Jacobson means religion cannot adapt to changing circumstances, but that the fundamental beliefs remain constant. This then provides young British Pakistanis (Muslims) a tangible resource from which to develop their identity. Jacobson acknowledges that the respondents did not have full control to exercise a straight choice between being Muslim and being Pakistani or Asian, not least because they are very closely tied together. However, she suggests that religion and ethnicity were seen as separate or alternative factors in the respondents’ self-descriptions.

Associating with Islam and using Islam as a resource for identity construction also enables young Muslims to reject the narrow set of values used by their parents for self-descriptions (Vertovec, 1998). For their parents, ethnicity and regionalism may have taken as much, if not more, importance than religion, but for subsequent generations religion has often been the key factor in determining identity. This is particularly the case for young women. Educating themselves and their parents about Islamic teachings has enabled them to widen the more constrained application of culture in their lives in order to develop their education, career prospects and attitudes about marriage, amongst
other things. Subsequently it often becomes difficult for some parents to disregard their children’s petition to Islam because they too recognise its importance.

Though the preference to be identified first and foremost as a Muslim is a discernible phenomenon, research such as that by Knott and Khokher (1993) has shown that other elements are present in identity formation. The responses from the young Muslim women they interviewed in Bradford were presented on a ‘perceptual map’. In this way rather than categorise whether a woman was religious or ethnic, they show visually where on the perceptual map their orientation lies. Although acknowledging the subjective nature of this mapping (no scientific technique is employed) they suggest this method enables us to see the women “at a specific point in time as negotiating religious and ethnic factors” through accounts of their experiences which are “complex, shifting and multi-faceted, and also, at times, selective, critical and assertive” (p 607).

The resurgence that can be seen amongst young Muslims of their religious identity does in many cases correspond to an increased level of knowledge and practice. However, as illustrated by the reaction to the publication of The Satanic Verses, many young Muslims who may not otherwise describe themselves as strong, practicing Muslims, were offended and became very aware of their Muslim-ness. This collective Muslim identity manifests itself periodically during various crises or issues - Bosnia, Gulf Wars, discrimination (Samad, 1998 and Scantlebury, 1995). A collective sense of concern or anger gives rise to an increased awareness of Muslim sensibilities. In certain instances reassertion of a Muslim identity is not accompanied by an emphasis on acquiring knowledge and adhering to Islamic principles. “Despite their sometimes rather lax participation in collective prayer and other mosque activities, and their general exclusion from the main organizational activities, these factors have not diminished sentiments surrounding Muslim cultural - if not religious - identity” (Vertovec, 1998, p 95). Events such as the Rushdie affair galvanized pride in a Muslim identity, especially among the youth. So regardless of the degree of practice and intensity of faith, most young Muslims in Vertovec’s (1998) study are staunch in their Muslim identity. “Many are the first to acknowledge their negligence of religious proscription and lack of religious knowledge - but this in no way mitigates their pride of being of Muslim heritage, nor their constant desire to be associated with perceived Muslim causes” (p
Identifying and sympathising with groups who have something in common means young Muslims are facilitating the "emergence of crossborder networks of affiliation [and] the development of transnational communities" (Sreberny, 2002, p 297).

Considering how infrequently we are asked to describe ourselves, especially in an academic setting, how we actually think about concepts of identity is interesting. I would argue that on a day-to-day basis most people are not preoccupied with the concern of trying to describe themselves - to define their identity. Therefore when the subject is broached it results in a complex process of assessing various factors within a person’s life. As Knott and Khokher (1993) note, the process of identity formation is not static but ongoing, and using their example of a perceptual map, a different perceptual map might be produced if the same women were interviewed several years later. This is because one could argue such a perceptual map (self-description) would alter depending on the circumstances one finds oneself in. As the circumstances in a person’s life change, so too might the positioning of this map. For example, associating with others more inclined towards religion would perhaps move one in that direction and this would reflect on the location on the map. Similarly, marrying someone with strong links to Asian culture would perhaps strengthen this association more and move one closer to the cultural or ethnic side of the map. Perhaps the ethnic or gender element of identity is of more relevance in certain situations whereas the religion may manifest itself strongly in other interactions. This idea relates to the concept of identifications or subject positions rather than fixed identity.

People with a strong religious commitment would perhaps argue that the religious aspect of their identity takes precedence regardless of the outside environment. If we are to analyse identity as the actions a person undertakes, then stating which affiliations are being called upon at any given time may be difficult to identify. For example, going to university may on the surface not point to any particular part of identity. However, further details may reveal the choice of university, the course, whether a person is living at home or has gone away to study and similar options tell us more about someone’s associations and attitudes. Attending an Islamic course or visiting the mosque points more obviously to a person’s identification with Islam or as a Muslim, but even these apparently clear actions can have multi-layered meanings. For Muslim women wearing
Islamic dress is a clearly visible action relating to their religious identity but individual reasoning for doing so can vary considerably. Another way of illustrating this idea is to take the example a young Muslim university student (the majority of my respondents) and examine the factors he or she will be influenced by (see diagram below). The student (●) finds himself physically bound to the university - its campus (a) and its wider city (b). The home city (c) may or may not be the same as b), depending on whether they have moved away to study (therefore it is shown by a dotted line applying only to those who have moved away). Encompassing all these is the national (d) and then the global sphere (e), including diaspora connections. This demonstrates the spatial layers that are imposing upon an individual. Although the diagram is drawn using circles, this does not necessarily represent a hierarchy of influence. Whereas previously the diagram may have been drawn with concentric circles around the person, with the local closest and the global furthest away, this is not the case any more. Then the global may have had less influence, therefore its place on the diagram being furthest away, but with the rapid processes of globalisation, in theory what is thousands of miles away can be as 'close' as what is around the corner. Thus the impact of each circle is potentially similar and their position does not illustrate relative importance. In addition, the student can move within the circles, changing associations at various times, so that even whilst at university they might locate themselves specifically within e) when they affiliate with a global cause.

Figure 2. Spheres of Influence
Simultaneously, there are then influences of other kinds on the student. Within the university setting these could be as follows:

**Figure 3. Potential Influences at University**

![Diagram showing various influences at university including Background/History, Islamic Society, Mosques, Islamic Learning, Ethnicity, Social/Cultural Life, Media/IT, National/Global Trends, Local Community, Group Memberships, Diaspora, Parents, Peers, Finances, P/T Employment, Future, Career, Marriage, Family, Religiosity.]

Each student arrives at university with a set of familial, socio-economic and other historical influences. These have probably helped determine which university and which course they are undertaking but will also affect their interactions with other factors once at university. During their time at university several factors have the potential to influence them. These, combined with historical background, will then shape the future perspective of a student. Many of the factors illustrated as being influential during university years have of course influenced a person before and will continue to do so after university. The task of the analyst is to examine which factors may have stronger or weaker influences on a person. The student can himself increase or limit one influence or another by gravitating towards or away from a particular sphere. With factors such as ethnicity, it may not be possible to totally eradicate the influence, particularly when external factors can highlight this (such as racism). The interaction of these spheres of influence with one another will also determine the outcome or impact on a person. If one area, such as religion, gradually modifies peer group such that friends are chosen on the basis of their perceived religiosity, the latter will then support the former. The same can be applied to social life or even future aspirations (which are developed according to present influences). The shifts between identifications mentioned earlier are thus possible by moving and positioning oneself within one sphere for a determined time and perhaps returning to a central position, changing subject positions. Movement between spheres can also be influenced by other spheres.
For instance, if friends/peers are inclined towards religious activities, a person would be encouraged to move in this direction, while if they socialised in mainstream culture, the pressure would be to adopt similar behaviour. The findings of the study by Modood *et al* (1997) show that Islam forms the core identity of many Muslims and all other identity-shaping practices are compatible with this reflects this idea. If this is the case, the various spheres of influence in this diagram would be modified to comply with this overarching master signifier of Islam (Sayyid, 1997). Additionally, certain external factors may be limited only to a degree, such as media, so total control over these influences is not possible.

The circle of national influence is a vital part of any discussion about the identities of young Muslims as the British setting has inevitably influenced the development of a Muslim identity. One of the debates regarding this has been whether it is possible (indeed even desirable) to be British *and* Muslim. Several dimensions may be explored within this debate as there appears to be a range of attitudes towards how being British and Muslim can, and should, work in practice. By posing questions on Britishness, identity and belonging, I aim to explore this relationship. As an initial observation I anticipate that there will be those people who see a conflict in being British and Muslim (or indeed *anything* and Muslim), those who are trying to incorporate the two by developing a positive relationship between them and those who see the relationship as neither positive or negative but more a fact of a legal citizenship framework mixed with their own religio-cultural practices. I envisage that racism and other feelings of alienation (economic marginalisation, social deprivation) will have a role to play in attitudes towards being a British Muslim. Here both the global-local dynamic and issues of diaspora may be of consequence. In light of globalising processes, a strong association with the global umma may be decreasing the salience of British Muslim-ness and the focus may be shifting to a Muslim-ness that only emphasises a worldwide Muslim community. Conversely, young Muslims may evoke the British-ness of their identity to locate themselves within their national and local sphere.

With reference to the above illustrations (Figures 2 and 3), tensions and conflicts can arise from the overlap of factors in a person’s life, particularly once family and community are introduced. However much one might try and align oneself in one
sphere of influence by rejecting others, ties of family, community and culture are hard to disregard. Maintaining a balance in these instances involves negotiating between opposing factors. At university, this conflict could manifest itself in pressure to socialise in particular circles or dress in certain ways whilst adhering to cultural, religious or family norms that differ from this.

Research about young ethnic minorities, particularly Asians, has often centred around inter-generational conflict, 'caught between two cultures' and identity crisis scenarios (see Anwar, 1981). It has been suggested that first generation migrants from South Asia have been unable to communicate effectively with their children who in turn have found their parent's values, culture and aspirations to be dissimilar to their own. Exacerbated by language problems this has resulted in young Asians being torn between conflicting demands from the home and outside environments. In some earlier studies (Faulkner, 1975) it was predicted that the younger generations would reject their Asian identity in favour of British cultural norms. Brah (1996) presents a thorough critique of this discourse, in which she asserts that even the language being used is problematic. 'Culture clash', 'identity conflict' and 'between two cultures' portrays Asians as disoriented, confused individuals though the evidence does not support this notion. She shows how the discourse assumes culture to be static and monolithic, one 'Asian' and one 'British' culture, when clearly there is differentiation within these categories. It also "disavows the possibility of cultural interaction and fusion. There is no a priori reason to suppose that cultural encounters will inevitably entail conflict" (Brah, 1996, p 41). In addition to these factors it should not be assumed that intergenerational differences means intergenerational conflict. Debate and exchanges between parents and children are to be expected and these should not be seen as exclusive to Asian communities. Many topics of discussion are similar amongst all adolescents and parents. Another reason this simplistic model of culture clash can not be applied to all Asian youth is because it overlooks the dynamics of class, caste, gender, ethnicity, religion and local factors. For migrant communities the move to a new environment brings further challenges to the intergenerational relationship. Research has shown that second and subsequent generation British Asians have used the two cultural inputs into their lives positively. For example, using the narratives of her respondents Basit (1997) shows, that they are "constantly redefining their identity by looking critically at its Asian and
British components and subsequently adopting and adapting aspects of both cultures to construct their identity. Significantly, they appear to contextualise their identity and decide when and where to be British and in what circumstances to be Asian” (p 28).

This is a topic I aim to explore in some detail during interviews. Asking my respondents about their relationship with their parents, I want to analyse the role Islam is playing in negotiating any differences that may exist. Responses may perhaps be differentiated along the lines of gender in this subject area. Where young Muslims may be rejecting both their parental culture and that of mainstream society, how useful is the discourse on being caught between two cultures? Culture needs to be seen as dynamic, changing and adaptable. A more accurate question is probably ‘what form of culture(s) are young British Muslims developing for themselves and how does this relate to their parental and other cultures?’ In reality creating or maintaining a pure, undiluted culture, which has no influence from other cultures, is almost impossible. Therefore whatever new cultural spaces young Muslims are opening up for themselves must contain elements of other ways of life that they have been exposed to.

Vertovec suggests that Asians carry out their lives in two mutually conditioning spheres of “community” and “context” (1998). Community includes religion, culture and the roles and relationships of family and community. By context Vertovec means local geography, social, employment, education and state structures. Importantly, he notes that operating within these two spheres does not imply Asians are caught between two cultures, simply that these are the range of factors influencing them. Because of this community and locality it is important to locate where my respondents are living and studying and how their home locality influences who they are. Community relations and pressures are no doubt lessened when studying away from home and this period in their lives is short but potentially of much significance in terms of identity formation.

In his chapter on ‘British Asian Muslims and the Rushdie Affair’ Modood (1992) analyses how the publication of The Satanic Verses had a great impact on the situation of Muslims in Britain. He talks about how Muslim identity is transforming and in some ways strengthening since Muslims were projected into the social and political arena during this period. Muslims are beginning to expect that it is the turn of the British
(non-minority) to change and accept the existence of ethnic and religious minorities. They themselves are finding their attention turned to the mosques and religious classes rather than bars and clubs and becoming more assertive of their own ethnic identity (Modood, 1992). Asad (1993) writes how this assertion, this 'politicization of religious traditions by Muslim immigrants' is seen as a threat to British authority and identity (p 267).

No doubt Muslim identity in Britain, or perhaps more precisely British Muslim identity, is currently experiencing changes. Many of the wider changes that are taking place in British society which affect identity are also impacting on Muslims. Hall (1999) talks about a range of factors that are decentring the traditional British identity (a problematic and much contested concept itself), including, as mentioned above, globalisation, the rise of regionalism and integration with Europe. The presence of people from ex-colonies in Britain is simply one manifestation of this phenomenon, rather than, as some people think, the cause of it. Winter (1999a) argues that the incompatibility or inevitable conflict of asserting a Muslim identity for a British citizen, echoed in many quarters, need not be the case. There is rather a definite possibility for mutual understanding and an identity that converges and evolves from both Islam and British history. For those who fear an erosion of religious beliefs and practices, Winter (1999a) writes “processes of assimilation are eroding more tangential aspects of ethnic identity, but the religion itself is conforming to its usual obstinate pattern of resisting the assimilation or transformation of core beliefs and practices, and has, so far, been successful in transmitting itself to the second generation” (p 22). Similarly Jacobson (1998) confirms the continuing appeal of religion as a source of identity. “It seems to me... that the identities they [religious boundaries] encompass will survive in something like their present form for longer than the ethnic identities” (p 101).

The generations that are born and schooled here in Britain are more confident of using mass media and increased levels of literacy to define a Muslim identity that incorporates features of British culture and their parents cultures as well as what they see as a revival of the 'pure' texts of Islam. The concept of Britishness itself needs to be reworked to include a diversity of peoples and cultures. The fear that Islam is being imported onto British soil (a fear shared by the USA) will lose its validity in many ways as the Islam
being produced and practiced here has more and more to do with life as a British Muslim. Whether or not one agrees with the relationship between Islam and Britain, Muslims are creating an identity for themselves which has distinct features influenced by British culture. “British Islam is becoming more British with every passing year... British Muslims are also Muslim Britons; they belong within the recognised UK cultural spectrum, but also as part of the transnational community of Islam which is now increasingly self-aware” (Winter, 1999a, p 22-23). Ansari (2000) reinforces this by saying that second and subsequent generation of Muslims in Britain are;

“negotiating new ways of being Muslim in Britain i.e. new forms of British Muslim identity in which the British element is not just tacked on for geographical or legalistic reasons but which is an important part of the equation. They are becoming Muslims who have been shaped by the interaction between Islam and British environment and who have incorporated ‘the British’ into their consciousness” (p 100).

Muslims seem to be making a determined effort to differentiate between what they perceive as culture and religion, particularly amongst the younger generations. Identifying oneself as a Muslim rather than using any other label signifies a move towards a ‘purely’ religious identity. For Muslims the religious element of their identity is being used more explicitly in determining how they define themselves. In their study looking at Changing Ethnic Identities, Modood et al (1994), note that ‘religion had a particular relevance for ... Asian ethnic identities’ (p 63). And speaking about Muslims, they say ‘it seems that for many of our Muslim respondents Islam is the core social identity, meaning not that it is always the most prominent aspect in all contexts but rather that all other significant identities and identity-shaping practices are not incompatible with it’ (p 62). For young Muslims actively involved in Islamic Societies at university or who have activities focused on Islamic learning, the importance of differentiating between culture and religion may be paramount. The respondents of my study were chosen for their overtly Muslim identification and therefore understanding how they make this distinction in principle and how this becomes apparent in their behaviour, is of importance and will be discussed in the focus group interviews.
GLOBALISATION AND DIASPORA

Many of the issues I aim to explore with my respondents are influenced by the processes affecting society as a result of globalisation. Identity, ideas of community, cultural exchanges and the media environment in our contemporary age have all been affected by changes and developments in global structures. Certain issues of relevance in globalisation theory are echoed in the discourses on diaspora. Both are germane to the subject of my study – young British Muslims – and again both have considerable bearing on issues of identity. This section is structured in the following way. The discussion is divided into three parts. The general theory and issues specific to Muslim communities will be discussed firstly in the context of globalisation, thereafter in the context of diaspora. The questions generated through these respective discussions will be combined and deferred to the last part of this section.

Globalisation

In this section I present a distilled overview of globalisation as it relates to my own research study by focusing on three topics; assessing the dynamics of the global-local nexus, the ‘cultural’ implications of globalisation (including notions of media and cultural imperialism) and identity formation in a globalising setting. Each of the topics examined in this general section will have direct implications for Muslim communities around the world. These implications will be considered in the second part of the discussion on globalisation under the heading of ‘Globalisation and Muslims’.

Globalisation refers to the processes that are transforming the world into a ‘global village’, shrinking distances and compressing time. These processes manifest themselves in three main areas; economic, political and cultural. Kennedy and Cohen (2000) suggest six components, each with their own value and significance, as part of the whole process of globalisation. These are:

- changing concepts of space and time
- an increasing volume of cultural interactions
- the commonality of problems facing all the world’s inhabitants
• growing interconnections and interdependencies
• a network of increasingly powerful transnational actors and organization
• the synchronization of all the dimensions involved in globalization (p 24)

Globalisation then can best be described by these “mutually reinforcing transformations that are occurring more or less simultaneously” (p 24). Giddens (1991) refers to globalisation as “the intensification of world wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (p 19). Though interaction between different societies in different parts of the world has taken place throughout history, the force with which it occurs in contemporary society has marked this phase of global connections as a new phenomenon.

Appadurai (1990) describes this through his conceptualisation of fluid ‘scapes’. The ethnoscape of mobile populations, including refugees and diaspora communities, migrant workers, students and business people; the technoscape of diffusion and adoption of mechanical and information technologies; the financescape of global capital; the mediascape which includes not only the global spread of media channels but the images these carry; and the ideoscape of political discourses such as those on democracy and rights. The processes within these and the interactions between them help to describe the dynamics of globalisation.

Globalisation and Localisation

A concept which is of significance in globalisation theory is the relationship between the global and the local. Sreberny (1999) notes that globalisation is challenging the nation state, through the emergence of transnational organisations and movements (for example, the EU, NATO, ASEAN, environmental/ecological campaigns, political Islam). Concurrent to the increase in transnational organisations there is also ample evidence of a growing localisation or even fragmentation of the nation state as the unit of political, economic and cultural activity (for example, the activities of ETA in Spain, the Khalistan movement in India and the struggle for Kurdish independence spanning three countries).
The importance of the local within the wider global movements cannot be underestimated, after all, local structures are involved in transmitting changes at a macro level. Goonatilake (1995) states that in the field of culture “two contradictory though intertwined historical processes are operating simultaneously: a globalizing tendency, where the economies and cultures around the world are being embedded increasingly in more and more pervasive global webs; and a localizing tendency, expressed in its extreme form by a number of insurgencies on the basis of ethnic, religious and other local identities” (p 225-6). She stresses the important role of electronic systems of information and communication in transforming cultural interactions. As a result of these changes, she shows how “an individual could today generally be a member of his face-to-face community, his transborder expatriate community or his virtual electronic community” (p 232).

The global and the local are inextricably linked, for example, global economic markets may enhance or undermine the means of livelihood of communities in disparate parts of the world, forcing them to react to processes beyond their control. An interesting example Morley and Robins (2002) cite is that the “emergence of enterprise and heritage cultures in Britain have not been a matter of the purely endogenous evolution of British culture, but rather a response to the forces of globalisation” (p 124). Similarly activists of various kinds (environmental, human rights, political struggles) often begin their campaigns in small localised settings, but intend to bring worldwide attention to their cause using advanced global telecommunications systems.

“Whilst globalisation may be the prevailing force of our times, this does not mean that localism is without significance. If we have emphasised processes of delocalisation, associated especially with the development of new information and communications networks, this should not be seen as an absolute tendency. The particularity of place and culture can never be done away with, can never be absolutely transcended. Globalisation is, in fact, also associated with new dynamics of re-localisation. It is about the achievement of a new global-local nexus, about new and intricate relations between global and local space. Globalisation is like putting together a jigsaw-puzzle: it is a matter of inserting a multiplicity of localities into the overall picture of a new global system” (Morley and Robins, 2002, p 116).

Parallel to these processes of globalisation and localisation are those of homogenisation and heterogenisation. One of the defining factors of globalisation has been its ability to
encourage apparently contradictory trends or opposing forces. So whilst organisations such as WTO and G8 have emerged as strong world bodies, forceful, indeed violent, regionalism has manifest itself in examples such as the break up of the former Yugoslavia. Thus the call for unification at some levels has been mirrored by assertive, even aggressive, calls for independence and division at other levels. "It can be argued that the present is being shaped by two competing forces, those of integration and fragmentation. Even as economies integrate, many polities are disintegrating. Even as capital goes global, identity is increasingly going local" (Khan, 2000, p 1). The impact of globalisation has to be realised at the local level otherwise it remains an abstract concept. Whatever economic, political and cultural ideas are influencing decisions at a global level must inevitably resonate in the daily lives of people in their own locality. Thus Sreberny-Mohammadi (1996a) writes that "in essence, most people continue to lead local lives, whereas the phenomenal worlds that we inhabit have become global" (p 9). In her work interestingly entitled 'Globalization and Me', Sreberny (2002) asks how an earth-encompassing phenomenon like globalisation relates to the tiny little dot that is me. She argues "theories of globalization have to "come down to earth" and become better grounded in the variegated experience of ordinary lives" (p 294). The impact of globalisation needs to be studied as the tangible outcomes on people's lives and interactions.

It is perhaps in this relationship between the global and the local that conflict or contradictory elements within globalisation become most apparent. Whilst certain infrastructure is compelling us to move towards global systems, issues of community and identity are embedding us to our local contexts. Indeed a resurgent and resistant counterbalancing to globalisation has been the revival of many localised associations. Localised should not be confined to geographical space alone but also to phenomenon which are 'local' to a particular group (language, dress, customs, traditions etc). The search for anchoring points in a rapidly changing, globalising society has resulted in the re-emergence of religion\(^6\), regionalism and particular linguistic and cultural markers. Thus the local can often be overlooked in gaining an understanding of processes affecting the global society, whereas it is actually units of localised activity that constitute globalisation. Sreberny-Mohammadi (1996a) stresses the need to theorise

\(^6\) This is often labelled 'fundamentalism' which is perceived to be an extreme and violent adherence to religious principles. With its roots in Christianity, it is now more often used to refer to Islam.
'local' and asks "how local is local?" (p18). By local do we mean the family and home, an electoral ward, the urban unit or a larger regional area?

"Given the range of local civic patterns and administrative units, and the diversity of social formation with which it is possible to identify, the range of possible phenomena that can comprise the local is extremely large, making it perhaps surprisingly the pole that needs most conceptual and empirical attention, and suggesting that there may be many levels of localness with which people can identify and in which they can act" (Sreberny-Mohammadi (1996a, p 18).

Global commodities and ideas are differently received, interpreted and enacted in different local settings. Therefore it becomes crucial to contextualise the impact of globalising processes to specific localities and I need to be aware of this in my own work. The specificity of the locale in which my respondents live their lives will no doubt determine their experiences, perceptions, connections and aspirations.

The opposition to aspects of globalisation reflects one of the two contrasting forces that Barber (1992) describes in "Jihad Vs. McWorld". These "two axial principles of our age – tribalism and globalism" - manifest the contrasting ideas of heterogeneity and homogeneity of globalising processes. "The tendencies of what I am calling the forces of Jihad and the forces of McWorld operate with equal strength in opposite directions, the one driven by parochial hatreds, the other by universalising markets, the one recreating ancient subnational and ethnic borders from within, the other making national borders porous from without" (p 2). Though Barber recognises the positive aspects of both tendencies' he predicts that unchecked these extreme cases of integration and disintegration will not bode well for a democratic or progressive world.

Ouis (2001) investigates the dichotomy presented in the Jihad vs McWorld thesis, but linking it specifically to Muslims, she questions which will be the qibla (direction for prayer) for Muslims: McDonalds or Mecca? She notes two extreme reactions to globalising forces amongst younger Muslims, the one group becoming McMuslims (fully adopting McWorld) and the other Mujahids (warriors in jihad through total

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7 McWorld "delivers peace, prosperity, and relative unity – if at the cost of independence, community and identity (which is generally based on difference)...Jihad delivers a different set of virtues: a vibrant local identity, a sense of community, solidarity among kinsmen, neighbors and countrymen, narrowly conceived. But it also guarantees parochialism and is grounded in exclusion" (p7).
rejection). The interesting rupture in this dichotomy is presented by McDonalds *in* Mecca, which demonstrates how the global becomes contextualised into local settings and complicates issues which at first appear to be quite straightforward.

The impact upon Muslims of these simultaneous yet contradictory processes of globalisation are of particular interest. Though most of the Muslim world has been subjected to the nation state model, the concept of a unified global *umma* is still a compelling theme amongst Muslims. Therefore, one might expect both unification *and* diversification to be occurring and how this manifests itself in reality for a selection of young British Muslims will be explored in my study. Globalisation may indeed reinforce the idea of a global *umma* and the phenomenon and significance of the Muslim diaspora will inevitably influence this (the British Muslim diaspora will be analysed later). The dynamics of the global-local nexus may have particular implications for young Muslims in Britain, perhaps highlighting questions about loyalties, identifications and actions within and outside the UK. Another reason to draw attention to the interplay between the global and local is because it is at the juncture between the two that identity formation is developed and contested. I will elaborate on these developments of identity in a globalising world below.

**Globalising Culture**

Though globalisation has been hailed as a sign of progress for mankind by many exponents, it has not been without its critics. At first glance the trends ushered in by globalisation may appear to indicate a unidirectional flow - a concerted effort towards universalisation of economic, cultural and even political systems. What this perhaps supposes is that globalisation leads to equal access of resources and the creation of an egalitarian society for all the world’s citizens. However, as Sardar (1998) has aptly demonstrated in his critique of the new imperialism of Western culture, not everyone, indeed probably only a fifth of the world’s population, really enjoy the privileges of a globalising world and not surprisingly most of this minority reside in North America and Europe. The flow of capital, goods and overall benefit has been overwhelmingly in the direction of the already rich North.

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8 Sayyid (1998) also examines the implications for Muslims of this phenomenon of 'McDonalds@Mecca'.
“For all that it has projected itself as transhistorical and transnational, as the transcendent and universalising force of modernisation and modernity, global capitalism has in reality been about Westernisation – the export of Western commodities, values, priorities, ways of life. In a process of unequal cultural encounter, ‘foreign’ populations have been compelled to be the subjects and subalterns of Western empire, while, no less significantly, the West has come face to face with the ‘alien’ and ‘exotic’ culture of its ‘Other’. Globalisation, as it dissolves the barriers of distance, makes the encounter of colonial centre and colonised periphery immediate and intense” (Morley and Robins, 2002, p 108).

Apart from the economic disparities reinforced by global capital flows, the drive towards homogenisation of culture has resulted in a loss of human rights, culture and tradition (Khan, 2000). This push for homogenisation has often been promoted by multinationals seeking new consumers for their products and services.

The second of the components Kennedy and Cohen (2000) note (see p 29-30) in the process of globalisation is ‘an increasing volume of cultural interactions’. One reaction to these cultural interactions has been a resistance to the hegemonising tendencies of Western or American popular culture. It has been the perceived threat to culture and religion, posed by the dominating presence of cultural commodities and ideas, the ‘McDonaldisation’ of society, which has led to this resistance against cultural imperialism. It is not only Muslim or even religious societies that have been averse to these new forms of imperialism, even Europe has become aware of the strong forces of American culture in their midst. Ironically, even America (and Europe to a lesser extent) has become conscious of the threat Japanese money and technological power poses to its status as world super-power (Morley and Robins, 2002).

In “The Many Cultural Faces of Imperialism”, Sreberny-Mohammadi (1996c) outlines the variety of sources that constitute the cultural impact of imperialism. These include tourism, technology and communication (media), language and education. Almost all of these circulate around the world with greater intensity in the contemporary era of globalisation. Almost all are of Western origin. However cultural imperialism should not be seen as a straightforward process of the imposition of one, static set of cultural beliefs and practices onto other societies. The particular dynamics of each ‘receiving’ society makes the reception to such cultural stimuli different. Tomlinson (1991) argues that the coercive nature of imperialism as experienced in periods of European
colonialisation is not an accurate way of describing aspects of contemporary imperialisms. He argues that "by thinking of cultural imperialism as the spread of modernity these problems are avoided. For what is involved in this spread is the process, not of cultural imposition, but of cultural loss" (p 173). Whereas societies previously may have undergone loss at a much slower rate, encountering perhaps a limited number of foreign influences over a long period of time, globalisation has accelerated the encounter with the 'other'. The power relations of these encounters are more often than not in favour of the rich and powerful West (or North) resulting in the erosion of many non-Western cultures and practices.

Noor (2000) also argues that cultural imperialism should not be seen in simple terms of negative Western influence on passive recipient countries and cultures, not least because elites in developing countries are often party to these intrusions. KFC and McDonalds are easily identifiable symbols of cultural and economic imperialism but it is their presence and impact on local economies and patterns of employment which are of concern rather than the goods they sell as such or the fact that they 'represent' the West. Cultural imperialism is a reflection of the continuing inequalities which beset the world but resistance to cultural change for its own sake is not rational because no culture, civilisation or nation is unique or pure and has not experienced cultural fusion at some point in the past (Noor, 2000).

 Earlier notions of cultural imperialism 'swamping' societies have been problematised by a number of factors. The first of these is a realisation that not all flows of information, ideas, practices and commodities – in short, culture – are one way. There are exchanges within nations that do not include external inputs, there is movement of goods, concepts and people within the developing world (for example, migrants from the Indian sub-continent to the Middle East or the popularity of South American telenovelas around the world) and of course ideas and people from the developing world are transferred to the developed world. The second point is that the reception of cultural, economic and political imperialisms varies from nation to nation, people to people. This is true of products such as television programmes through to acceptance of NGO practices in the development sector. Different levels of acceptance and resistance at the point of consumption mean that the same messages and practices will have different
impacts. Particular norms and ideas have been in opposition to traditional cultural practices, which people have been averse to, and in defending their indigenous cultures, people have strengthened local patterns of living and traditional practices. In doing so they have actively reinforced their own culture against outside forces, so whilst acknowledging the strong influences of capitalist commodities and Western cultural customs, local resistance should also be acknowledged. This resistance has manifest itself in outright opposition and protest to certain commercial ventures (boycotts of companies and even the destruction of business outlets), strengthening of local infrastructures to counter the impact of social and economic imports and alternatives to unsuitable cultural conventions and products. An interesting example of this is Iran’s response to Barbie. Sara and Dara (Sara’s brother) were created to be sensitive to the religious and cultural values of Iran and as a way to restrict the persuasive powers of Americanisation. They were also seen as a way of preserving national identity. The most realistic objective of many groups and peoples is to limit the impact and erosion on their indigenous way of life.

Cultures are always undergoing change and of course no culture or people are authentic and pure. Neither is it the case that the current global exchanges are the first to penetrate societies – hybridity is as old as mankind. This hybridity and diversity of cultures (within the boundaries of one nation-state) applies to Europe and other Western countries too. How easy is it to talk about Western cultural values being exported to Pakistan, for example, when the West is home to millions of Pakistanis? The places from which this imperialism is said to be originating are diverse, multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies. Perhaps it is telling of the relative powerlessness of minority communities in these countries that the majority of the cultural exports do not account for the diversity present within nations. Nevertheless, this is another factor which challenges a simple reading of cultural imperialism. At the level of the individual, there may not be resistance, indeed quite the opposite, to certain lifestyle products from abroad;

"[b]ut there may be another way of formulating the domination involved in cultural imperialism. Instead of on the level of individual responses, it might be thought of in terms of the culture as a whole. The argument would run

9 Muslim dolls tackle 'wanton' Barbie, BBC, 5 March 2002. See bibliography for webpage.
something like this: whatever the divergence in individual responses to cultural imports, domination is occurring where the ‘autonomy’ of a culture – roughly speaking, its right to develop along its own lines – is threatened by external forces. It is this ‘holistic’ formulation of cultures that is usually implied in claims made by critics of cultural imperialism about the ‘swamping’ of indigenous cultures by alien ones” (Tomlinson, 1991, p 95)

Notwithstanding the power relations in these exchanges, the above factors present interruptions to the simple cultural imperialism thesis.

**Neo-Imperialisms and Identity**

Globalisation has, it would seem, helped facilitate and indeed accelerate aspects of cultural imperialism. The movement and exchange of ideologies, lifestyle choices, consumer products and problems (for example, crime, sex tourism, and diseases) has had profound implications for the identity of individuals and communities, particularly those which previously had limited interaction with the outside world. The choice of lifestyles and identifications enjoyed by privileged individuals and groups in a globalising world has provided them with greater autonomy to develop their identity. At the same time collective identities have transformed to counter the perceived negative effects of globalisation;

“Against the globalisation of culture, there are intense struggles to preserve and enhance national identities, against the forced identities of modern nationhood (often a product of imperialism), individuals and groups are constructing identities in terms of religion, ethnicity, and region against former national identities; against all collective identities, other individuals are attempting to construct their own personal identities (Kellner, 1995, p 258).

I cite cultural imperialism here in my work because it has gained relevance in a globalising world. Though the more blatant forms of imperialism, experienced for example, during European colonial expansion have diminished, more subtle, yet insidious, methods of domination tend to be aided by globalisation and the postmodern condition (Sardar, 1998). Powerful conglomerates are now aware that introducing their products to new markets in a culturally sensitive way has become part of the marketing technique that ensures an easy transition into unfamiliar environments. Sardar (1998) analyses how, for example, youth in Asia are bombarded with programmes and cultures from the West. “Not surprisingly, Asian youth are becoming eager and willing
purchasers not just of western pop music and designer outfits, but the entire personality profile of postmodernity” (Sardar, 1998, p 142). He goes on to show how a fixation for foreign, superior goods and lifestyles can lead to self-loathing and loathing of local and traditional systems. Only when the West has appropriated, repackaged and sold back to the third world what was originally theirs, do they appreciate its worth. These forms of imperialisms are what lead me to look at their impact on identity. The disorientation and self-loathing that Sardar talks about have generated an acute identity crisis amongst non-western youth. What I want to find out is whether this is restricted to youth in non-Western countries or whether it could apply equally to Muslim youth in the West. Thus the relationship between the neo-imperial presence of Western cultures and identity transformations in Britain can also be explored using these theoretical ideas, though the experiences and resources available to youth in the Muslim diaspora in the West will inevitably be different to their counterparts in other countries.

"Globalisation is profoundly transforming our apprehension of the world: it is provoking a new experience of orientation and disorientation, new senses of placed and placeless identity. The global-local nexus is associated with new relations between space and place, fixity and mobility, centre and periphery, ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ space, ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, frontier and territory. This, inevitably, has implications for both individual and collective identities and for the meaning and coherence of community” (Morley and Robins, 2002, p 121).

How does the notion of cultural imperialism impact on Muslims living in the West? I would argue this question is important for at least two reasons. The first is that geographical distance is not a prerequisite for being subject to the powerful economic and cultural ideas of Western societies. Ideas, systems, goods, lifestyle choices and similar aspects of a secular, capitalist society permeate the lives of Muslims in the West. In some cases these ideas are not conducive to a Muslim’s beliefs and for those actually living in the West the impact and presence is more direct, whereas for Muslims in Muslim states, these influences may undergo a process of indigenisation, somehow diluting their impact. A second concern I predict Muslims in the West have about cultural imperialism is for their coreligionists in Muslim countries. Thus, the opening of a McDonalds in Mecca was frowned upon by Muslims around the world (I suspect this to be the case judging from reactions in Britain). Muslims in Western nations may look upon their own interaction with non-Muslim ideas and practices as unavoidable but feel strongly that holy places (and indeed all Muslim lands) should remain untainted by non-
Muslim and especially anti-Muslim influences. The banning or restricting of satellite dishes, censorship of foreign television material, monitoring of postal mail and blocking of electronic mail and internet access in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan and Iran are testimony to the concern governments have about the uncontrolled import of media and information from the West and non-Muslim sources (Bunt, 2000).

Cultural imperialism is closely related to media imperialism and is relevant to identity construction. As Kellner (1995) demonstrates media culture “provides resources which individuals can appropriate or reject, in forming their own identities against dominant models” (pg 3). Morley and Robins (2002) explore the relationship between the cultural resources provided by media and communication technologies and they ask “what role [do] these various media play in the constructions of our sense of ourselves – as individuals and as nations, or supra-national communities” (p 69).

We need to be mindful that culture and identity are not seen as passive and reactive only to media discourse, that only a simple cause and effect relationship exists between them.

“To understand the relation between communication, culture and identity then we must move beyond the deterministic model of the communication process. Within this prevailing framework, cultural identities can only ever be responsive and reactive to the controlling stimulus of communications technologies” (Morley and Robins, 2002, p 71).

The media culture that surrounds us is of importance not only for its ability to provide forms of ideological domination that helps reproduce the current power relations “but it also provides resources for the construction of identities and for empowerment, resistance and struggle” (Kellner, 1995, p 2). These attributes of media culture, coupled with the fact that it saturates our society, is of significance to my research question about media and identity formation. I predict that my respondents will be conscious of media and cultural products in their surrounding environment. I would support my prediction with the evidence\(^\text{10}\) that there is not only a growing awareness amongst Muslim individuals and organisations about media and popular culture often containing

\(^\text{10}\)The main evidence for this is the development of numerous Muslim media monitoring organisations, or sections within organisations. For example, 'Balanced Media', The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) and Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism (FAIR) (see p 58 of the \textit{Muslim Directory} for further examples).
anti-Islamic attitudes, but in addition, the tendency amongst some extreme groups to promote blatantly anti-Western attitudes. In the latter case this is manifest through a strong opposition to all things western; literature, music, clothes, academia, ideologies—that is, all social, cultural and economic systems. Each individual and organisation undertakes a process of analysing, evaluating and then deciding how they perceive and react to media culture. It is these processes I am attempting to uncover in my fieldwork.

Globalisation – Implications for Identity

In assessing the consequences of globalisation on cultural identities, Hall (1996) presents three possible outcomes:

1. “National identities are being eroded as a result of the growth of cultural homogenization and ‘the global post-modern’.
2. National and other ‘local’ or particularistic identities are being strengthened by the resistance to globalization.
3. National identities are declining but new identities of hybridity are taking their place” (p 300).

He asserts that the idea of a pure national identity is problematic in itself and now with the presence of diverse racial, cultural, religious and linguistic populations in any one state, this has become even more contestable. The dislocation that has occurred between place and identity as a result of globalisation, meaning identity is no longer bound by immediate geographical surroundings, has given considerable weight to the idea of identity as a ‘moving feast’ (Hall, 1996). Though in some cases national identities may have weakened, that does not overlook the fact that new collective alliances have been forged, for example, local, regional and international. In fact national structures such as citizenship and legal rights will continue to maintain the strength of national identity at a certain level, whether or not a shared cultural identity exists within that country.

Where certain identities perceive themselves to be under threat, the recourse to tradition has become more important. This threat can emanate from globalising tendencies which appear to be stripping away distinctiveness and turning everyone into global consumers
— bereft of any individuality or special cultural elements — to serve the ever expanding global markets. Here emphasis is given to old, stable identities. Though one might question whether religious identification has ever declined (particularly with respect to Islam) there are signs that religious identity is being reasserted in contemporary society. The appeal to religious tradition and a return to purely religious identifications is a phenomenon perhaps not expected in a global post-modern setting — particularly in Western societies. Possibly the trend of secularisation — whereby the manifestation of religion has diminished or has been increasingly relegated to the private sphere — has itself forced certain religious groups to reassert their affiliation to religion. A perceived disintegration of moral and ethical values in societies has resulted in people calling for the return of religion. Sometimes strong affirmations of religious beliefs of one kind have been stimulated by what is seen as corrupted, unorthodox religion itself. Therefore, in certain places rigid, even extreme forms of religious practice, law and adherence have been implemented. Where the process of globalisation appears to be diluting any fixed, ‘pure’, identity, advocates of religion have referred to a purity of religious text to construct an identity.

“The trend towards ‘global homogenisation’ then, is matched by the powerful revival of ‘ethnicity’, sometimes of the more hybrid or symbolic varieties, but also frequently of the exclusive or ‘essentialist’ varieties” (Hall, 1996, p 313).

The notion that globalising forces are eroding all types of national or regional identities is perhaps too strong a contention. Equally local and distinct identities are not isolated from the wider processes of globalisation and interaction with other cultures. What is needed is a better understanding of the global-local dynamic that manifests itself at the macro (global) and micro (local) level. A closer examination shows that a number of processes are actually taking place in forming cultural identities. Information about different types of living and being are more easily available to people in even the most remote parts of the world. This knowledge of other identities may increase the choice people have to assume and incorporate other aspects of cultural recognition into their own self-definition. Sreberny (2002) argues that “since identity-construction is always a social process, the encounters with more “others” that globalization can bring about can challenge old identity structures and provoke new ones over and over again” (p 294).
Hall (1996) then suggests that the trends of globalisation are having a complex influence on culture and identities:

"As a tentative conclusion it would appear then that globalization does have the effect of contesting and dislocating the centred and ‘closed’ identities of national culture. It does have a pluralizing impact on identities, producing a variety of possibilities and new positions of identification, and making identities more positional, more political, more plural and diverse; less fixed, unified or trans-historical. However, its general impact remains contradictory" (Hall, 1996, p 309).

Globalisation and Muslims

The interaction of processes both within the locality and within a more global environment is significant when considering Muslim identity. With the ‘time-space compression’ that has occurred through the shrinking globe and the idea of a global village, what happens thousands of miles away in an otherwise remote area may now have a great impact in our own home. Ahmed and Donnan (1994) cite the example of the reaction to the Satanic Verses as one such manifestation:

"Interactions between the local and global can be discerned in the responses to Satanic Verses which again, while superficially uniform, were composed of a diverse range of motivations and objectives. These too, like responses to the Gulf War, were played out according to the parameters and concerns of localized and often very different national political arenas. Thus the response in Britain, for example, differed in important and significant ways from that elsewhere, because of the particular configuration of relationships there, both between Muslims and non-Muslims, and among Muslims themselves” (p 8)

This type of link is especially strengthened or focused where groups of people are felt to share a particular bond, for example, ethnic or religious, that transcends any national boundaries. Support for campaigns originating in one place spreads across the whole world as people with the same objectives join forces.

Perhaps the use of the Muslim identifier – saying simply that you are a Muslim first and foremost – is one way of articulating an identity at a global level, whilst at the same time challenging or undermining the hegemony of the nation-state system. However, it is not clear whether identity is becoming more and more global or whether people are in
fact, now more than ever, emphasising their national, cultural or local identity (Hall, 1996). Referring specifically to religious fundamentalisms, Castells (1997) argues that:

“The explosion of Islamic movements seems to be related to both the disruption of traditional societies (including the undermining of the power of the clergy), and to the failure of the nation-state, created by nationalist movements, to accomplish modernization, develop the economy, and/or to distribute benefits of economic growth among the population at large. Thus, Islamic identity is (re)constructed by fundamentalists in opposition to capitalism, to socialism, and to nationalism, Arab or otherwise, which are, in their view, all failing ideologies of the post-colonial order” (p 17).

According to Castells, globalisation, in one form or another, has influenced all movements of Islamic fundamentalism, be they in Muslim countries or amongst Muslims in non-Muslim states. Muslims are having to contend with issues and concerns thrown up by globalisation which they previously have not experienced. Various channels of communication have ensured that these globalising trends impact on even the most remote Muslim communities and they are then being forced to formulate responses to these issues and challenges (Ahmed and Donnan, 1994).

Changes in other parts of the world have been a catalyst for certain new trends amongst British Muslims, and this has not been a one way process. Issues which touch upon the lives of Muslims, especially in areas of political and military conflicts, or natural disasters, act as a means to tie together the global Muslim umma. In general it is perhaps Muslim populations, both in Muslim countries and in the West, who are more attuned to one another’s concerns as opposed to governments. A considerable amount of exchange between ordinary Muslims no doubt takes place bypassing government and other official bodies. This is because the state no longer contains political activity (or indeed political or cultural identifications) and new forms of global solidarity politics from ‘below’ are emerging (Sreberny, 2002). Sometimes government or other authorities are not seen as appropriate mediums through which to communicate and at other times the communication is actually clandestine. With so many millions of Muslims dispersed globally, this is to be expected. These exchanges of information, experiences, concepts, concerns and plans can normally be done with ease facilitated by information technologies, which make interacting with someone five streets away as easy as communicating with someone five thousand miles away. The rapid flow of information
to and fro between localities creates virtual Muslim communities comparable to Anderson’s (1991) imagined communities. The common factors binding the Muslim communities to one another are greater than a simple notion of ‘national identity’. This must be the case since the exchanges are taking place across national borders and the commonality that is being evoked, Islam, exists in many countries.

Paradoxically, the same processes that enable Muslims to share their concerns in this global age, also pose a threat to Islamic tradition and culture everywhere. Westernisation or often Americanisation is not seen as a danger by Muslims alone, other religious and ethnic groups have expressed their disapproval of this cultural imperialism. As noted earlier, for Muslims this threat operates at two levels; one is for Muslims living in the West and being exposed to this on a daily basis, and the other is to Muslims in various Muslim countries around the world. The resistance to this imposition can manifest itself in the assertion of a strong Muslim identity.

So one new boundary-less identification that has re-emerged in the global setting is that of a global Muslim community. Whilst not suggesting that all the world’s Muslims are united on every aspect of society, culture, politics and even religion, the concept of the worldwide community, imagined or experienced, has consequences for how Muslims conduct themselves. The interests of British Muslims are not confined to Britain but extend beyond its borders through the diaspora and global umma, which is facilitated even more so today with the development of advanced information and communication technologies. Anderson’s (1983) description of an ‘imagined political community’ may be usefully applied here to an ‘imagined global community’ or umma. The sense of belonging to this community intensifies during crises and in fact local events and issues may become less meaningful if people feel that there are more pressing international issues. Identifying with global concerns in turn impacts on how one perceives being a Muslim and this global connectivity creates new associations amongst geographically dispersed people.

The impact of globalisation on Muslim (and other religious) identities has been enormous. Ameli (2000) argues that today’s global post-modern society has forced religious identities into crises and the reactions to the challenges posed by this have
manifested themselves in differing responses of identity formation. “The fragmentation of religious identities, the relativization of religious belief and the pluralization of religious understanding are only a few of the distinct characteristics of a post-modern society” (p 154). Looking specifically at Muslim identity, he suggests that four different types of selfhood and identity are emerging in response to the compelling influences of globalisation; resistance, legitimizing, mix hybrid and drifting vagrant identities. Resistance identity in essence originates from the insecurity and danger felt by Muslims when faced by Western culture. They often find safety in traditional, conservative religious movements and identifications. Legitimizing identity is that which is introduced by the dominant institutions of society and results in conformity between selfhood and institutionalised norms of society. Hybrid identity combines the deep-rooted attachment from parental culture with that of the new environment. Parental culture produces religious identity but other dimensions of identity are shaped by the new environment. The fourth type of identity (vagrant) Ameli reserves exclusively for the (modern) youth. He feels this is the outcome of living in a society which has no clear aims and is constantly in flux, where the importance of values, religious activities and conduct has been decentralized, leading to confusion and uncertainty. A sense of hopelessness and social disillusionment mark this identity. My investigation of identity formation amongst young British Muslims in an era of globalisation will benefit from this description of responses. It may be that young Muslims fit into these categories in a precise way or perhaps they are in fact creating new and different responses in identifying as Muslims.

It is important to remember however that it is not just global trends that impose on identity. For my respondents national issues as well as concerns in their own locality both exert an influence on how they perceive and express themselves. Community dynamics, family relationships, education, friends and personal characteristics are some of the other factors that affect identity.

For a full description of each of these see Ameli (2000) pp 163-167 and further Ameli (2002).

Though I realise these local and national dynamics may themselves be a result of wider global processes or at least be influenced by globalisation, I want to emphasise the importance of more localised factors.
For Muslims living in Britain, knowledge of different aspects of an Islamic identity, perhaps from other countries, can merge with local characteristics to give rise to new identifications. The research will explore what these new identifications might be and how they are producing different ways of expressing Muslim-ness amongst young British Muslims. Questions will be put to the young Muslims I interview to explore the processes involved in developing a particular kind of identification with Islam or as Muslims (individual and collective). Has an increased identification with Islam (or their Muslim-ness) been apparent amongst my respondents? If so, what have been the processes involved in this and what role has globalisation played in all of this?

Globalisation and cultural imperialism link with one another and they also have particular connotations for identity formation, though both sets of processes tend to have contradictory results for how people are perceiving and defining themselves and others. Furthermore, the dynamics and impact of globalisation have not excluded Muslim communities. Influences of globalisation have been felt by Muslims in Muslim countries and by Muslims in the non-Muslim world. Indeed in a time when Islam is itself becoming global - “by virtue of migration and conversion, Islam is found everywhere” (Khan, 2000b) – it becomes difficult to demarcate accurately the presence of Muslims and the influence of Islam. However, as Sreberny (2002) petitions, globalisation needs to be examined as the lived reality of people’s lives rather than observed as an abstract concept. It is anticipated that responses to the above questions will provide some insight into this lived reality.

Diaspora

Rather than examine diaspora theory in depth, I propose here simply to describe and present some basic concepts of diaspora. Secondly, I will discuss specific issues affecting the South Asian Muslim diaspora in Britain and consider how the experiences and dynamics of diaspora are influencing identity. Three particular themes I outline are those of gender dynamics, knowledge and learning and media in diaspora.

The debate surrounding diaspora populations has gained much momentum in recent years. Though diaspora communities have existed throughout history, the scale of
movement of people in the past few decades has given a new sense of urgency to the concept. The more historical definition of diaspora relating to the dispersal of the Jewish population has now expanded to incorporate movements of other groups. The notion of persecution, exile, political conflict and war has broadened to include "population movement [that] could have been induced as part of global flows of labour, the trajectory of many, for example African-Caribbeans, Asians, Cypriots, or Irish people in Britain" (Brah, 1996, 9 182). Whatever the reason for the creation of various diasporas, they carry with them some idea of longing (to return), memory, a homeland (imagined or real) and they also connect multiple communities of dispersed populations (Clifford, 1994).

Cunningham and Sinclair (2000) propose some criteria in defining diaspora:

"Certainly, some sense of difference, marginality and displaced belonging is essential to the concept, including a strong identification with a homeland and the corresponding resistance of diasporic groups to complete assimilation by the host nation. However, the most literal element in any definition must be that of dispersal" (cited in Husband, 2002, p 156).

In today's world there are many examples of diaspora communities; Palestinians, Kashmiris, Kurds, South Asians, Bosnian Muslims and various African populations, such as the Somalis.

"Diasporas emerge out of migrations of collectivities, whether or not members of the collectivity travel as individuals, as households or in various other combinations. Diasporas are places of long-term, if not permanent, community formations, even if some households or members move on elsewhere. The word diaspora often invokes the imagery of traumas of separation and dislocation, and this is certainly a very important aspect of the migratory experience. But diasporas are also potentially the sites of hope and new beginnings. They are contested cultural and political terrains where the individual and collective memories collide, reassemble and reconfigure" (Brah, 1996, p 193).

An additional factor which renders the experience of diaspora very different from previously in history is the media (Brah, 1996, Clifford, 1994). Indeed the main reason for greater interaction between diaspora communities and their homeland, as well as amongst dispersed groups within diaspora, is the rapid, relatively cheap and easily
accessible channels of communication. The role of media in diaspora will be the final topic I want to cover within this section.

The dynamics of diaspora communities are closely linked with globalising processes. Indeed a diaspora population can be seen to epitomise the bipolar tendencies of globalisation and localization in a globalising world. Though diaspora often has a particular focal point (geographically), it almost always has a global reach, connecting both homeland and the network of fellow diasporians. Thus, diasporic identities are at once global and local. However, a point that Brah (1996) makes in her critique of discourses of fixed origin, is that a homing desire is different from a desire for a ‘homeland’ and that in fact not all diasporas sustain an ideology of ‘return’. This idea is perhaps of greater relevance to subsequent generations in diaspora populations, some of whom may not even have visited their ancestral home. Whilst primary migrants may retain vivid memories of and aspirations to return home, a mere sense of connectedness and loose affiliation to ‘home’ may suffice for those born in their current diaspora locations. A sense of belonging may be achieved through this alone. Here Brah’s (1996) idea that diaspora identities are networks of transnational identifications, both ‘imagined’ and ‘encountered’, is applicable.

It is important to recognise the differentiated experiences within diaspora. “Diaspora communities are not merely geographically dispersed fragments of a common core culture. The internal fragmentation of generation, gender and class need to be recognized as dynamic engines of social mobilization and key sites of identity negotiation” (Husband, 2002, p 158). This means that the diasporic aspect of a person’s identity partially represents their total experiences. The migration of women from poorer countries working as low paid employees is very different to the settlement of highly skilled (and highly paid) entrepreneurs. The trauma faced by political refugees, both in their own country and at their destination, can not compare with the experience of economic migrants who have chosen to relocate abroad.

Generation is a key differential in diaspora experience, perhaps more so than any other factor. Sreberny’s (2000) account of Iranians in London, focusing on their media use, shows how the aspirations of first generation migrants from Iran differs from those of
their children (and how this is reflected in their media use). Whilst the former still retain a nostalgia for Iran and a desire to return (though the reality of their settling in London has perhaps diminished the prospects of this), their children “were already products of British education and immersed in British culture” (p 191). However, the latter did not feel completely part of the British culture either and there was an emerging division between the generations in terms of perceptions and aspirations.

Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslim youth in Britain no doubt share some of these experiences with their Iranian counterparts. For both, language, schooling and familiarity with British institutions and structures may have made the connection with Britain stronger and therefore the link with ‘home’ weaker compared to their parents. Indeed if we are exploring the emergence of new identities and identifications, then the likelihood of having stronger affiliations with the same generation from different ethnic backgrounds may be high. Shared experiences at school for example may make the sense of belonging closer and more obvious with similar aged people rather than necessarily those of the same ethnic group. Where religion is a common binding factor this may be reinforced further.

**The South Asian Muslim Diaspora in Britain**

The British South Asian Muslim diaspora is of greatest relevance to my work (connecting with Pakistan, Bangladesh and India). I suspect that the generational differences noted earlier apply as much to these groups as they do to other diaspora populations, with primary migrants from South Asia having a more determined association with their place of birth. One of the ways in which subsequent generations have maintained a connection with their parents’ country of birth is through marriage. This and travel (visiting relatives) have meant that South Asia still plays a role in the lives of younger South Asian Muslims (Anwar, 1986). Maintaining South Asian culture at home in Britain has of course been of primary importance in compensating for the infrequency of travel. Dress, food, language, customs and ideologies have all been elements passed on by parents to their children in order to maintain their culture in their lives. Not only this but retaining cultural symbols, especially language, has been a key to ensuring a smooth transition (temporary though it may be) into either Pakistan,
Bangladesh or India during visits. Studies of Pakistani communities in Britain have shown how structures such as the **biraderi** (kinship networks) system have survived the journey from Pakistan to Britain and still function in a similar way to villages in Pakistan (see for example, Raza, 1991 and Anwar, 1985). In his study of *The Four Tribes of Nottingham*, Hussein (1999) shows how **biraderi** was a very important factor in determining mosque constructions and local council elections. He states that the kinship system still plays a significant role in the dynamics of Pakistanis in Nottingham. And as importantly, these kinship systems are one of the major routes through which diasporic connections are reinforced.

My attention then is turned to how the ideas and practices of **biraderi** will be perceived by younger generations of South Asian Muslims. Will they be maintained and modified or will they be totally rejected if they are seen to hold no value, and indeed are seen as unnecessary hindrances. In exploring these ideas I aim to understand a number of factors. Firstly it should reveal something of the changing nature of generations amongst a minority ethnic and religious population (intergenerational relationships and change). Secondly, it relates to my investigation of the role of Islam compared to the role of culturally embedded practices in the formation of identity. If aspects of **biraderi** are seen as un-Islamic (for example only marrying within the **biraderi**), how are these being renegotiated out of the lives of younger Muslims without disappointing or disagreeing with parents and elders. The systems of kinship and community practices have certainly undergone change in being transported to the British social setting. Economic and employment disparities have almost certainly diminished in cases where people of so called ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ ‘castes’ are both working in the same office or factory. The education of their children, perhaps all professional university graduates, also weakens the boundaries that segregate different groups. Despite these equalising processes, people still maintain difference at a social level and refuse to acknowledge the futility and irrelevance of certain categorisations. Again a salient point is that of internal differentiation within diaspora communities. Not only have diaspora populations travelled in separate units over time and in differing circumstances, but their lives in diaspora are fragmented along class, gender and generation amongst other factors. The experiences and anxieties of Indians living in poor housing in an inner city
area, with low employment prospects, will be unlike those of middle class Bangladeshi professionals living in suburban neighbourhoods (Brah, 1996).

Raza (1991) states that the sectarian element has become acute in Britain as a way of reacting to the secular context within which Muslims find themselves. Rather than cling to their religion Muslims have clung to their sectarian identities. Ethnicity and regionalism are also still powerful differentiating factors. The Shia-Sunni dynamics are possibly of less relevance than the inter-Sunni or Sunni-Wahhabi politics\(^{13}\). Raza sees the outcome of this exposure to secular society as one of reactionary Islam, one in which Muslims have become defensive of and have adhered to their practices for the sake of being different. As a result many of these practices have become empty, meaningless rituals which do not actually hold any substance, any connection with the Divine. I would agree with Raza to a certain extent, however, I feel Muslims have thought of these processes at a more sophisticated level. Exposure to secular society, or indeed any society whose moral, ethical and legal values may be different, has made Muslims realise their own values, culture and religion need to be protected. Being conscious of the increased exposure to different values has for instance resulted in a stronger emphasis on certain cultural practices. These practices then act as a barrier against values that are incompatible with Islamic teachings. This probably accounts for why when British/Pakistani Muslims visit Pakistan they are seen as holding onto the past with greater force than those living in Pakistan. In an environment which can potentially be hostile to Muslims or at least with a value system unlike that of Islam, culture has been a way to reinforce Islam. What this means is that cultural practices that have been Islamicised, for example dress or food, are then seen as important in maintaining the distance required for recognition as Muslims.

For Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian Muslims in Britain the diaspora connection remains particularly strong for the first generation of migrants to travel away from their homes. How strong this connection is for their children and grandchildren is something that is of importance and interest to communities and academics alike (for example, Jacobson, 1998 and Vertovec, 1998). The manifestations of this connection will most probably vary between different generations. For younger British Muslims a heightened

\(^{13}\) See section on ‘Ideological Issues’ in Chapter Two for brief details of Sunni-Wahhabi dynamics.
awareness of the political struggles facing Muslims around the world may not limit their connections to the country of their ethnic origin as much as for their parents. Their attention may be focused on the brotherhood or *umma* concept and go beyond particular ethnic or national concerns. The presence of Muslims in non-Muslim countries in the West, including North America, Europe, Australia and the former Soviet republics, has expanded the area encompassed by the global Muslim community. The connections between dispersed Muslim populations have been facilitated by the development of information and communication technologies, the outcome of which has been increased awareness of the condition of Muslims all over the world.

If the connections between disparate communities are being enhanced then this may impact on the ways in which people think of themselves as part of a larger group. The sense of belonging to a body that extends beyond the immediate locality, or even nation, and encompasses an extremely diverse group of people, may be a source of comfort and confidence, particularly for those living as minorities. This was reflected in Jacobson’s (1998) findings. She notes that by widening the idea of Muslim identity to cover the whole *umma*, young Muslims are saying that nationality is not important, what matters is being a Muslim:

“In this way the boundaries defining Muslim identity and the plausibility structure they delineate are strengthened: the young Muslims are likely to feel that although within British society they are members of a relatively small and weak minority, their religious beliefs and practices traverse the globe and history and are thus components of what is a vast and (potentially at least) powerful force.” (Jacobson, 1998, p 148)

Thus young British Muslims of Pakistani origin are finding a strength in associating with a wider, global community rather than a small, localised and relatively powerless group of Muslims. This is an example of a newly emerging identity envisaged by Hall (1996), emphasising its religious element and crossing boundaries to create an international alliance. My research aims to look at how young Muslims in Britain are developing new associations and identities that are influenced by these wider global processes. These types of affiliation may be seen as problematic by governments or even local communities. In the former case it could challenge the hegemony of the nation-state and in the latter it might perhaps undermine the stability of real
communities. For first generation migrants, remittances to family and community 'back home' were probably the main economic connection, with visits back home being less frequent. Now however, the spectrum of 'conversations' between home and diaspora, and within diaspora, have broadened. Not only are family ties maintained but these connections include greater sympathy with political struggles, social and cultural movements and the import and export of understandings and practices of religion. Second and third generation Muslims in Britain may be undergoing a dual, contradictory process whereby there are experiencing a weakening of ties with their place of origin whilst at the same time strengthening ties with what they see as other Islamic/Muslim homes. In this way the experience of diaspora for Muslims relates to the concept of a global umma.

Sayyid (1998) argues that diaspora seems an unlikely metaphor for the Muslim umma because there is no homeland (imagined or otherwise) from which Muslims have been displaced and to which they envisage return. If diaspora contains the idea of being homeless, it becomes difficult to compare directly to the Muslim umma as the universality of Islam precludes any concept of homeland as such (though perhaps the differentiation between dar-al-Islam and dar-al-harb\(^\text{14}\) may be considered). He believes that a reconceptualisation of diaspora from a demographic to a political formation helps us better redefine the Muslim diaspora. Diaspora and migration have been of relevance to Muslims since the very beginning of Islam when migrations (hijra) took place from Makkah initially to Abyssinia and then more significantly to Madina. Movements of Muslim communities are therefore not a new phenomenon, but for the factors mentioned above (especially media) the interactions between the now widely dispersed umma have taken on greater significance.

Many of the experiences of those forming the Muslim diaspora are similar to groups in other diasporas. One similarity between diaspora and umma is that it transcends or challenges the nation-state system by articulating identities that are inter- or intra-national. Though the concept of a global umma may feature strongly in the imagination of many Muslims, its existence in reality may not be so obvious. This is not because of the diversity and differences amongst Muslims – this does not prevent the formation of

\(^{14}\) Dar-al-Islam translates as the 'the abode of Islam' and dar-al-harb the 'abode of war'. For a more detailed explanation see Ramadan (1999).
a united entity – but Sayyid (1998) cites three main reasons. Firstly, the project of nationalism is very strong amongst Muslim societies, often given preference over the *umma*. Secondly, the “integration of Muslim communities into the global economy are seen as signs of the waning significance of Muslim identity. For example, it is argued that the Islamist rejection of modernity flies in the face of the desire of Muslims to have television, Coca-Cola, 501 Levi’s, McDonalds etc” (p 10). Thirdly, the idea of the Muslim *umma* is undermined by internal conflicts (not diversity) between Muslims, such as the Iran-Iraq war and sectarian conflicts in Muslim countries and in diaspora. Despite these factors though, the notion of the *umma* has many implications for Muslims, not least for individual and collective identity.

**Gender**

Of particular interest are the processes of change that gender relations are exposed to because as Clifford (1994) asserts “diasporic experiences are always gendered” (p 313). Muslim women in the Western diaspora, especially those born and educated here, constantly encounter different discourses on ‘womanhood’, gender relations and critiques of patriarchal societies. In many of these discourses, the two main ones being feminism and Orientalism, the roles and characteristics of women in Islam have been the object of derision. In the first Muslim women have been portrayed as being oppressed and subjugated with unequal status. In the second images of exoticism and sensuality have been common (Ahmad, 2001a). But as some of the studies cited earlier have shown, Muslim women have in fact used Islam to critique these understanding of Muslim women’s lives and beliefs, often referring to Muslim or Islamic feminist discourse (Ali, 1998). Moreover they have used Islam to challenge their parents’ and communities’ attitudes towards and practices regarding women. Where they feel customs and restrictions are framed within cultural tradition, they have applied Islamic teachings to dispute this position. Women (and men to some extent) have deconstructed customary understandings of gender roles in Islam and by doing so have developed new concepts of Muslim female identity.

Naturally the category of ‘Muslim women’ includes a large and diverse set of women, from different backgrounds and with different experiences and understandings. Though
I am focusing on women who profess an affiliation to their religion (in thoughts and through practice). I am aware of this diversity. Factors which differentiate any other group, such as locality, education, socio-economic status, age, ethnicity, all play a part in distinguishing between different Muslim women. It would appear that there is a greater desire for women to return to the pure texts, teachings and practices of Islam (Vertovec, 1998, Dwyer, 1998). Mandaville (2000) asserts that the questioning and reinterpretation of the conventional religious knowledge which Muslims in the West are undertaking is as applicable to women:

“Today more Muslim women than ever before are to be found in the public spheres of diaspora – in places of work and in higher education... More and more Muslim women, seem to be taking Islam into their own hands. They are not hesitating to question, criticise and even reject the Islam of their parents. Often this takes the form of drawing distinctions between culture, understood as oppressive tendencies which derive from parents' ethnosocial background, and religion, a 'true' Islam untainted by either culture or gender discrimination. Young Muslim women are hence often more religiously self-conscious than their mothers or grandmothers, seeing Islam as a 'progressive' force which allows them to move away from their increasingly unfamiliar South Asian roots, but at the same time also avoid submission to Western cultural norms” (p 141).

Empirical studies have demonstrated how women wish to articulate their Muslim identity in their own language such that non-Muslims' misunderstandings and stereotypes are resisted and strict cultural understandings of Islam are also disrupted (Dwyer, 1998, Ahmad, 2001a). At the same time the charges leveled against the inferior status of women in Islam have met with responses from classical scholars (Murad, 2002). These have avoided the often apologetic manner in which gender relations in Islam are explained and have even used the work of writers such as Germaine Greer to advance a discourse on gender which accounts for the presence of God, often challenging the narrow and eurocentric nature of Western feminism.

Meeting in diaspora not only with non-Muslim women but Muslim women from Arabia, Africa and Far East Asia has enabled both women and men to appreciate different cultural manifestations of Islam as far as gender dynamics are concerned. In many instances South Asian Muslim culture is said to have adopted non-Islamic elements of Hindu teachings which have been questioned by, for example, Arab Muslim women, forcing South Asian Muslims to reassess their religious knowledge. Parents
have also made concessions on allowing 'unwomanly' behaviour where they feel it suited their wider purposes, for example, encouraging a daughter to work in order to secure residency for a spouse from abroad (Mandaville, 2000).

Diaspora has also enabled British Muslim women to draw comparisons between their own experiences and those of women in the Indian subcontinent. First hand experience of this has come from visits to the countries, though other forms of contact also exist. Cross fertilisation of ideas and sharing of problems may help to reinforce a link with home through concerns focused on women more than anything else. Recent coverage given to issues such as 'honour killings' in Pakistan (Jilani, 1999) and high profile campaigners such as Asma Jahangir and Hina Jilani\(^{15}\) has forcibly strengthened the tie between diaspora Pakistanis and those in Pakistan\(^{16}\). Sadly, this has not been the only reminder of such actions, for Britain's Pakistani community now has its own record of honour killings\(^{17}\).

**Diaspora Identity**

For diaspora communities, the potential inputs into the formation of their identities come from a number of factors. The first of these is the often quite strong link with 'home'. This link is actively maintained because of the fear of it becoming blurred and eventually extinguished due to the powerful factors in the new environment. However, at the same time an acknowledgement of the new environment is perhaps what has lead to identities using dual subjectivities such as British-Asian, African-American or British Muslim. "Cultures of hybridity" are thus created in the formation of the lives of diaspora populations. As with all cultural identities, the identities of diaspora populations are in transition, maintaining traditional values whilst incorporating elements of encounters from their new environment into their identity.

\(^{15}\) Both women are lawyers and human rights activists campaigning for women's rights. They are 'controversial' figures, and have been threatened on numerous occasions, for upsetting the religious and cultural norms regarding women in Pakistan and have been accused by male religious leaders of espousing Western feminism on the society's traditions.

\(^{16}\) An example of this is Asma Jahangir's visit to Manchester, UK to discuss the issue of honour killings in Pakistan. *Honour Killings*, 5th April 2002, organised by South Manchester Law Centre.

\(^{17}\) In 1999 Rukhsana Naz was killed by her brother and mother for becoming pregnant through an extra-marital affair. See "Life for 'honour' killing of pregnant teenager by mother and brother", Sarah Hall, *The Guardian*, May 26 1999.
An additional factor to consider in diaspora identities is the imprint given by the ‘host’ culture as just one amongst a set of identifiers. The particular identification – Muslim, Pakistani, Londoner, British – that has most meaning for an individual will reflect on how they express their identity. Perhaps a combination of identifications will constitute the identity of my respondents and this may be an example of how borrowing from a variety of social settings can develop multi-layered identities. The British Asian ‘scene’ has developed considerably in the past several years. This is an indication of the strength of diaspora space, as Brah (1996) notes. She argues that “diaspora space as a conceptual category is ‘inhabited’, not only by those who have migrated and their descendants, but equally those who are constructed and represented as indigenous. In other words, the concept of diaspora space (as opposed to that of diaspora) includes the entanglement, the intertwining of the genealogies of dispersion with those of ‘staying put’. The diaspora space is the site where the native is as much a diasporian as the diasporian is the native” (pg 209). Brah does not however ignore the power relations within this space and recognizes social relations, experience, subjectivity and identity as relational categories within these power relations. Similar to Husband (2002) she notes that class, racism, gender, sexuality and other such factors complicate individual experiences in diaspora. What this shows though is that both ‘migrant’ and host communities interact to create the diaspora experience, not just those settling in a new location. Interactions and exchanges (including clashes) with the white British population, with other diaspora communities and with international tourists, make the experience of identity construction in the South Asian Muslim diaspora richer and different from that of families and communities ‘back home’. Shared experience with the indigenous population as well as encounters with ‘home’ both have an influence on peoples’ ideas and activities.

Islamic Knowledge in Diaspora

The coming together of different Muslim groups in diaspora is an interesting phenomenon. Mandaville (2001) shows how this meeting of Muslims in diaspora (mainly North America and Western Europe) has forced them to deal with the Muslim ‘other’. From his observations this meeting appears to have resulted in a set of complicated process. On the one hand it has allowed Muslims to look at themselves
from a new perspective, often one critical of practices taken for granted in the 'homeland'. It has also meant more freedom to practice their religion in cases of 'unorthodox' sects (such as the Ahmediyyas in the UK). This hasn't meant that complete unity has emerged amongst Muslims. Indeed whilst perhaps coming together at certain times for a common cause or against a common opponent, Muslim communities have been fairly divided along ethnic, political, ideological, linguistic and perhaps generational lines. It might have been predicted that the move into diaspora would have eliminated or at least diminished the divisions amongst Muslims and perhaps this has happened in certain aspects, however, quite profound differences also remain. Though Mandaville (2001) doesn’t confine any developments or self-critiques amongst Muslims living only in the West, he believes a particular kind of environment exists which encourages or even forces Muslims to rethink aspects of their religious and cultural practices in diaspora. For second and third generation Muslims this rethinking can include critiques of their own parent’s understandings of Islam.

The movement of information, political ideas, other activism and people between Britain and the subcontinent is an example of the living nature of diaspora connections. Imran Khan, the former cricket captain now active in politics in Pakistan, ‘toured’ Britain as part of his election campaign and also used the opportunity to raise money for his cancer hospital. Similarly, in order to launch and get publicity for his film, Jinnah, Akbar Ahmed actively took advantage of the strong appeal in both Pakistan and in the Pakistani diaspora (including the UK and the USA) for this topic. Staying informed about the social, economic and political situations of the Indian subcontinent is apparent through the local concerns of Muslims, such as charity appeals and also through media consumption (reading newspapers jointly published in Pakistan for example). In speaking about the global umma, interests and concerns extent beyond just diaspora relations to other areas involving Muslim conflict or hardship, political unrest or other issues. Palestine, Kashmir, Bosnia, Kosova, Chechnya and Iraq are recent examples. It is perhaps these overwhelmingly political concerns that lead Sayyid (1998) to define the Muslim diaspora as a political entity rather than simply a demographic one. Similarly Mandaville (2000) is concerned with the dynamics of Muslim political thinking and action in 'translocality' rather than an apolitical notion of community as a cultural unit.
From my own observations and relating to what Mandaville (2000) outlines, I envisage that living in diaspora has increased the availability of information about global issues. This is true of all places ‘networked’ into a global telecommunications system, however in global cities such as London real contact with people from all over the world increases the awareness and potential to gain knowledge through more direct information sources. The recent *Guardian/ICM* poll showed that “the international situation dominates the concerns of most Muslims living in Britain. More than 70% of the sample said they were ‘very conscious’ about the Kashmir dispute (79%), the Middle East crisis (73%) and war in Afghanistan (70%), eclipsing concerns about domestic issues. Only education (64%) came close to the level of interest expressed about Kashmir or Afghanistan” (Travis, 2002). Whether these statistics are reflected in my qualitative interviews will be a point to note. As importantly, why there may be a bias towards international issues can be explored during these discussions.

Thus the development of Islamic knowledge in diaspora involves a complex set of variables. Diaspora becomes a congregation point for various interpretations and practices of Islam. In addition to the previously unknown aspects of Islam, Muslims have to think through their religion in the shadow of modern, postmodern and secular discourses. The method of questioning imparted to children through the schooling process, combined with their own learning about Islam, enables them to access particular resources. These resources and the limited formal education in Islamic sciences have opened up the potential for young Muslims to learn and re-learn their religion for themselves. The access to and range of information obtainable in diaspora helps individuals formulate their own understanding of Islam and to facilitate this desire for learning Muslims have established various media and educational outlets (I will examine these in chapters Four and Five).

The desire of countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran and Pakistan (amongst others) to keep an element of control or at least influence over diaspora Muslims is manifest in the overseas funding of projects, especially mosques, the publication of literature, financial subsidies for organisations and communication over domestic politics. Diaspora Muslims may be seen as potential ‘converts’ to the established interpretations of Islam in each of these countries. Younger Muslims would especially be the target of this
rivalry as they are perceived to be in the process of establishing their Islamic identity or their religio-political affiliations. Because they have the potential to incline towards any one version of ‘Islam’, influencing them through organisational structures could be a prime objective for Muslim countries. Ramadan (1999) argues though that this is changing, mainly as the control shifts from first generation to second and subsequent generations of Muslims. Because the latter groups see themselves more and more as European Muslims, they are creating for themselves organisations and institutions that reflect their permanent place in Europe. Financial independence means the freedom to develop their organizations, activities and cultural space to suit their needs rather than being dictated to from overseas.

Diaspora Media

Media has been of great value and significance in maintaining the link between the country of origin and dispersed communities in diaspora. Information technologies have been pivotal in enhancing this communication.

“The diasporas proliferating at the end of the twentieth century will be experienced quite differently, in some respects, in this age of new technologies and rapid communications compared with the time when it took months to travel or communicate across seas. The impact of electronic media, together with growing opportunities for fast travel, invests Marshall McLuhan’s idea of ‘the global village’ with new meanings. Simultaneous transmission to countries linked by satellite means an event happening in one part of the world can be ‘watched together’ by people in different parts of the globe... these developments have important implications for the construction of new and varied ‘imagined communities’” (Brah, 1996, p 195).

Sreberny’s (2000) study of the Iranian diaspora in London shows how nostalgia for Iran is maintained through newspapers and other media, especially amongst first generation migrants.

“Diasporic media may play to all poles of affect: they can help Iranians relocate within the British cultural space, the inward turn; or they can exacerbate feelings of dislocation, the temporariness of the Iranian existence in England and intense involvement with affairs inside the Islamic Republic, the backward look; or they can bind Iranians to the emerging transnational Iranian community, the truly diasporic vision. (Sreberny, 2000, p 193)
Media in diaspora do not just fulfill the simple function of disseminating information about the place of origin but transmit knowledge about new situations which diaspora populations have found themselves in – making the connection with the new home. The internet has served as an important tool through which pockets of diaspora populations have remained constantly in touch with one another. Though other methods do exist the rapid exchanges enabled by electronic communication has heralded a new phase of interconnectivity. New communities - virtual communities - are established through these exchanges in cyberspace (Bunt, 2000 and Mandaville, 2001). Much of the focus of alternative and diaspora media, for example, the Muslim media in the UK, is on issues relating to Muslims around the world, again expanding the concern from just diaspora homes to the whole global umma. As has been noted above, there are many differences within any diaspora population. These differences reflect on the varied consumption of media. For example, Pakistanis born in Pakistan pay more attention to Urdu language media compared to their children as their interest in the politics of the Indian subcontinent are greater than that of the latter. The media is also vital for publicity in the examples I noted earlier of Imran Khan’s and Akbar Ahmed’s connections with Pakistan. As Husband (1998) notes:

"[an] important feature of the minority ethnic press reporting... [is] the translocation of Pakistani party politics to the Pakistani communities in Britain. This domestication of Pakistani sub-continent politics in the British context blurs any easy distinction between British and overseas news. Events in Britain are not irrelevant to the political process in Pakistan, and political agendas fiercely contested in Pakistan, are not without organized factional support in Britain" (p 30).

This is the type of transnational political activity that extends to all diaspora communities in Britain. Dayan (1998) stresses the importance of media in influencing the identities of diaspora communities. He does not confine media to newspapers, radio and similar resources but includes activities, practices and organisations that people participate in. Community or particularistic media, he says, seems especially relevant in ensuring the survival of ‘endangered cultures’ and maintaining links as they have become geographically dispersed groups. For minority groups who fear a ‘cultural homogenisation’ the creation of ‘new public spheres’ through their media is a way to resist this (Dayan, 1998). Sreberny’s (2000) work demonstrates the pivotal role of diaspora media in binding transnational communities and maintaining minority ethnic
identities as well as creating ties to the new homes of those in exile or diaspora. Similar to Dayan (1998), Sreberny includes festivals, cultural events and religiously significant dates as part of the wider media environment but also includes community organisations as an important indicator of how communities function and continue to develop.

Diaspora media offers alternatives to mainstream media discourses, particularly about minority ethnic and religious communities and issues relevant to them. The Muslim media in Britain is the focus of my research but I do acknowledge that there are various ethnic and other religious media. It is this form of media which I anticipate will be the most significant to my respondents. I am also interested in investigating how the concept of the (global) Muslim umma is articulated in Muslim media and in the perceptions and experiences of young Muslims themselves.

If as Gillespie (2000) asserts "media and cultural consumption – the production, ‘reading’ and uses of representations – play a key role in contesting the reconstituting national, religious, gender and ethnic identities" then exactly what this involves will be the focus on my investigation. It is clear that diaspora communities use transnational communications networks and that their connections are strengthened as a result of this, both symbolically (watching the same movies) and in a concrete manner (such as exchanging home videos). Brah (1996) observes that racism and the limited sense of belonging to any particular nation or culture can generate a desire for new kinds of transnational and diasporic identifications. With much of the theorising of South Asia youth falling into the ‘caught between two cultures’ idea, Brah’s assertion of these new identifications may be usefully tested with my respondents. Is media helping to settle those persons ‘floating’ around in diaspora or is it in fact disembedding them further from any home because of the international outlook of diaspora?

The role of media in a globalising world and its impact on identity is crucial. Barker (1999) explores the relationship between globalisation and cultural identities and shows how “television is a proliferating resource for the construction of identities” (Barker, p 119). This role can be extended to other forms of media and applied to the consumption of media by diaspora communities. Indeed it is in diaspora communities that media could be seen as a compensating factor for the reduced contact with the country of
origin. The variety of media discourses has enabled the audience to choose from and identify with a diversity of identities. Therefore, aside from drawing on a variety of resources that exist in the local environment of a person, access to a mediated world of opportunities extends the spectrum of choice. More open discussion in popular viewing and culture, for example about gender, sexuality or ethnicity has given a certain confidence to previously marginalized groups. Audiences are thus able to interpret television and media messages within their own life circumstances for their chosen purpose. Though not uncritical about television representations, Barker (1999) argues that a "diversity of representations" can be sought from television (and other media) that can be used as a resource for identity construction. He recommends the development of alternative discursive resources so that the images available to the audience are not only ones of the hegemonic structures but of a spectrum of views in society. Though media have been available to people previously, in a global context, electronic media in particular "break the traditional bonds between geographic place and social identity since mass media provide us with increasing sources of identification which are situated beyond the immediacy of specific places" (Barker, 1999, p 118). These messages are then relayed to a variety of local contexts, which in turn interpret meanings of text according to their particular situation.

The newly emerging identities in constantly changing (global) diaspora space is where I presume my respondents will be located. How they create and negotiate this space and the impact this has on their identity is what I aim to explore in my research.

MEDIA

The increasing salience of media in the development of culture, community and identity cannot be ignored, therefore it is necessary to explore how media consumption may help to explain the emerging phenomenon of a British Muslim identity. This section is separated into three parts. Firstly I present a general overview of the role of media in society and its role in influencing individual and collective identity (including aspects of the media 'effects' debate). Secondly, I focus on the relationship Muslims have with

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18 Notions of media and cultural imperialism (and diaspora media) have already been discussed in 'Globalisation and Diaspora' and therefore will not be reviewed here. However, their relevance should be borne in mind when reading this section.
the media, both mainstream and Muslim media. These two areas are examined to gain an understanding of the potential media has in the lives of my respondents and from these I extract questions which will form the third part of the section.

Media increasingly occupies a more prominent position in our social landscape. Its ubiquity has become a normal part of our lives, whether we are aware of this or not. The debate on media 'effects' has continued for a considerable period of time within mass communication theory and two major shifts have occurred in this debate. The first was a move away from the 'hypodermic' capabilities of media, which stated that there were strong and direct effects of media. The second was a critique of active audiences that were endowed with the ability to read and interpret media messages however they chose to (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995). In presenting a critique of earlier theories Gauntlet (1998) concludes that many aspects of the 'effects' model were flawed, taking the wrong approach to mass media, audiences and society in general. More subtle approaches to studying the relationship between media and audiences were required especially as the global context of media production and consumption changed.

The function of media is viewed according to underlying assumptions of how society works (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995). For the Marxist school of thought the media is seen as an instrument of reinforcing the ideological status quo in society. Thus its function is to report and present issues in such a way as to increase acquiescence amongst the general public. Pluralists on the other hand would argue the media, like other actors in society, is a platform on which various groups contest their agendas. Rather than being a supplement to one ideological stance, it provides a forum for debate on different issues and from differing points of view. However, what the latter group would contend is that the media is involved in 'agenda-setting', whereby the media sets the priorities on 'what' it is that will be presented, though it may not be able to persuade the public directly (Curran and Seaton, 2000). The frameworks media creates within which to discuss political issues, race and social concerns are created to reflect a particular perspective. This normally functions to marginalise other, challenging perspectives and voices.
Media and Identity

With such a presence in our lives, what role can media play in influencing our notion of identity? The role of media in constructing and maintaining a specific national identity has been studied previously, though the relationship is far from linear or a one way process. Schlesinger (1989) states that we need to turn around the terms of the conventional argument, that is, not to start with communication and its supposed effects on national identity and culture but to look at the national identity itself, to ask how it is constituted and what role communication practices play in its constitution. The media and communications industry are part of wider socio-cultural, political and economic structures that are all potential sources of influence for individual and collective identity formation.

“What is the nature of the relationship between communications, culture and identity?... Within the prevailing framework, cultural identities are only conceived of as responsive and reactive to the controlling stimulus of communications technologies. What is needed is a better formulation of the problem, one that takes questions of cultural and national identity as both central and problematic categories” (Morley and Robins, 2002; 90).

So how would the media create or encourage a national or collective identity? Creating a national story or socialising members of one group about a collective culture is how the mass media can contribute to building national identity (Das and Harindranath, 1999). One method employed by the media to define national identity is by excluding or marginalising certain voices whilst giving prominence to that which they see as the voice of the dominant group, effectively excluding minority or oppositional discourses. In this way the national collective is defined by asserting who is ‘in’ and who is not, the ‘us’ and ‘them’ of national recognition. In a similar way to Anderson’s (1983) concept of ‘imagined communities’ the media provide a point through which people living in distant areas can focus their attention. Though not present at many national events, the closeness achieved through media enables millions of people to share, participate in and identify with rituals ‘involving’ fellow nationals. Of course media are only one of the agencies through which national identity is constructed. The education system is another pervasive agency, as well as interaction with friends, family, peers and colleagues. As a result of these varied interactions and because of people’s critical
readings of media messages, the impact of media may not be as strong and direct as first expected. It is impossible to know that the audience have gathered from the message what the producers had intended, the desired or preferred reading. The diversity present in any population along age, ethnic, gender, linguistic, political and religious lines renders a fixed reading of any given text highly improbable. Not only this but there can be active resistance to the desired hegemonic reading of media - this can be collective or individual. These resistant and critical readings are of interest in my research. A critical interpretation of media is one aspect of resistance, a further stage could be the development of alternative media. Meanings which audiences derive from media depend on their cultural background and lived experiences. For Muslims the perception that mainstream media portrays issues relating to Islam and Muslims in an inaccurate or negative way has possibly developed a tendency to resist conventional meanings. Initially this resistance may not have extended beyond discord and debate amongst Muslim circles, however, once momentum gathered this turned into more organised and collective resistance. A further step or perhaps parallel to this was the realisation that alternative voices were needed to express the views of Muslims and to try and respond to the impact of mainstream media. This does not mean though that Muslim media only came into existence as a reaction to external forces and that objectives internal to the community were not a catalyst in themselves. It simply indicates one influential factor involved in the creation of alternative media. If the importance of media in developing and sustaining a national identity is recognised then there is also potential for asserting a minority identity through alternative media. An alternative identity does not necessarily have to contest all aspects of the overriding national identity but it can focus on aspects of an identity that are not important or even recognised by mainstream culture, such as a minority religion. The marginalisation and sometimes vilification of minority voices in mainstream media discourse means that alternative media plays a vital role in providing minorities a platform. The penetration of these alternative discourses into the mainstream is questionable but infrastructures are at least put into place form which to develop more far reaching publications. For many communities alternative or community media is a vital means through which to maintain a distinct identity. The fear of being overwhelmed by a dominant majority encourages the development of specialist media and this acts as a method of archiving cultural practices and teachings for future generations so that they do not fade with time by becoming diluted with
mainstream society. Diaspora media (examined in the previous section) presents such a case and this includes Muslims living in the West. Though a global Muslim community exists on such large proportions, the perceived 'swamping' of Muslim identity in non-Muslim lands is of prime concern for Muslims. The omnipresence of Westernisation means that this concern is not limited simply to Muslims in non-Muslims countries, but is as important all over the world.

The more public existence of Muslims since 1989 may have been a reaction to the perceptions non-Muslims have of Muslims. In her study of young Muslims in North West London, Dwyer (1998) shows how young Muslim women "seek to define their own identities and resist dominant representations of 'Muslim women'" (p 53). By analysing how the young women talk about dress and consumption of media, Dwyer illustrates how articulating their own identities requires negotiation of dominant representations and stereotypes and challenges the existing discourses. The public and cultural spaces of dress and media help women develop and articulate concepts of the self. These concepts include contesting how they are portrayed in the mainstream media and also challenge stereotypes within the community itself. Thus it is evident that the development of identity in this instance was influenced by media discourses. Instead of using the media to reinforce an idea or in this case an identity, it is used as a stimulus to disrupt and challenge mainstream messages. The familiar tropes of oppression, backwardness and suffering of Muslim women, are met head on by young Muslim women who are disputing these perceptions through their own behaviour. By expressing their intellectual conviction and active association with Islam, Muslim women have reacted to negative stereotypes. This expression can be seen in collective and organised forms as well as individual assertions. Issues such as the *hijab* or veil are perhaps dealt with on an individual basis but issues such as arranged and forced marriages have prompted organisations and community groups to come forward and confront such problems. Thus, in this way the development of identity can be influenced through reaction to mainstream media discourses. Simultaneously the alternative discourses available in Muslim media not only challenge mainstream discourse but can be used to reinforce a Muslim-ness giving confidence to Muslims whereby they are then appropriating or re-appropriating language used to describe themselves, their experiences and their identity. So for example whereas Islamic dress has been used to
signify oppression and lack of freedom, Muslim women have suggested that in fact it symbolises a liberation from the constraints of a society preoccupied with the female body and sexuality. The agency for different interpretations and alternative readings is apparent here. For Dwyer’s (1998) respondents, reading and understanding media is “always contextual” (p 60) and the wider setting in which they find themselves, for example, school or home, has a bearing on how messages are received and construed. Her research also demonstrates the fact that there are opposing readings of the same texts even amongst a small group that may otherwise be seen as homogenous.

Muslims and the Media

The increasing awareness amongst Muslims of a generally negative media portrayal of Islam and Muslims (see for example Said, 1981, Ahmed, 1992, Patel, 1998 and Abbas, 2000), coupled with reactive and proactive responses, has quite often meant challenging dominant stereotypes. The extent to which these challenges or rejection have come about as a result of the assertion of a ‘Muslim’ identity within a Western or non-Muslim context needs to be examined, or indeed is it the fact that a more prominent Muslim identity has become visible in some ways because of media? This will mean looking at the role of the media (particularly Muslim media) in influencing identity, both individual and collective, and understanding how Muslims are consuming and responding to the general coverage of their faith in the media.

A most powerful contributory factor to the development of a Muslim public space and forum for debate has been Muslim media. Whether one develops a sense of identity directly from consuming Muslim media is difficult to examine accurately. Though the anecdotal evidence would suggest the media’s role is significant in informing about constructs such as identity, a more subtle reading of the situation is needed. The Muslim media ‘landscape’ has developed considerably over the past decade or so. Whereas previously there were only a handful of publications, today there exists a vast array of newspapers, magazines, journals, newsletters and bulletins. Electronic media although still in its infancy, has also seen improvements, particularly in the medium of radio. In addition to these there are now numerous publications on the internet and electronic mailing lists too. The increased availability of information and media presented from a
Muslim perspective allows alternative views about Islam and Muslims to circulate amongst British Muslims. Mainstream media is still seen as indifferent if not hostile in its reporting of Islamic or Muslim issues, therefore the popularity, indeed the necessity, of Muslim media is understandable. Because Muslim media is seen as an up-to-date and easily accessible source of knowledge and learning about Islam it is very much in demand amongst young Muslims. The creation of Muslim media has given the Muslim communities of Britain a platform from which to speak to the rest of society and debate issues with each other. Different ideological and political factors determine the outlook of each publication, and like Muslims themselves, the media represents a diverse spectrum of views. It is important to examine the role of Muslim media to gain an understanding of how it is contributing to a knowledgeable society. If we propose an extreme scenario in which all mainstream media is ignored by a person, then the role of alternatives such as Muslim media is all the more pertinent. From his study of ethnic media consumption amongst the Pakistani community in Bradford, Husband (1998) concludes that the “current identity politics of minority ethnic community boundary construction and the demographic trajectory of communities like the one studied here seem likely to ensure a vital and diverse minority ethnic media system in Britain in the foreseeable future” (p 31). With this increase in diversity, he asserts that consumers will be able to select a communication environment consistent with their own identity and interests.

Muslim media works at two levels to maintain a Muslim presence and identity. The first is for the benefit of Muslims themselves, to provide information and a focal point through which to discuss relevant issues. The other is a statement to non-Muslims that a specific Muslim identity exists and its adherents want to maintain it. Though Muslims are geographically concentrated in certain towns and cities (and within these particular areas) ‘contact’ with the other Muslims in Britain can enhance the feeling of community. In this situation a similar concept operates as at the national level - one of an imagined community - undoubtedly diverse in its composition but nevertheless sharing some type of mutual affiliation. Whether a shared identity is mythical or real is not really of significance, rather it is the perception of a collective which matters. For whatever reasons national dailies or television channels may find it easier to work with a few selected Muslims, representative or not, whilst Muslim media can examine issues
from different perspectives amongst Muslims and the diversity which is ignored by mainstream media can be reflected more accurately by community media. For minority faith communities instruction of religious principles is a crucial element in initiating the setting up of alternative teaching institutions, media and information sources. This can include locally distributed leaflets, magazines, newspapers and publications with national or international circulation, internet websites, radio programmes and television channels to name the most widely used media. Religious teaching has especially been a focus as far as the younger generation are concerned. The alternative sources of information and indeed any information at all about Islam, are aiming to keep the young aware of and attracted to Islam and as the surrounding environment does not normally reinforce Islamic values, Muslim media share the task of continually keeping Islam in the minds of Muslims.

Fitzgerald (1994) talks about electronic media enabling culture to exist that is not bound by physical or geographical location. For British Muslims not only have their links with countries of origin influenced their identity and culture but the availability of vast media information has helped them to construct a more global, disembedded identity. Media inform them of social, cultural, political and religious processes and changes taking place in other parts of the world. Before the advent of such a sophisticated telecommunications system, knowledge of other Muslims was limited. Now however the rapid flow and access to images and information has raised an awareness that previously did not exist and in this way the media has enabled or at least helped people to identify with a global umma. Their outlook, culture and identity thus take on a more global perspective. Mandaville’s (2001) work examines the role of information technologies in creating new ways of thinking about and ‘living Islam’. What this transnational media environment seems to be facilitating is new concepts of community or umma which are not limited by fixed boundaries. Because the media and information technologies are helping Muslims to engage with their religion in a novel manner, new ideas of how community is perceived and how Islam is practiced are evolving.

Ideas about interpretations lead us to look at audience research - the consumption of media. This is an important notion for my research because I am examining the use of media by young Muslims which will involve analysing how they read, understand,
interpret and then perhaps react to the content of media. The focus here is on how they use Muslim media and in particular what input it has into how they think about themselves. If we are trying to obtain information on how media informs people about identity then audience reception has to be part of the analysis. Because media can have polysemic readings, there are various interpretations at the point of consumption. Whether or not the audience is being actively critical of messages relayed in the media, their diverse backgrounds - age, gender, social, economic, political, religious - mean that different people will read the same communication in different ways. Where there already exists a body of literature suggesting Muslims are conscious of the negative portrayal of Islam and Muslims in the media, a critical reading of media is to be expected.

Disillusionment with mainstream media as well as personal experiences creates an atmosphere of scepticism for what is perceived to be the preferred reading or meaning of information. I am not underestimating the power of media institutions and seeing the audience as thoroughly equipped, informed and able to generate readings from the media independent of any production input. However, at the same time as recognising the media’s capacity for agenda-setting, it is important to recognise alternative readings, resistance and rejection of intended meanings. Seeking alternative media and information sources reflects this ability of audiences to selectively digest and absorb meanings. The audience has to be seen to be active to a certain degree because of the choice it exercises in what it chooses to consume - however well informed that choice may be. Reasons for consuming media vary therefore different meanings can be derived from similar messages. Keeping informed, escapism, developing critical or literary skills and confirming ideas and personal identity are amongst the various reasons media is consumed. Avoiding certain media is an indication of approaching media with a critical understanding of production processes and objectives of mass media, for in fact avoiding media is an active process in itself in a society saturated with media images and messages. Ang (1996) stresses a balanced view of media and audiences and suggests researchers need to be aware of a number of factors when conducting audience studies. One of these is to remember that consumption of media takes place in a wider cultural setting and to gain a better understanding of the former it needs to be located in the latter. In addition to this audiences are not media consumers alone - their lives
consist of other interactions and relationships. As mentioned above we also have to be weary of crediting the audience with complete autonomy or ability to resist texts. With specific reference to Muslim media, it must be recognised that resistance may also occur within this community media. For example if many of the structures, including media, have been set up and are run by first generation South Asian men, they may expect questioning from young people, women and people from other ethnic backgrounds.

Consumption of media depends on several factors. Saying that Muslims consume media in the way they do just because they are Muslim ignores the other aspects of their identity, background or outlook which may be influenced by ethnicity, age, gender, socio-economic status, spatial distribution and similar factors - factors which are common to other groups of people, regardless of their religious affiliation. What role are the family environment, socio-economic position, the 'connectedness' to the place of birth of parents and grandparents (or even further back), the religion, personal taste and a myriad other factors playing in what makes up Muslim identity - and where does the media fit into all this? By exploring these wider issues of social activities, inter-generational and family dynamics, as well as media consumption, I aim to ascertain the relationships between these various factors and how they impact on identity.

SUMMARY

The debate outlined here refers to three broad theoretical themes; identity, globalisation and diaspora, and media, which I am using to drive my research study. Each of these themes - both in themselves and in their close relationship with each other - comprise the foundation from which to explore identity construction amongst young British Muslims. Globalising economic markets, highly mobile labour and rapid movements of information have given rise to new spatial distributions of peoples. These are creating new ideas of community and these communities then interact in new and different ways facilitated by global media and technology. These processes have brought people into contact with new people, environments and new ways of thinking about themselves and others - that is, new identities.
By reviewing some contemporary debates on identity I have presented the basis from which I want to develop the study. The main concept which will be examined with my respondents is the increasing salience of religious identity. This will be considered within the broader framework of globalising and diaspora identity and notions of the Muslim umma, as this too is pertinent for the identity of Muslims. Whether this religious identity constitutes an essentialised identity or whether Hall's (1997) notion of identity as a socially constructed process of identification is more appropriate will be a question I will return to in the Conclusion. Though 'picking and choosing' different identities is not easy in practice, Hall (1997) shows how influences from various external sources are helping shape new identities.

The forces of the 'global post-modern' have resulted in opposing trends for cultural identities. On the one hand there has been a fragmentation and dilution of traditional identities (those fixed to place or position in society) and on the other hand there has been a strengthening of these very same notions of being and belonging. Young British Muslims present an especially noteworthy example of the dynamic nature of identity and belonging in contemporary society. Living in a non-Muslim, Western environment, where the surrounding society often misunderstands and is even hostile to certain aspects of their culture and religion, their attitudes, experiences and aspirations about who they are and how they express this is of great interest. Their negotiating who they are will include ideas of their religion (belief and practice), British-ness, belonging to a diaspora community, links with global Muslim communities and local connections.

The first of these, religious identity, is very much determined by access to and use of Islamic knowledge available to young Muslims in Britain. The rapidly changing landscape of information technologies, communication networks and flows of people has unlocked new possibilities for how knowledge can be acquired and how individuals determine their learning experiences. According to Mandaville (2001) this has dramatically altered traditional ways of learning, interpreting and practicing Islam. The landscape – social, cultural and educational – will then have developed to assist these new ways of learning and transmitting knowledge and this is what I aim to discuss with the respondents of this study. With globally mediated environments of knowledge
modifying more traditional ways of learning, what patterns of learning can be discerned amongst those newly (re)discovering Islam?

Media is an integral part of this research because it has often been a catalyst for new formations and identifications. Looking specifically at Muslim media introduces into the research dimensions of community representation and knowledge acquiring processes, as well as studying an alternative media source. Thus media culture is vital to the processes of knowledge acquisition which consequently impacts on identity. It will therefore be important to identify the activities and practices designed to assist this acquisition, what I call 'identity as activity'. Using these criteria enables me to investigate how Muslims see Islam enacted in their everyday lives, as opposed to seeing identity as an abstract concept which supposedly influences them.

A number of studies cited in this chapter point to the discernible trend amongst Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian youth in Britain of defining themselves as ‘Muslim’. Following this discourse of an emerging Muslim identity, I aim to obtain narratives from young British Muslims on the development of their distinct Muslim identity with particular reference to how their media consumption and socio-cultural surroundings influence this. It is fairly clear then that being a Muslim is important for many young Muslims, but what does ‘being’ a Muslim actually mean? How does this identity manifest itself in the practice of daily activities? Leaving open the definition of Muslim, I aim to explore the multi-layered meaning of belonging to and identifying with the signifier ‘Muslim’. The spectrum of practices and adherence that is contained within the term will be vast. The issues examined in this project will invariably be focused due to the sample of respondents, for example, their age, status as students and locality, amongst other factors. Young Muslims are becoming more aware of their religion but how is this being facilitated by the resources available to them? And what do they aim to achieve by accessing alternative media discourses articulating different notions of Muslim-ness? Politics will no doubt be of concern to the respondents of this research study and how they approach the subject will be of interest, especially whether domestic politics take precedence over international issues. To establish this I aim to ask them about both concerns relating to Muslims in Britain and in other parts of the world. How
they articulate these concerns will also reflect on the language and resources available to them as university students.

Though the specific questions I am asking during the focus group interviews are in the interview schedule (Appendix B), in order to focus the reader I will summarise the main research questions here. These questions arise from the theoretical themes discussed in this chapter and also link to issues debated in the next chapter: what role do families and communities play in the everyday lives of young Muslims? How is culture and social life influenced and altered by religion? How is Islam changing the dynamics of intergenerational relationships? What are the connections to ‘home’ and how does living in diaspora impact upon young Muslims? How are ideas and perceptions of marriage and gender transforming amongst second/third generation Muslims? How does British-ness and Muslim-ness manifest itself through the lives of British Muslims? What is the role of media in all of these developments?

I intend to answer these questions and others set out throughout this chapter by developing discussions on a number of themes drawn from the theoretical literature. These themes are:

- identity, including influences of diaspora and global identifications,
- the role of media in the process of identity construction,
- community,
- intergenerational relationships,
- gender,
- British-ness and Muslim-ness (belonging) and,
- socio-cultural and educational activities.

I anticipate that conflicts and struggles that young Muslims are facing will become apparent in these discussions. These struggles will probably operate within Muslim communities (including within families) but will also have particular manifestations in the relationship with non-Muslim structures and society. The manner in which these conflicts are negotiated will also be explored.
The objective of the PhD then is firstly to consider the alternative media landscape which Muslims have developed for their communities. The second aspect is to explore how young Muslims are interacting with this media, as well as other social and cultural interactions. These two are then combined to understand how young Muslims are defining themselves, what affiliations this leads to and how their understanding of Islam manifests itself in their behaviour.

My methodology is guided by the type of data I aim to obtain and this will be explained in chapter Three. The analyses in chapters Four, Five and Six will refer to the themes (listed above) identified as important in the theoretical debates. In the following chapter I develop some of these issues further in order to give a more detailed contextual framework for my research. This context will include certain background information about the Muslim communities in Britain and issues relating specifically to the lives of young British Muslims.
CHAPTER TWO
CONTEXTUALISING BRITISH MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

The theoretical framework in which this research is situated was presented in the previous chapter. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a context in light of which issues relevant to British Muslims, particularly young Muslims, can be examined. Firstly, in order to locate the respondents involved in the research, a brief background of Muslims in Britain is given. This is not to say that the research data collected is representative of Muslim communities in Britain. However, it enables the reader unfamiliar with Britain’s Muslims to gain an understanding of some of the issues affecting them. It also places the research respondents in the wider communities to which they are linked. This background will include demographic data and spatial distribution. Structures, processes and differences amongst British Muslims will also be highlighted to gain an understanding of the communities’ internal dynamics and the problems they face. The aim of this section is not so much to present statistical data on the situation of British Muslims but to look at some of the problems and processes occurring amongst Muslims. These tie in to the theoretical themes elaborated in chapter One and will therefore connect to the issues discussed during the fieldwork for the project. The subject of Muslims in Britain is vast and covers many areas. Here though I will simply outline some basic history and information relating to their current situation.

Almost all of the issues and questions highlighted in the previous chapter have become of greater relevance following the attacks on the World Trade Center (WTC) in New York on September 11th 2001. Certain political and ideological debates which were taking place amongst Muslims have been catapulted to the fore both for Muslims and non-Muslims to reconsider. To summarise this chapter I will explore some of the consequences of this for Muslims living in Britain.

Muslim Migrants

Some of the earliest Muslims to arrive in the British Isles consisted of Lascars from the Indian sub-continent and Yemen. The arrival of the Lascars was probably the first substantial settlement of Muslims. Between 1890 and 1903 nearly forty thousand
seamen and labourers arrived in the port cities of Cardiff, Liverpool, Pollockshields and London (Siddiqui, 1995). Parallel to this, an indigenous Muslim population grew from converts, most famously the solicitor William Quilliam, who after his conversion in 1887 set up The Liverpool Mosque and The Muslim Institute and also edited two publications about Islam. According to figures from the first British mosque in Woking (established in 1889), by 1915 there were 10,000 Muslims in the UK and by 1924 1,000 converts to Islam.

These numbers increased dramatically with post World War II immigration from former British colonies, including Bangladesh and Pakistan. This first wave of immigration comprised labourers and workers who found work in industrial towns and cities. Geographically they were concentrated in the Leeds, Manchester, Birmingham and Glasgow conurbations and in and around London. Following the 1969 and 1972 Immigration Acts family reunification saw the second phase of immigrants to the UK. The arrival of East African Asians also took place around this time. Once families had arrived, settlement became more permanent and communities began to flourish. Geographical distribution was determined by availability of work in traditional primary sector employment but also by proximity to other migrants within the towns and cities. People from the Middle East and other Arab countries, the Far East, Turkey and Africa have also established communities within the UK. In addition to this there is the local Muslim population of converts which probably number around 10,000 (Anwar, in Guthrie, 2002) or according to Murad (1997) a considerably higher estimate of ‘perhaps fifty thousand’ (p 3). In more recent times the Muslim population of Britain has increased through the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers. These have included countries such as Somalia, Bosnia, Kosova and Afghanistan.

Accurate statistics on the number of Muslims in Britain are difficult to obtain. Most counts use the ethnicity categories or the ‘country of birth’ (particularly of head of household), to estimate numbers. Data gathered from the 1991 Census using the country of birth category would obviously miss second and third generation Muslims who were born in Britain. Peach (1996) uses a technique whereby the number of Muslims in the

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19 For an interesting chronology of Britain’s contact with Islam and Muslims see, ‘From Scholarship, sailors and sects to the mills and the mosques’, The Guardian, June 18 2002, p 6-7. For a more detailed history see Lewis (1994).
UK from a particular country is calculated by using the Muslim proportion of the population from that country of origin. That is, if 95% of the population of Bangladesh are Muslim, then 95% of the number of Bangladeshis in the UK is calculated to arrive at a reasonable estimate of how many are Muslim. Using this method Peach reaches an estimate of almost 1 million (965,369) Muslims in Britain. The discrepancies in this technique occur because as mentioned above it allows a certain number of Muslims to slip through the count, including those resident in Britain without legal status. Compared to other sources this amount may be a little conservative and the actual figure is probably higher, perhaps more close to 2 million²⁰.

Brown (1997) notes that the difficulty of capturing the Muslim population statistically stems not only from the fact that they are not counted as Muslims but also because the definition of Muslim itself poses difficulties for the researcher. Is it the profession and practice of Islam, for example, a person following the five pillars and legal rulings of Islam, or a ‘nominal’ or ‘cultural’ Muslim that is to be included in the numbers? (Brown, 1997). The introduction of the religion question in the 2001 Census will possibly clarify the statistical representation to a degree, although even this will inevitably not be totally accurate. Many of the Muslim organisations that campaigned for the religion question to be included hope that census data will allow government and local authorities to distribute funding more equitably.

**Early Muslim Communities**

If the early stages of settlement had been concerned with gaining access to mosques, places of religious instruction, *halal* meat provision and similar practical issues, more recent times have seen the Muslim community campaigning for political representation, Muslim schools, alleviating socio-economic disadvantage and generally establishing themselves as a group of citizens with particular needs. Developing and maintaining a distinct Muslim or Islamic identity has also been a crucial element for today's British Muslim communities. Provision for Islamic dress, food and places for worship at work as well as schools, universities and similar institutions were arranged or campaigned for. Although provisions vary according to local authorities and individual

²⁰ For various estimates of Britain's Muslim population see the MCB website: www.mcb.org.uk
organisations, for example for burial or religious worship in schools with a high proportion of Muslim pupils, negotiations normally take place between authorities and institutions and Muslim community representatives to try and reach a solution or compromise (Nielsen, 1988). Numerous mosques and organisations have been set up by British Muslims, at times with assistance from overseas, serving a range of facilities from the primary prayer space to teaching, social and welfare advice, legal advice, employment and training facilities and other services. Some of these organisations have been set up along ethnic groupings (for example, Black African, Pakistani, Chinese) due to the dynamics of the communities themselves but also because funding for such voluntary sector organisations is often given according to ethnicity as opposed to religion.

The diversity within Britain’s Muslims can be examined along different lines. Like any other group in society they are differentiated by various social, economic, ethnic, regional, demographic, political and theological strands (Siddiqui, 1995). Of relevance to this research are also differences which seem to be occurring along generational lines. These will be explored during the interviews and analysed in chapter Six, with the aim of examining the ‘intergenerational’ or ‘caught between two cultures’ theory mentioned in chapter One. Ideological or sectarian divisions are also important in differentiating between Muslims in Britain. The major sectarian divisions within Britain’s Sunni Muslims (assuming the Sunni and Shia groups are already recognised) are the Deobandis and Barelvis, the latter of which tend to contain elements of Sufism. Many groups which take their ideological basis from Wahhabism also exist, such as Ahl-e-Hadith, Salafi and Jamaat-e-Islami. In addition to this Raza (1991) adds the Modernists and the Revivalists. Certain more marginalised sects such as the Ahmediya and Ismaili Muslims also have established communities in Britain. These groupings often overlap with ethnicity or regions from the Indian subcontinent. This diversity of British Muslims can be seen as a microcosm of the global umma (Geaves, 1996). I expand on these ideas later in the section on ‘Ideological Issues’.

The range of activities carried out by Muslim organisations has increased over the years. Many now concentrate on dawah or invitation to Islam, not only to rejuvenate Islam amongst the Muslim communities themselves but to introduce it to non-Muslims.

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The rapid growth in the availability of information technology resources talked about in the previous chapter has meant that Muslims within Britain now communicate amongst each other in a more comprehensive way and also have 'access' to the global Muslim population. As a result of this the agendas of the local British Muslim population are influenced by events and patterns around the world giving a more global perspective to the affairs of the Muslims, including connections with the Muslim diaspora in Europe. Changes within the structure and organisation of the European Union, including easier access between the member states, converging of certain legislation, government and academic studies at a cross-national level and similar trends have created a greater awareness between Europe's Muslims. The genocide of Bosnian Muslims has been a catalyst for attention being given to Muslims across Europe, not least alerting people to the fact that Muslims have lived in these countries for centuries, longer than the presence of Muslims in Britain and other Western European countries (Sells, 1998). In Britain one of the ways this awareness has manifest itself is in Muslim media. Articles and reports focusing on the situation of Muslims in other European countries, often comparing their experiences with those in Britain, appear in almost all of the newspapers and magazines.

Contemporary Issues

Many of the problems British Muslims face today, as well as the foundations of community life, are very much determined by migratory processes. The labour migration of recently colonised nations brought with it certain aspirations, modes of thinking and socio-cultural and religious values. First and foremost the reasons for migration had been economic. As a result of this not only did the migrants have a particular demographic and socio-economic status but they also carried with them aims and objectives for leaving their homes to work in an alien environment. They possibly had experience of the British people during the occupation of the Indian subcontinent but this was restricted and any perceptions they formed from this were perhaps limited. Many Muslims initially perceived their stay in Britain to be temporary and the structures they put in place reflected both the purpose of migration and the perception of the length of time they would remain. These consisted mainly of provision for halaal food, access to a place of worship and similar arrangements for day-to-day religious
provisions. Although these were all vital for ensuring the community could function, a
strategy anticipating longer term needs was not implemented. There was a desire to be
_in_ the society but not so much _of_ the society. Muslims arriving in Britain were
concerned with preserving their own community structures and identities at the expense
of fully understanding the environment they had come to. This often led them to
become insular and isolated from society. With few exceptions, the Muslim community,
individuals, leaders and organisations, did not see opening up and introducing Islam to
the host population as a major concern. Therefore examining and understanding the
problems and issues facing the host population was not seen as necessary. This foresight
would probably have enabled Muslims to see their role in Britain as one of being able to
present solutions to social problems. Not only that, it would have helped prevent the
negative aspects of wider society impacting on their own communities. Instead British
Muslims today are also faced with rising drug related evils, low educational
achievement, domestic problems, family breakdown, crime and imprisonment.

The position of Muslims in Britain is also determined by the nature of the population
that migrated to the UK. The socio-economic factors, rural background, educational
levels, types of employment and strata of society they entered all influence their
circumstances today. This is demonstrated by a comparison between Muslims in North
America and those in Britain. The former were from professional backgrounds and so
established themselves in a different context within the American economy and society.
Admittedly certain experiences were shared between these diaspora communities but
there are also substantial differences.

Having arrived in the UK Muslims then proceeded to arrange for _imams_ from their
countries of emigration for local mosques and places of learning. No formal structures
were in place for this but the UK government at the time (1960s and 1970s) did not
restrict these movements. These men (mainly from the same place as migrants) were
almost all unfamiliar with the setting into which they had come and it is fair to say they
did not acquire a good knowledge or relationship with the non-Muslim society they had
arrived into. In fact some were not even qualified in the basic Islamic sciences or even
the Arabic language, let alone conversant with the current issues of their surroundings.
Their remit was to impart simple education to the youngsters who were now growing up
in Britain and who would otherwise have no source of formal or institutionalised instruction. Their role also included fulfilling some rudimentary religious commitments to the communities such as leading congregational prayers, performing marriages, funerals and such obligations. The necessary knowledge required to give legal rulings on new situations in a secular society was normally lacking amongst most imams. Apart from being out of touch with contemporary issues, lack of English caused difficulties in communicating with younger Muslims born in Britain. Scantlebury (1995) notes the critique levelled against mosques by young Muslims for not providing programmes specifically for them or making Qur'an schools attractive. In pointing to these facts I do not mean to be overly critical of imams. Rather an understanding is required of the fact that the environment from which many imams came did not involve having knowledge of interacting with an unknown population, who formed the majority. Training and education given to the imams reflected the needs of the communities in the Indian sub-continent which were very different from circumstances in Britain. There was perhaps never a strong tradition of proselytising amongst these communities because of their fairly contained nature. Thus, when imams came to Britain they were not necessarily acquainted with this obligation. Sometimes this combined with a lack of willingness to acknowledge, let alone tackle, social evils such as child abuse, sexual abuse, drug addiction and family/domestic problems, has created a potentially volatile situation in Muslim communities.

These problems may not be prevalent within Muslim communities, nevertheless they do exist. It is therefore the duty of all Muslims but especially imams to address them throughout their work with the community, most obviously by presenting the Islamic position on these issues during the jumah khutba (Friday sermon). Again the tradition of khutbas in the Indian sub-continent may well have been very different from what is considered relevant to contemporary British needs. Having used a particular set of sermons, in some instances written by others, imams are often not trained to be culturally alert and driven by the needs of the congregation. Only by engaging in and creating open debate will the problems facing Muslim communities be solved. Ignoring the problems will not make them disappear. Lewis (1994) does point to the fact that imams are now being trained in Britain using techniques and curricula that are suited to issues in the British context. British born and educated ulama are seen as being able to
bridge the gap between the youth and more conventional mosque structures. I make
these points here because they are of relevance to the development of young Muslims in
the UK. Geaves (1996) notes that the two groups that are most likely to be unsatisfied
with the mosques are young people and women, both because of their marginalisation
from mosques, especially women. Therefore, having often rejected local *imams* as a
source of knowledge, they are adopting different techniques for learning their religion.

The various issues Muslims are confronted with can be divided into several categories.
In education and the economic sphere they are suffering from low educational
achievement and have the highest rates of unemployment relative to the rest of the
population\(^21\). Socially, divorce rates are increasing, family breakdown is more apparent
and the youth are involved in gang/territorial wars. Furthermore, Muslims are now more
than ever involved in drug abuse, leading to criminality, where they are now over-
represented amongst the prison population\(^22\). Indeed put like this the picture looks
depressing. Admittedly these problems do not affect all or even most sections of the
community. Having said that the establishment of organisations such as NAFAS –
Bangladeshi Drugs Project or Muslim Women’s Help Line (MWHL) and many similar
endeavours are testimony to the existence of these problems.

Knowledge

The key issue determining these processes is knowledge. Often limited or incorrect
knowledge, from the average man on the street to those whose primary responsibility it
is to impart knowledge to the community, is the cause of many problems. Mandaville
(2001) writes that Muslims are being asked to conduct their own *ijtihad* (independent
reasoning or judgement) and interpretations of the Qur’an. Certain prominent Muslims
whom he cites have said that the Qur’an has been sent to the whole of mankind
therefore anyone is entitled to read and act upon what he feels it means. Because the
primary sources, the Qur’an and *sunnah* (practices and teachings of the Holy Prophet,
saw) are easily available to a greater number of people and literacy rates are relatively

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\(^22\) Latest Home Office figures show “Muslim prisoners have doubled in the last decade to reach a total of
between 4000-4500 – amounting to 9% of the total prison population – which is treble our proportion
of the total population. One in eleven prisoners is Muslim” (Birt, 2001).
high, this kind of self teaching seems to have become common and Britain is an example of where this type of trend appears to be taking place. Encouragement to read for themselves, coupled with a rejection of their parents versions of Islam, has lead to literalist readings of the primary sources alone. Unfortunately classical Islam has never functioned in this way and many of the ideological clashes between present day Muslims are because of the rapid rise in self-styled scholars. *Ijtihad* is a science, which can only be practiced by those qualified to do so, in the same way that interpretation of the Qur'an and *hadith* (*sunnah* literature) requires a vast amount of prerequisite knowledge. However, it is not uncommon amongst young Muslims in Britain today to think that they can correctly interpret the Qur'an without even a basic command of Arabic. In diaspora the restricted access to classical scholars or in fact lack of recognition of the importance of these scholars, exacerbates this situation. For some who do recognise the classical approach, the search for *ulama* (religious scholars) has involved travelling abroad to gain their education in Islamic sciences but the practical difficulties of this are obvious. A way to compensate for this has been to invite *ulama* to the United Kingdom, where they normally conduct short courses and thereafter maintain contact with their students for distance learning.

Muslim publications have also functioned as a medium through which to promote these scholars and their teachings. For those who may not be able to attend courses, summaries are often given in magazines or posted on the internet. No doubt the global outlook which young Muslims have adopted enables them to develop their understanding of Islam from scholars all over the world. Imitating the classical methodologies of Islamic teaching has been difficult because the structures – namely scholars, institutions of learning and resources – are not easily available in Britain. The Muslim media has played a key role in filling this gap but its limits have been realised. Mandaville (2001) talks about the role of information technologies in making Islamic information available and perhaps displacing the primacy of scholars to some extent. CD-ROMs, internet websites, electronic mailing lists and chat rooms have opened up a vast array of resources to those who can access them. In locations where scholars are not present, the role these information technology sources play is very important. However, as Mandaville asserts, a point I would like to emphasise, these resources in no way replace *ulama*, without whom the *umma* cannot function properly.
The restricted contact with scholars is coupled with a lack of positive role models in the Muslim communities, particularly for the youth. Righteous scholars are these role models themselves but even at the level of good leadership or strong personalities to represent Islam, attention turns to activists or scholars abroad. Closer to home the job is normally taken up by those who can shout the loudest! Ideal role models do of course exist in the Holy Prophet (saw), his Companions and pious men and women throughout Islamic history but contemporary figures that live with respectability and attachment to Islam are also needed to emulate. This is especially important to dispel the notion that Islam cannot be practiced in today’s modern society. It also provides reassurance that Islam is not just a slogan appropriated for personal or political gain, but a real and desirable focus of one’s life. The present generation of Muslims in Britain are perhaps more critical and less tolerant of people who claim to be ‘perfect Muslims’. Whereas certain divergent behaviour of local imams and community activists may have been tolerated by their parents, younger Muslims refuse to accept them as purveyors of religious excellence because their teachings may contradict their behaviour. Otherwise they are often seen as not having enough knowledge to adequately address the needs of the community, especially its youth. Having little experience or knowledge of ulama from the Indian subcontinent has been an additional factor which seems to have convinced many young South Asian Muslims that South Asia does not have much to offer in the way of learned Muslims. Holding white converts in high esteem has meant their attention has turned to the more prominent shaykhs and scholars who have captivated an audience in search of guidance and leadership. Again the Muslim media have helped to establish the role of these speakers by covering their activities and bringing their teachings to the young Muslims in Britain.

Similar to Mandaville, Baktiari (2000) analyses the phenomena of acquiring knowledge in an age of information technology, particularly as a result of the internet. He states that three consequences are evident by examining ‘Muslim’ websites: the reduction of geographical limitations, that is, having instant availability of information from all parts of the world; challenges to traditional methods of Islamic learning and education, and; accelerated pluralism in Islamic political activity. The second of these is relevant to the debate here. The internet is providing alternative sources of learning which has implications for the types of knowledge acquired by young Muslims around the world,
including Britain. Not only is basic information about Islam available on the internet, but there are structured courses in Qur’anic exegesis and even a Masters degree for imams (Baktiari, 2000). These developments have meant that traditional methods of learning are being bypassed and Muslims can potentially become imams or take other positions of responsibility without actually having to attend classes with teachers or be tested for their knowledge.

The range of information available to today’s young Muslims searching for Islam is vast. Fluency in English opens up an enormous body of literature which was not easily accessible to their parents. As most do not have a command of Arabic, the proliferation of Islamic literature in English enables young Muslims access to a wider range of sources on Islam. Within this plethora of information there can be views ranging across a wide spectrum of religious thought and the internet is a good example of how there can even be information overload if one is not sure exactly what to look for, as it can involve trawling through numerous websites, not all of which are relevant. Discriminating between books also requires some skill and experience. The range and ideological background of writers, publishing houses, bookshops and of course contents may not appear to be a major issue to someone unacquainted with this. However, for more discerning Muslims, it is vital that only books from a particular perspective are utilised. Other new forms of Islamic information are widely available to Muslims in the UK. One of the most prominent of these is organised events and activities, which have increased substantially over the past few years. These learning experiences are totally different to what earlier generations of Muslims in Britain experienced. More details of these events are given in chapter Five. Here I just want to mention these activities as having great potential in the development of an individual and collective identity for young British Muslims.

The relevance to my research of these new ways of acquiring knowledge about Islam is great. Young Muslims are finding themselves in a position to exercise more and more autonomy over how they learn about and practice Islam. In reality this means a possibility of many different manifestations of Islam or of being a Muslim. It also means a greater potential for disagreement and fragmentation. The question then is with limited access to a shaykh (that is, traditional sources) how is the media helping to
develop young Muslims’ understanding and application of Islam? This question will be explored in the focus group interviews. The process of acquiring knowledge entails influences and interactions with family, friends/peers, teachers and ‘literature’ (not just written text but cassettes, videos, conferences, events etc). A person’s social life can itself be configured to assist the acquisition of knowledge and practice of faith. This is one the processes I aim to investigate during the fieldwork.

**Ideological Issues**

Unconvinced or otherwise unsatisfied with the Islamic way of life practiced by their parents, many second and third generation Muslims in Britain are presented with a wide range of choices of ‘Islam’ from which to choose and an array of options available from which to develop their identities. The proliferation of groups and ideologies currently present can possibly be explained by a number of factors. The first of these is probably the generally unsuccessful endeavours of ‘political’ Islam. Finding no one system of Islamic (or Muslim) governance to have solved the basic problems of many Muslim countries, Muslims are again looking for another, purer form of political Islam. Various groups have come into existence in the search for this perfect methodology of creating an Islamic system of governance. Those groups concerned with a political revolution, with social and economic implications, have often looked abroad to movements advocating Islamic rule and adopted much of their rhetoric whilst accommodating for their own particular circumstances in a Western society. In actual fact these campaigns do not begin and end in Britain, their reach is global and the implementation of *shar‘ia* (Islamic law) on a universal scale is seen as the ultimate aim. The main objectives of this would be to eradicate poverty and inequality, remove corrupt rulers and governing systems, address war crimes and injustices, ensure equitable distribution of resources and create a harmonious working relationship between different parts of the world.

To this political vacuum have come ideologies and groups such as Jamaat-e-Islami, Ilkhwan-e-Muslimeen, Hizb-u-Tahrir and Al-Muhajiroun. Granted that many of these types of organisations have their roots and branches in Muslim countries where they have a long history but they have been imported to Britain slightly modified and are now being hailed as models for reform in Western countries. In a global age in which
people and goods are moving from one corner of the world to another, the movement of ideas and political systems is apparent too. This global transfer of ideas, talked about with regard to identity in chapter One, has an impact on how young British Muslims perceive what is of relevance to them.

The infiltration of conflicting ideologies into Muslim communities has led to greater factionalism or sectarian subdivisions. Changes at the global level, in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran or Pakistan, have resonated on the political life of British Muslims. If we assume that in the Indian subcontinent the main sectarian differences were between Sunni and Shi'a groups and that there was awareness of groups such as Ahmediya or Aga Khani, then this is a fairly simplistic categorisation of Muslims. A second layer of difference occurred mainly within Sunni Muslims from which certain political alliances were forged. Though the presence of Wahhabi doctrine was felt in Pakistan through Mawdudi's writing and activism, its influence and reach at the turn of the 21st century appears to be great and increasing. The socio-political consequences of the Wahhabi movement have penetrated the heart of British Muslim life. Their strict, literalist reading of the primary texts of Islam resulted in a puritanical view of the religion which has come into conflict with other interpretations both at the public and private level. For South Asian Muslims with a leaning towards Sufism, normally the Barelvis, there has been a sometimes antagonistic relationship with the Wahhabi ideology. The theological distinctions between the various groups is perhaps not of relevance to this work, suffice to say there are considerable differences in individual, community and political practices (Geaves, 1996).

Though one could optimistically predict sectarian divisions would diminish with time and Muslims would function as a united body, the increased length of time in Britain has, if anything, exaggerated differences. One simple explanation for this could be that in the initial days of migration and settlement to Britain the number of Muslims was so few that there was a sense of unity. Their ethnicity was also an important factor in uniting them. A Deobandi Muslim was probably grateful to have a Barelvi Muslim as a neighbour because they were both Pakistanis. With the passage of time however, communities grew and became better established. A confidence in numbers resulted whereby each section of the community had enough members to band together without
necessarily needing the support of others. In fact sometimes there were hostilities between groups. Ethnic lines were represented strongly in these divisions but these more or less coincide with sectarian categories. In talking about Muslims in Coventry, Ellis (1991) shows how with time Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Gujeratis divided into their own community groups for setting up mosques, whereas initially there was even unity between Punjabi Muslims and Sikhs. Fears of assimilation into the dominant white culture turned to a concern with the preservation of Islamic tradition. However, this tended to manifest itself in sectarian forms. For local authority provision though Ellis (1991) advocates recognition of the diversity amongst Muslim communities if their needs are to be adequately met.

Murad (2001a) expounds the impact of the Wahhabi ideology on Islam. Extremist activity by Muslims takes its roots and is justified by using the Wahhabi perspective on world politics. Even amongst those professing a Wahhabi inclination there are divisions though. Muhammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab, from the Najd area of Saudi Arabia, founded this doctrine some two hundred years ago. Its popularity escalated with the backing of Saudi oil wealth which was able to subsidise many publishing houses to promote Wahhabi literature. At the same time these publishers restricted publication of other mainstream Islamic literature. Why then has this narrow minded and intolerant rendering of Islam become so popular amongst young British Muslims? Murad (2001a) gives a lucid answer:

"What attracts young Muslims to this type of ephemeral but ferocious activism? One does not have to subscribe to determinist social theories to realise the importance of the almost universal condition of insecurity which Muslim societies are now experiencing. The Islamic world is passing through a most devastating period of transition. A history of economic and scientific change which in Europe took five hundred years, is, in the Muslim world, being squeezed into a couple of generations.... Such a transition period, with its centrifugal forces which allow nothing to remain constant, makes human beings very insecure. They look around for something to hold onto, that will give them an identity. In our case, that something is usually Islam. And because they are being propelled into it with this psychic sense of insecurity, rather than by more normal processes of conversion and faith, they lack some of the natural religious virtues, which are acquired by contact with continuous tradition, and can never be learnt from a book".

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Miranda (2001) writes that even the Western world is now beginning to understand why mainstream Sunni Islam finds Wahhabism unfavourable. He also confirms that the Wahhabi outlook is popular due to political and social frustration and the failures of Muslim countries to establish a just and effective political system. He predicts though that the downfall of Wahhabism will be its own failure to deliver such a system. The “salafi burnout” which Murad (2001a) speaks about describes how enthusiasm, even zeal, in the early stages of one’s journey into Islam, eventually fades away leaving the individual “seemingly no better or worse for the experience in the cult-like universe of the salafi mindset” (p 2).

What this has meant for most Muslims in Britain has been to distance themselves from this type of interpretation of Islam. In another article Murad (2001b) suggests how even amongst moderate Wahhabis there is a crisis of identity or belief following September 11th. “They cannot deny forever that doctrinal extremism can lead to political extremism” and because “not every committed Wahhabi is willing to kill civilians to make a political point” Murad feels a mass exodus from the ideology can be anticipated. It may seem irrelevant to talk about divisions amongst Muslims at this level but in fact this background is needed to gain an insight to the current dynamics of Muslim communities in Britain. External factors are often analysed and even blamed for the predicaments of Muslims whilst little attention is given to internal aspects of communities. One reason for the increasingly splintered communities of Muslims is the incompatibility of Wahhabi dogma with other groups of believers. Whilst not wanting to write about divisions amongst Muslims to portray the image of an extremely disunited community, I am also conscious of what Murad advocates when he says “we cannot simply ignore this [Wahhabi support for terrorism] on the grounds of ‘Muslim unity’, since those people appear so determined to destroy Muslim unity, and endanger the security of our community” (2001b, p3). He calls for Muslims to engage in debate about the situation they find themselves in and the threat of “cultural and doctrinal foundations of extremism” sanctioned by Wahhabism. The threat to Muslims, non-Muslims and the image of Islam posed by extremism is a matter of much concern.

A combination of the insecurity talked about above and a lack of adequate knowledge provide fertile soil for the planting of such quick fit solutions or knee jerk reactions to
the malaise young Muslims find themselves in. This nonetheless is one side of the story. For as many if not more young Muslims, the path taken towards seeking an Islamic identity has developed from a much more stable and traditional framework. The realisation of the importance of Islam in their lives has been followed by a gradual acquisition of knowledge and practice. A gentle approach has also been taken towards their parent’s and community’s practices of Islam. Rather than alienate themselves from the family by endorsing a harsh break from any form of parental culture, they have presented a subtle and reasonable critique to their parents who have often taken to their children’s ‘educated’ version of Islam with interest. Practices and habits which are not un-Islamic are incorporated into the new lifestyle which accompanies the ‘conversion’ to Islam and there is not an outright rejection of everything associated with South Asian cultural renderings of Islam. This is more in line with the Islamic tradition of prescribing a framework within which to conduct our lives. The boundaries of this are wide enough to encompass different cultural and social aspects of humanity but aspects of public and private life are regulated and the fundamental beliefs are the same.

**Politics of Representation**

These ideological differences then manifest themselves in how Muslims want to be represented, amongst themselves and to the outside world. Representation of any community has been a contested issue, particularly perhaps of minority communities. Diversity within Muslim communities is to be expected in a similar way that all communities have a range of views – be they majority or minority communities. Within the community this diversity has found expression through Muslim media. This ranges from small, localised publications to magazines with national circulation in the thousands. In this way Muslim media presents different outlooks and is catering for different audiences within a minority population. Husband (2002) shows this range and diversity amongst minority ethnic media in Britain. “This rich repertoire of newspapers is an indication that the internal hybridity found within minority ethnic communities is to some extent reflected in the diversity of print media available to serve them” (Husband, 2002, p 163). He also demonstrates that there are multiple audiences for this media fragmented along generational, gender, class and religion. Similar to Husband’s charts showing ethnic media by language and ethnic group, Appendix A shows the
Muslim publications mentioned by my survey respondents, indicating the diversity within Muslim media.

Problems arise when the whole Muslim community is expected to be represented by one voice. Previously the government had expressed concern that there was no official spokesperson or body which could speak on behalf of Muslims and whose views would be taken seriously by official bodies. It was said that if the Muslim community had the equivalent of the Board of Deputies in the Jewish community, their opinions would be represented in the corridors of power. In 1997 the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) was launched to try and perform the role of community representative. As an umbrella organisation it has over 300 organisations affiliated to it, including mosques and other community institutions. In its remit it is "geared to promote consultation, co-operation and co-ordination of Muslim affairs throughout the UK" (www.mcb.org.uk). Any organisation in this position though has the difficult task of representing an extremely diverse population and of course has its critics. Some critics have said it is an organisation composed of an already established elite and its creation has given media and other organisations the excuse of consulting one body alone and not gauging public opinion amongst the Muslim populace. Because they say the MCB is seen as representative, media and authorities need not investigate any further for information on Muslim community issues. In some ways it would be inappropriate to ask all, possibly 2 million, Muslims to be speaking with one voice, the same way it would be to ask any other community. The diversity of opinions and concerns that exist within other minority ethnic or religious groups or indeed the majority population should be expected amongst Muslims too. Considering the ideological, political, social and economic stratification amongst Muslim communities, it would be unrealistic to expect them to be represented by one umbrella body. However, the MCB has been successful in many of its campaigns. These have included liasing with mainstream media to improve the quality and accuracy of reporting on Islam and Muslim issues.

23 This is obviously not an exhaustive list of all publications as it includes only those mentioned by survey respondents. The four publications through which the survey was distributed were also mentioned, for example a Trends reader may have mentioned Q-News, but these have not been mentioned again in Appendix A.
Whilst the issue of representation is still being contested amongst Muslims, the Muslim media provides a much needed platform for articulating Muslim concerns. Though this may be limited to circulation within Muslim communities, there is an indication that even mainstream media are beginning to acknowledge the presence of Muslim media. A series of recent articles in which *The Guardian* mentions *Q-News* is evidence of this trend. It also provides space for Muslim journalists to write about community issues (for example, Ziauddin Sardar and Faisal Bodi). Several non-Muslims wrote to the editor of *Q-News*, telling how they came to hear about the magazine through articles in *The Guardian*, signalling some crossover between the two types of media (October 2001/Rajab 1422).

The politics of representation are important to all Muslim communities, including young Muslims. Whereas for first generation Muslims, the media may have been the forum through which to debate sectarian, ideological and particular political issues, subsequent generations of Muslims may be using the media for different reasons. Their political agenda may extend beyond local community politics and encompass global issues, not just diaspora politics. Equally, they may prefer to concentrate on very local issues such as how to live an Islamic life in a non-Islamic environment because their interactions are different from their parents. Thus, their expectations of community media may differ from their parents and so too might their inputs into its development.

**Being Muslim at University**

I have examined broader theoretical debates about identity construction in chapter One. What I aim to consider here are factors that may be of particular significance in developing the identity of most of my interviewees – young Muslim university students. Being away at university changes the influences affecting a young Muslim. Though family ties remain, on a day-to-day basis there is a relative absence of family and community influence. This is a time when perhaps it is easier to live an Islamic life compared to in the working environment. Prayer rooms are provided and students are normally flexible enough with their lectures to be able to pray their daily prayers on time. In addition Islamic societies often play a major role in the structuring of the

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students' social lives. Hence it is often that the development of a Muslim consciousness forms during university life where a person has relative freedom of time and obligations. There could also be an element of insecurity resulting from the new and sometimes overwhelming environment which attracts one to Islam. By examining the different environments a Muslim is in we can begin to develop an idea of what influences an individual to think of their religion as they do. As well as examining external influences, analysing the individuals own characteristics helps us to understand the processes taking place in identity construction.

For first generation immigrant Muslims, the spheres of influence were much smaller and limited in number compared to where their children find themselves. The locales within which these two sets of Muslims operate – live, educate, work, socialise – are very different. Consequently the variety of influences is also very different. First generation Muslims in the UK may have had their strongest influence from local mosques and imams, family and friends, links to their country of origin, a strong self monitoring community and basic interaction at work (Raza, 1991). The focal points of their lives were thus the family, economic activity, mosques (particularly men) and politics of the Indian subcontinent. For this generation these factors have helped define the close relationship between cultural practices and a strong ethnic identity (Modood, et al 1997). A reason that this generation’s knowledge of Islam did not perhaps develop further, either to take into account their new circumstances or to continue to learn generally about Islam, was the age at which they migrated. At that stage in their lives they had gained a ‘working’ or ‘living’ understanding of Islam and did not feel the need to develop it further. Establishing themselves economically and raising families also changed their priorities. Even if they had continued to learn their sources of knowledge were either the local imams or literature from their country of origin that may only have reinforced what they already knew.

Contrasting this position with that of their children (and subsequent generations of Muslims) I suggest a number of profound differences that provide stimuli for thinking about identity can be noticed. One obvious factor is that their upbringing has taken place in diaspora, rather than them migrating at a developed stage in their lives. Influences from within the British education system first and foremost give young
Muslims a perspective on learning that is dissimilar to education in the South Asia. During schooling children often suffer from racial or religious discrimination and this instantly makes their experience of childhood different from their parents. First generation migrants undoubtedly suffered discrimination when they arrived in Britain but it contributed to their life experiences in a different way (different stage of life, unfamiliar with the language and environment, different strategies for coping and resisting, etc). One of the effects of racism is to bring about a consciousness of being the 'other'. Coping strategies for this can vary, but one frequent consequence is that it leads to a questioning of one's own identity and may result in some sort of identity crisis for some people. I would say this is inevitable to an extent but the length of time it lasts in most cases is insignificant as to have any profound long term effect. For the majority of people this questioning comes at some point in their lives regardless of ethnicity, religion or cultural background. Young Muslims perhaps have a wider range and potentially conflicting set of criteria with which to work in deciding what and who they want to identify with. Peer pressure and socio-cultural surroundings will make it easier to identify with mainstream values and shed any religious affiliation, therefore somewhat more will power is needed to identify with and maintain religious conviction. During school and college identity is less well formed for most people and though certain characteristics do develop at an early age it is probably not until later, perhaps at university or during employment, that a more lasting foundation is put in place.

As noted earlier, peer pressure is another factor influencing young Muslims. There are at least three sets of peer group pressure on young Muslims, two from Muslims and the third from non-Muslims. Muslims with a desire to practice Islam pull other Muslims in the same direction as themselves while on the other hand Muslims who are not so mindful of their religion and may even be cynical about it, would sway their peers into a less religiously observant life. The third influence comes from non-Muslim friends and colleagues. Their lifestyle and attitudes would not be attuned to Islam and therefore keeping their company would probably not act as a reminder about Islamic teachings. Even if peer groups are carefully selected to enhance one's religious aspirations, it is difficult to totally eliminate the influences of the wider social and cultural environment. This again applies more so to younger Muslims born, brought up and educated in Britain and less to their parents. Muslims who are alert to and want to combat negative
influences from their surroundings then need an increased and constant vigilance of how they interact with society. This vigilance can manifest itself in two ways, the first is one in which all things Western are seen as 'satanic' and should therefore be avoided at all costs. This normally renders taking any benefit from the surroundings almost impossible, although in actual fact there is always interaction between a person and their surroundings, though those who espouse to this line of thinking like to imagine they have totally excluded themselves from the outside world. The second more thoughtful approach is preceded with an understanding of what Islam has permitted and prohibited. Once this understanding begins to develop living in British society becomes a process of sifting out what is harmful and keeping what is beneficial. It also encourages participation in society so that the benefits of having Muslims as fellow citizens are derived by all. In the longer term this will also alter the image of Muslims to a more positive one rather than seeing them as in but not of the society. The strength and weakness of these links is what determines the direction in which a person develops (compare to Figure 2 and 3 in chapter One).

Being a young Muslim in Britain today then consists of dealing with and prioritising several different, often conflicting, elements within the economic, social, cultural, political and religious structures which they find themselves in. The decisions made whilst living and working in these structures, the choices made about how to strike a suitable balance between all these forces reflects the development of a particular understanding of religion and therefore a particular identification with Islam. This in turn becomes evident in an individual or group being recognised as having a British Muslim identity.

**Multiethnic Britain?**

Young Muslims in Britain have to contend with a number of complex issues, including those affecting all young people. One of the most important of these is racial tensions. Events in Spring 2001 served as a reminder of the often fragile community relationships that exist in Britain's towns and cities. Riots in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham focused attention on the prevalence of poverty, deprivation, unemployment and crime suffered by all communities. However, the real issue that came to light was that of racial tensions
in these areas, thus the riots came to be known as the ‘race riots’. Government reports analysing the disturbances were promptly published and they highlighted the causes as being mainly those listed above (Ritchie Report, 2001). These too recognised the influence of far right wing groups in provoking the riots.

The occurrence of these events is significant for Muslims in Britain, particularly the younger generation. To analyse the reasons for the riots, we need to understand the events which lead up to them. It is not satisfactory to present unemployment, poverty, deprivation and poor housing as the actual reasons for the riots. If this had been the case why were there not riots in a whole host of other towns and cities suffering from the same problems? And also why in May 2001, why not months or years before? Poor infrastructure and living conditions can only be used to explain how the situation becomes exacerbated but these issues are really symptoms of structural inequalities which exist in Britain. Years of persistent racism and discrimination, both from institutions and individuals, form the backdrop to the riots. Prior to the riots themselves a period of some weeks of sustained racist antagonism from right wing groups aggravated tensions in certain inner city areas. Crucially though a set of marches planned by the British National Party (BNP) sparked the fuse for hostile confrontations (Ahmed, et al, 2001). What followed were the familiar patterns of vandalism, physical and verbal abuse, police mistreatment and mob violence.

How do these events relate to my research? The fieldwork was carried out before these riots took place so a direct question relating to their significance could not have been included in the interviews. However, a substantial proportion of those involved in the disturbances were Asian Muslim youth and the fact that these types of tensions exist amongst young Muslims speaks directly to the concept of Britishness and belonging. Understanding the situation in towns and cities where racist groups have a high profile, unemployment is higher amongst youth and other socio-economic deprivation exists, and Leicester and Nottingham where fieldwork was carried out, may provide an interesting comparison. Recognising aspects of identity other of than religion in my work is also important and Vertovec (1998) stresses that the local context is one such

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25 The feeling of alienation and discrimination was further exacerbated when some of the Asian Muslim youth involved in the clashes were given very harsh sentences for taking part in the riots (see Q-News, 2002).
factor. To understand the development of a British Muslim identity one cannot ignore local community dynamics. The experiences of young Bengali men living in Tower Hamlets and professional women working in the City are very different, which in turn are both different from the lives of youth living in Burnley or Oldham. Understanding the distinct context affecting each group (and further each individual) is of significance because it influences how they develop. Therefore the diversity within ‘British Muslim’ has to be acknowledged. Though the commonality of Islam relates all of those espousing this identity, there is often much to distinguish one group of Muslims from another. All this is referred to as a reminder that my work is not in any way representative of ‘young Muslims’ – a category which comprises many different facets.

September 11th 2001

Following the events of September 11th 2001 much discussion and literature on issues relevant to my research came to the fore. These included:

- Issues of identity – Muslimness, Britishness and belonging;
- The presence of Muslims in the West;
- The relationship between ‘Islam’ and the ‘West’;
- International politics;
- Ideological differences amongst Muslims and internal community dynamics;
- Anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic attitudes and discrimination, and;
- The role of media.

My fieldwork took place before September 2001, however, during the analyses of my data I want to keep in mind how September 11th may have brought increasing relevance to the themes I analyse.

The events of that day marked a turning point for Muslims in particular. The immediate impact of the WTC collapsing was felt by Muslims everywhere because within minutes accusations were made that Muslims were responsible. In Britain the following days and weeks witnessed many physical and verbal attacks against Muslims and vandalism.
against mosques and Muslim organisations and many incidents of Islamophobia were reported. These have been documented by various newspapers and organisations (Sheriff, 2001 and IHRC, 2001). In a society where anti-Islamic sentiment was already high, the events of September 11th simply reinforced negative stereotypes of Muslims.

In Britain as elsewhere, special conferences were set up to disseminate the Islamic perspective on the actions of those who carried out the attacks. The Muslim communities felt the need to address the growing hostility and lack of knowledge about Muslims and Islamic beliefs and practices. Amongst Muslims themselves the anti-Western hostility meant that voices of reason or moderation were faced with a great task of presenting the balanced view of Islam to non-Muslims whilst at the same time trying to deal with the more extreme opinions amongst their own faith community.

Although the overwhelming majority of Muslims condemned the attacks, there was a handful that sympathised with the attackers (see Murad, 2001b). For instance, the more political and vocal groups, often with an anti-Western inclination, perhaps encouraged their members to take practical measures to help in the subsequent attack on Afghanistan. This included arranging rallies, holding talks and even encouraging people to go to Afghanistan to fight. Whereas these groups of Muslims came out more forcefully to state their Islamic identity and position on the situation, others, especially women, were conscious of keeping a low profile and understated their Muslimness. It was even advised that the more obvious Islamic dress of women be toned down, headscarves be made less obvious and similar actions to avoid confrontation or abuse. Another side of the Muslim community showed a calmer approach, one of introspection and self analysis rather than blaming all the problems of the Muslim world on the West. The polarisation which occurred (Sardar, 2001) meant that to identify oneself in a certain camp indicated either a condemnation or condoning the actions of September 11th. The sectarian divisions talked about earlier have become more obvious following the attack. The reaction against Muslims and the ensuing debates are of interest to my work, both those amongst Muslims and in wider discussion circles. How can belonging to both a nation and a global religion, whose outlooks may be in conflict, be possible for Muslims? How do young Muslims see these crises as influencing their own behaviour and thinking? Again these questions were not addressed with September 11th in mind.
but many of the issues debated during the focus group interviews will be relevant in the aftermath of the attack.

Inevitably widespread media coverage was given to the attack. Media coverage was extensive not only in the mainstream media but also in Muslim media, with the cover story of many publications carrying the story of the New York attacks. In the latter, articles were focused mainly on the standpoint of Islam on the carrying out of such actions, the condemnation of the attack by British Muslims and analyses as to the possible reasons for the attack. Most pertinent these events brought to the fore the issue of being British and Muslim. This is something which has interested academics, policy makers, the general public and the media previously but it became more significant in these circumstances. An important role for Muslim media was to furnish readers with more in-depth and alternative analyses of September 11th. Whether the editors felt this would counteract any negative portrayal in the mainstream media is difficult to ascertain as the majority of mainstream media audience is unlikely to access Muslim media. Although the audiences are not the same, there was a need for balanced reporting of the events, with background information and in depth analyses which presented an alternative discourse to that circulating in the popular domain.

Media attention on Muslims was intense. Debates on electronic media, analyses in newspapers, websites and academic articles increased substantially. Keeping abreast of all the media coverage was a top priority for many Muslim organisations as they spent time analysing and responding to articles and programmes. The government too was conscious of the potential backlash against Muslims so it tried to present the message that the fight was not against Islam or Muslims but a ‘war on terror’ and that attacks on Muslims were not acceptable. Official statements such as this however, were not always convincing. Surveys carried out by two Muslim publications, Q-News and The Muslim News, showed that their readers were not satisfied with the government’s reaction to the attacks and an element of cynicism was expressed about its motives (see Conclusion). The increased interest in Muslims and Islam continues till the present day. Many single articles and series have been positive in their attitudes towards including Muslim

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26 Whitaker (2002) notes that in the 12 months prior to September 11th his search for the word ‘Muslim’ in both tabloids and broadsheets revealed 3,075 hits. In the nine months following September 11th this increased to 8,806 – an increase of 286%.

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opinion and have moved beyond the simple stereotypes to engage in meaningful debate about what Muslims are experiencing as a result of the attacks in the USA\textsuperscript{27}.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter has been to provide background information on Muslim communities in Britain and to develop some of the theoretical themes presented in the previous chapter with specific reference to young British Muslims. In addition it has examined certain contemporary issues affecting Britain’s Muslims because these relate to the respondents of my study.

The historical background was presented as it inevitably affects patterns of geographical distribution, employment, and social and political dimensions of Muslims today. A number of problems that exist within the Muslim population are disproportionately affecting young Muslims (for example, crime and unemployment). As well as these negative features, many of the positive developments, including an increased awareness of religious duties, are also taking place amongst younger Muslims more than in older generations. The attitudes of younger Muslims towards sectarian differences, ethnicity, marriage, gender and community have been moulded to a substantial degree by the British environment in which they have been schooled and brought up. This is most likely to give them different insights, aspirations and priorities about their lives compared to their parents and compared to their non-Muslim peers.

It is reasonable to assume that the Muslim media in Britain has played a key role in influencing how young Muslims think about identity, community (local, national, global), culture and religion. This media also provides a forum through which to debate current issues of relevance to young Muslims. The consumption of this media is particularly interesting in the global Muslim diaspora because of the variety of information that has become available to people and as noted earlier, this has given rise to new ways of learning and therefore, of thinking about religion.

\textsuperscript{27} For example, The Guardian ran a series of articles from 17-21 June 2002 titled ‘Muslims in Britain’ and The Daily Telegraph published a tabloid supplement ‘Understanding Islam’ on 15 November 2001.
Much debate exists on the representation of Islam and Muslims in the mainstream media. Although one of the factors forming the background of this research, media representations need only be examined with respect to how they influence decisions about media consumption by Muslims. It is perhaps from the situation of perceived negative portrayal that new community media has established itself. Ultimately this means considering the politics of representation that are taking place for a minority community in Britain.

Racial tensions between Asian (mainly Muslim) and white youth were highlighted as one major cause for concern after the riots of Spring 2001. At a time when Muslims may feel they are making progress in British society, these events serve as a reminder that the situation is more complex. Aspects of the riots are important in helping to understand some of the experiences of young Muslims in Britain today. Because my own respondents are not in the towns and cities involved in these events, their experiences may serve as a useful contrast to those of youth in Northern England. I also looked at issues of sectarianism, knowledge acquisition, and media because I anticipate they all relate to the lives of my respondents. Many of the issues discussed in this chapter have gained greater relevance for both Muslims and non-Muslims since September 11th 2001. I envisage that young Muslims have been widely involved in dealing with reactions to September 11th, not just as individuals but through membership of organisations. The responses and methods of dealing with the aftermath that have been adopted by young Muslims may be better understood in light of the themes and issues discussed in the focus groups.

Together chapters One and Two provide the theoretical and contextual framework within which this research is set. Whereas the first chapter outlined three theoretical themes underpinning this study, this chapter has developed particular issues which concern Muslims in Britain. The questions which I propose to ask are linked to these themes and issues and form the basis from which to further an understanding of how young Muslims in Britain are developing and articulating their identities. In the next chapter I demonstrate how the research questions derived from these themes and issues are developed into a methodology to conduct the research. The chapters that follow that then present the data collected and offer analyses with the above issues in mind.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The theoretical debates outlined in the previous two chapters are the starting point from which research techniques were developed to obtain data to answer the research questions. This chapter reviews some of the existing debates in social science research methodology and then proceeds to describe the methods used in my study.

Changes in the field of mass communication research reflected the changes that occurred in the tradition of social science research. The progression from a positivist approach to social sciences to an emphasis on more interpretive and cultural studies perspectives has initiated a shift in the way media and audiences are studied. The traditional separation of quantitative and qualitative methods follows from the philosophical differences between the positivist and interpretive standpoints in the social sciences. Whereas the former aspires to using techniques similar to the natural sciences, with experimental and numerical investigations, the latter promotes a more inductive method of examination. As a result of this quantitative researchers have generally applied surveys, questionnaires and experiments in their work whilst qualitative researchers have used interviews and observations which often have a less formal structure and emphasise interpretation over measurement.

However, in practice the distinction between the two types of methods is not always so clear, or at least they are not used mutually exclusively.

"This dichotomy and opposition is attractive in its simplicity. Methodology in the social sciences is divided into a two-party system, in which all can choose sides according to their preference. Yet this division fits badly with reality. All scientific and social research has shared principles, such as an attempt towards logical reasoning and objectivity in the sense that researchers rely on their data rather than on their personal views or value preferences" (Alasuutari, 1995).

Combining both quantitative and qualitative methods can result in a more thorough research study taking advantages from both techniques and supplementing one data set
with another. This could occur for example when administering a questionnaire to a large number of people and then from these respondents selecting some participants for focus groups or individual interviews.

Much of the qualitative media research stems from the belief that studying the media and its consumers in a more experimental setting, as in quantitative methods, does not present the whole picture. There needs to be in-depth examination which takes into account the fact that institutions and humans do not operate in a vacuum but are acting within a social setting. Although there is no commonly accepted definition of qualitative research, indeed some researchers resist defining the term for fear of limiting the technique, “the word qualitative has been used to refer to a broad philosophy and approach to research, a research methodology and a specific set of research techniques” (Wimmer and Dominick, 2000; p 103).

Qualitative research implies gaining an understanding of the social, political and cultural situations and environments within which people act as all these influence people’s behaviour. The ‘hypothesis testing’ also differs somewhat between the two approaches and qualitative work takes the research question as a guiding statement referring to the phenomenon under examination which enables the researcher to develop theories and modify initial arguments with respect to the observations and data gathered. Although a theoretical framework exists prior to conducting fieldwork, the process allows modifications and the possibility of new theories to emerge.

The ‘Effects’ Debate

Within media studies there are a number of key areas that are normally under investigation, namely; media institutions, media production processes, media content, media technology and audiences. In a study which aims to examine an audience’s use of media and how this might be related to the way they think about themselves, it is important to look at the debates surrounding the ‘effects’ model within mass communication research. This area of study comprises a rich and diverse range of research from many different countries and I will only present a very brief outline of a debate which spans several decades and continues to interest researchers within mass
communications studies. Historically the effects debate grew out of concern about what was seen as the strong and mainly negative impact that media messages had on audiences, though the media was also praised for its educational value. The former concentrated on looking at how violence and representations of anti-social behaviour in media, particularly television, may impact on the population, especially children and more vulnerable members (Halloran, 1964). Researchers tried to establish and measure the existence of media effects through a series of experiments and laboratory tests. This was supplemented by more refined ideas about media impact on society and one of the reasons for this change was the way in which audiences were viewed. In the earlier model masses were seen as easily manipulated and uncritical of media messages. However, as the attitudes towards audiences evolved and they were seen as consciously able to read, negotiate, interpret and reject what they consumed, the approach to studying the link between media and public perceptions transformed accordingly and new research methods developed. Rather than focus totally on the communicator, the new methods tended to examine the audience itself (Wimmer and Dominick, 2000).

However, the idea that audiences were able to determine media impact also had its critics. They argued that it wasn’t so much the direct impact of media on society which needed to be focused on, but the ideological content which was responsible for ‘agenda-setting’. The influence of media was not so crude as to be easily detected through experiments but had a more subtle and pervasive role - media did not so much tell us what to think but what to think about. In this way media effects were seen as longer term and working to provide stability and acceptance of the status quo as well as operating at the level of social perception (Gunter, 1999). Consequently, along with other cultural institutions, the media was seen to ‘cultivate’ ideas. Therefore, it was argued that audience selectivity has its limits and ultimately the audience can only select between what is being offered by the media.

The contemporary study of media effects is still very much influenced by early studies in the field which found that “the effects of communications can be many and diverse, they may operate at different levels and in different strengths, they may manifest themselves in different ways or they may be latent, and they may derive from different
aspects of the content and different parts of the communication process" (Halloran, 1964, p 13).

It was primarily the cultural studies perspective in social sciences that shifted the emphasis to the interpretive capabilities of the audience within the field of mass communications (Alasuutari, 1995). Being critical both of the direct stimulus-response behavioural effects model and the all-powerful mass media system, it was interested in two related phenomenon. One was looking at the role of the reader in ‘decoding’ media texts and noting that although the text carried a preferential meaning, the audience did not necessarily have to accept this and could take a number of meanings from the ‘polysemic’ nature of media messages. The second main argument was that media itself has to be understood within the social context both of the production but more so at its reception. Political, social, cultural and economic factors affecting individual and ‘interpretive communities’ will influence how messages are received and read, thus meaning different people respond differently to the same material (Gunter, 1999). An individual’s own ‘variables’ include “predispositions, retention, selection, group membership, level of frustration, family background and educational level” amongst other factors (Halloran, 1964, p29). Studies carried out with this principle in mind often consist of reception analysis; examining the differential readings people made of media messages.

As many media studies actually implied effects and had not demonstrated them clearly, the question as to why effects could not be measured precisely and indeed may not exist, led academics toward two concepts, selectivity and interpersonal relations, both “processes which intervene between the communicators and the audience so as to diminish the direct impact of media messages” (Gunter, 1999. p 15). A model which approaches media research from this perspective is ‘uses and gratification’. In this approach the use of media is seen as selective and gratifying certain purposes for the reader, be that keeping up to date, obtaining information, fun and entertainment or just killing time. After all it is important to note that however powerful a particular media message may be, if a person never ‘uses’ that media any influence is questionable. Each reader also brings with them a set of experiences and preconceived ideas many of which may contradict what they read in the media, therefore having little or no effect.
Gauntlett (1998) offers a detailed critique of the ‘effects model’ and shows that in fact even after “many decades of research and hundreds of studies, the connections between people’s consumption of the mass media and their subsequent behaviour have remained persistently elusive”. He first proposes that as direct and clear effects have not been proven, perhaps there are none to be found and secondly demonstrates through analysing a large number of studies that the research approach has been fundamentally flawed. Determining a direct link between media and opinions or behaviour has therefore become less of an objective. Instead research has developed to look at the role of the media in society and study the possible influences it has on us. This normally consists moving away from the immediate, short-term effects to understanding how media influence us in the long term, particularly as a socialising process (Halloran, 1964). Not only does this approach see the impact of media as a continuous process but it locates the media within a wider framework of other social institutions and studies its impact in relation to these other agents of socialisation.

This changing theoretical focus has meant that the methods employed too have moved away from seeking to find simple linear relationships to broader patterns of interaction and exchange.

“With the rise of qualitative studies which actually listen to media audiences, we are seeing the advancement of a more forward-thinking, sensible and compassionate view of those who enjoy the mass media. After decades of stunted and rather irresponsible talk about media ‘effects’, the emphasis is hopefully changing towards a more sensitive but rational approach to media scholarship” (Gauntlett, 1998).

As a result of these developments, since the 1970s what can be described as an ‘ethnographic turn’ in the studies of media consumption had taken place (Moores, 1995). Plural audiences, divided by their use of media and by their social and cultural positioning were more reflective of reality as opposed to one great mass all responding similarly in relation to the media. For qualitative media research this meant factors such as questioning the power of media to relay messages and determine meanings, diversity within the public, assessments of social settings and dynamic social situations especially within the domestic and family context and finally the increase in the range of communication technologies available, were all areas worthy of investigation (Moores,
Thus, as mentioned above, care needs to be taken to avoid an approach, which in its theory and consequently in its methodology, is too media-centric, over emphasising the role and impact of the media, at the expense of other influential socio-cultural factors. Gunter (1999) summarises this as follows:

"a media theory which wants to understand how social meanings are formed, changed and reinforced through complex interactive processes, must rethink interpersonal relations in qualitative terms as the formative forces in an individual’s socializing environment, profoundly affecting identity, behaviour and attitudes" (p 17).

Not only does the media make up one part of the complex social fabric within which an individual makes decisions, develops and processes thoughts and acts, but in reality the media may not play as powerful a role as family, friendship and community networks and other social and cultural activities. Closely linked to the ‘effects’ debate are ideas of media (and cultural) imperialism that have been discussed in chapter One. This study is following the shift that has occurred within mass communication research methods that I have outlined above.

Analysis of Qualitative Data

The nature of qualitative research does not lend itself to generalisability the same way as for quantitative results. However this is not a problem as the aim of collecting in-depth, rich material which gives us clues to a particular phenomenon, is not to apply the findings to all cases with similar characteristics. A small case study or interviews with a select group of people are valuable for their ability to reveal precise data which would not otherwise be obtained through general questionnaire techniques. The objective is not to apply the findings or analysis to all cases and for this reason it is meaningful to contextualise the research question and the results. "What can be analyzed instead is how the researcher demonstrates that the analysis relates to things beyond the material at hand... The broader issue at stake is the relevance of the research one undertakes" (Alasuutari, 1995; 156).
The analysis of qualitative data has traditionally been a 'manual' procedure until fairly recently when the introduction of software packages have enabled researchers to exploit computer assisted technology normally associated with quantitative analysis. Much of what was done by the researcher such as reading and rereading the data to establish certain themes and highlight frequently occurring concepts for analysis is now done quicker and more accurately by the computer. Data collected through qualitative research often comprises large amounts of text which is not easily analysed using simple numerical techniques. The very way it was collected, perhaps through in-depth interviews yielding autobiographical narratives, enables the participants to go beyond the simple question and answer procedure involved in structured interviews. So although this is an advantage in examining in greater detail peoples' experiences, views and perceptions, it also presents a methodological challenge for thorough analysis.

The volume of the data means that practically researchers are tempted to break it down into neat and manageable units running the risk of losing much of the context in which statements were made (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). In order to try and prevent this it is essential that the researcher familiarises himself with the whole data set and gives a holistic interpretation. As the whole of the data set can not be presented, what is presented has to be done so within a wider analytical framework. If recurring or prominent themes are chosen along which to summarise the findings the reader should be made aware of how these were selected and also be told of any contradictions or exceptional cases. In practice the use of computer assisted packages means that initially one is forced to 'code and retrieve' in a manner which could lead to fragmented or decontextualised data, however, when dealing with possibly hundreds of pages of interview transcripts this is a useful starting point. After this the researcher can proceed to read deeper into each theme and make links with the whole of the data set. As qualitative analysis software packages become more sophisticated they often allow the researcher to explore text surrounding specific quotations, build a thematic diagram linking relevant areas and present the data in a more comprehensive way. Each part of the findings is then defined by its relationship to the system as a whole. In this way its
function and meaning is understood with respect to the whole, whether that be a sentence, paragraph, narrative or culture (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000).

Jankowski and Wester (1991) point out that the function and expertise of the computer in data analysis is to store, segment, organise and reorganise data which is almost certainly done better than if it were done mechanically, but that this is only an aid to the actual analysis, and theory formulation is ultimately the job of the researcher. This procedure can not be a substitute for the real purpose of collecting and analysing data which is “theory construction - the exploration and refinement of concepts” (Jankowski and Wester, 1991; p 66).

There are now various packages available for qualitative data analysis, two of them are Nud. ist (Non numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorising) and Atlas. ti. With Nud. ist, which is one of the most popular ones in use today, its function is more than simply storage, retrieval, searching and indexing. It enables the analyst to explore links between data, record emerging understandings of the text, find and analyse patterns and test theories and ideas (Weitzman and Miles, 1995). Atlas. ti is again suitable for working with large data sets and also offers the option of presenting data in a visual format. As Atlas. ti was chosen to analyse the data for this research project, I will briefly outline its functions and explain why it would be beneficial to use. One of the first advantages of any package as mentioned above, from the most simple ‘code and retrieve’ to the more complex ones, is their accuracy and speed in finding words, phrases and sentences. Once all the data has been entered into Atlas. ti it allows easy comparison between all units (in this case interview transcripts) and these can then be built up into networks connecting selected passages enabling the construction of concepts and theories. Automatic coding and making relationships between text units retrieves data related to one concept allowing you to see all references in the data at one time (Scolari, 2000). When working with rich and complex data gathered through focus group interviews this type of analysis package assists greatly in quick retrieval and comparison of conversations. Atlas. ti was chosen rather than Nud. ist because it fulfilled the needs of my research analysis and also seemed more straightforward to use and the time taken to learn to use the package was also a consideration. Although Nud. ist also
has a function whereby a ‘tree’ structure can be developed using the data, Atlas.ti has options for the visual presentation of data.

**Operationalising the Research Question**

Before outlining the research methods used in this study it is helpful to restate the research question. The aim of the study was to examine issues influencing identity construction of young Muslims and understand the role that media consumption and wider socio-cultural activities are playing in this. This was investigated through focus group interviews. To further supplement this a survey of Muslim media users was distributed through Muslim media publications, the editors of whom were also interviewed.

The focus group interviews with young Muslims were conducted in Leicester and Nottingham. These were not chosen for any particular reason other than practicality. Proximity to and familiarity with these two cities meant easier access to respondents. Therefore whilst not selecting Leicester and Nottingham specifically, the locality within which the research was conducted is of importance. As stated in chapter One, locality is very important when examining the lives of young British Muslims. Demographic structures, history, ethnic diversity, community dynamics, employment and other economic variables and social issues are some of the factors which render each locale unique. All of these factors will no doubt impact on the lives of my respondents, to a greater or lesser degree. Perhaps as university students in these cities, their historical and community link is weaker compared to their home town/cities, which may exert a stronger influence on their lives. The composition of the Muslim community in Leicester varies compared to Nottingham, with the former having substantial proportions of East African Asians whilst in the latter Pakistanis form the majority of Muslims. Though it is not in the scope of this discussion to give details about each of these cities, my aim in raising the issue of locality is to make the reader aware of the particular differences between these two cities in the Midlands, which may in turn differ from other towns and cities in Britain. The Muslim publication editors were all based in London (with the exceptional of one in Nottingham) and interviews were conducted there.
It is also important to appreciate the unique nature of my sample of respondents. They were selected for what I perceived to be their adherence and commitment to their faith and as such may differ from other groups within the subset of 'British South Asian Muslims'. Their location in the two Midlands cities (even though they may originally have been from other cities) will impact on wider community dynamics which affect their experiences and outlooks. For example, had I selected a town or city in which strong inter-ethnic conflicts existed, a different picture may have emerged. Similarly, had I focused on Muslims who were not as involved in 'Islamic' activities, such as those cited by my respondents, the findings would have reflected different aspects of the lives of young British Muslims.

The research topic - the construction of self and collective identity - is not easily translated into simple direct questions. Participants' ideas and experiences of these concepts had to be ascertained through questions that looked at broader concepts linking these together. The exact questions asked during the fieldwork are crucial in determining what data is collected. The interview schedule and a brief explanation of the objective of questions is given in Appendix B.

Rather than gather further data on representations of Islam and Muslims in the media, the focus of the research is on collecting personal narratives and opinions of young Muslims, therefore my methods focus on audience research rather than analyses of texts. The focus group interviews were accompanied by a more formal or structured data collection technique using an Activities Diary (AD, see below).

As in many other research processes one method is not exclusively employed but can be combined with others for a greater understanding of the subject matter. Focus group interviews can form part of an investigation which also includes analyses of media texts, surveys or document analysis, for example. The focus groups may be used at the beginning of the fieldwork to determine and focus the survey questions, conversely questions in the survey may be further elaborated on during focus groups.

The type of information that I aimed to obtain from respondents was pertaining to their cultural habits and participation in various activities, especially related to media. In
order to obtain this information focus group interviews were seen as the most appropriate method to employ. Unlike structured, formal interviews, the focus group interview creates an environment in which it is conducive for all participants to contribute to the discussion and develop their own ideas during the process. “The focus group is particularly effective in providing information about why people think or feel the way they do” (Krueger, 1994. p 3). Although the focus group interview of course has its ‘focus’, the nature and structure of the questions allow respondents to talk freely about relevant topics, those important to them which may not have been mentioned by the interviewer, whilst being guided by the interviewer.

Focus groups are used in various academic subjects and non-academic settings, in particular marketing. With specific reference to media studies, applicable also to this research project, Hansen et al (1998) outline the distinction between qualitative and quantitative methods,

“discovering how audiences make sense of media messages is not easily done through survey research. Survey research is good at providing a snapshot of audience beliefs, attitudes and behaviour - the what of audience-media relationships - but is much less suited for telling us about the why or how of such relationships. For examining the dynamics of what experiential knowledge and frames of interpretation audiences bring to bear in their use of media content, what role media use has in the everyday lives of audiences, or how audiences use media as a resource in their everyday lives, it is necessary to turn to more qualitative methods, which allow us to observe in a more ‘natural’ setting than that of the survey or laboratory experiment how audiences relate to media (both as technologies and as content)” (p 257).

The increased popularity of focus groups in media studies has occurred as a result of a change in the underlying principles of conducting media audience research outlined above. A shift “away from questions about media influence and effects on audience behaviour and beliefs, and towards concerns with how audiences interpret, make sense of, use, interact with, and create meanings out of media content” is reflected in the application of focus groups which facilitate this type of examination (Hansen, et al, 1998. p 259).

The type of in-depth information relating to personal experiences and choices, opinions and habits, may also be obtained from individual interviews. However, there are definite
reasons for choosing focus groups. The first of these is that the focus group interview aims at creating the real life interaction which people experience in groups. In particular the “generation of meanings and interpretations of media content is ‘naturally’ a social activity, that is, audiences form their interpretations of media content and their opinions about such content through conversations and social interaction” (Hansen, et al. 1998. p 261). As the emphasis in mass communication research has moved away from the ‘effects’ debate towards understanding the more subtle processes involved in the uses and interpretations of media, focus groups have provided a suitable setting within which to explore these negotiations.

So whilst trying to replicate what may be an everyday exchange between a group of people, the focus group environment also enables the researcher to examine group dynamics. Not only are individual responses important but how these may develop and even change during the discussion will be of interest. Conversely a criticism of focus group interviews has been that they seek consensus formation, whereby dominance of one or two members may force others into agreement or that people may say what they think is socially acceptable (politically correct!), particularly when discussing sensitive issues such as racism or sexuality. Challenging other group members’ comments and viewpoints does however reflect reality in as much as people do not always agree on everything and these conversations are useful in understanding the research question. Some of these aspects of group dynamics may also be influenced by the researcher/researched relationships that I will discuss later.

Some kind of commonality between the group participants is needed so that a common basis for the discussion can be exploited. Whatever the research issue to be examined, there needs to be a shared understanding of fundamental factors amongst all participants; shared knowledge of language use and vocabulary; possibly shared meanings of certain phenomenon and to some extent shared experiences. This does not mean all the members should have the same experiences and notions of a subject, but that threads running through this subject are familiar to them. “The focus group is characterized by homogeneity but with sufficient variation among participants to allow for contrasting opinions”. (Krueger, 1994. p 77). Homogeneity could be in terms of occupation, age, sex, education level, family characteristics, interests and involvement
in certain activities - this will all depend on what the research question is and which ‘units of analyses’ the researcher is using.

Familiarity between group participants prior to the meeting also allows exchange of information in a relaxed environment and people may look to one another to seek confirmation of their views. This familiarity works in some settings but could possibly inhibit in others whereby the topic is one of a sensitive nature (such as domestic violence or criminal behaviour) where members would probably feel freer talking in front of strangers. Acquaintance with other members of the group may not also work where employers and employees or children and parents are present preventing honest and unrestricted discussion.

It is generally recommended that between 6-12 participants are involved in a focus group (Krueger, 1994). Although this is not a fixed formula, the group should be large enough to generate ample debate yet not too large that the moderator finds it difficult to manage and mini-focus groups begin to develop (people speaking to the person next to them because it is difficult to get heard). If the number of participants is very small it may become difficult to generate a free-flowing discussion.

In theory these are recommended numbers for focus groups, however, in practice the researcher may find various practical difficulties forcing him to work with different numbers. Inviting eight people to a focus group does not guarantee that eight people will actually attend. The research topic and methods used to gather participants also affects the numbers attending. If an existing group of people who possibly meet regularly in a specified place are being accessed and you are conducting a ‘piggyback’ focus group (a focus group conducted at another event, meeting or occasion to take advantage of the pre-existing group of people) (Krueger, 1994) then it may be easier to have a considerable number of participants. If however, you have individually invited people through distinct avenues, albeit sharing elements relevant for your research, sometimes gathering six or seven people may be ambitious!
Focus Group Interview Procedure

For my own research maintaining an ideal or suggested number of participants of between six and twelve was not possible because of practical difficulties. As these numbers would have proved too time consuming to arrange, I opted for what may be termed mini-focus groups, sometimes even consisting of two people (see Appendix C for details of each group). In the cases where only two people were interviewed they knew each other previously (normally through social or friendship networks) therefore there was no problem of introduction or taking time to ‘break the ice’. In some cases having fewer participants at least enables the interviewer to obtain an answer from all people whereas in a focus group only some respondents will speak.

Once a focus group had been set up whether at home or at the university, the group were given a brief introduction to the research topic and to the relevance of their contribution. Ethical considerations were also explained. A short video clip from a CNN documentary ‘Islam in Europe’ was shown (see Appendix D for transcript of clip). This was chosen because it discussed a number of topics I too wanted to develop further with my respondents. The title was relevant, young women were interviewed (two of them representing British Muslim organisations) and racism, Islamophobia, marriage, gender, media and identity were all issues talked about in the documentary. I felt that showing this documentary would not only allow an informal introduction to the focus group interviews but would enable interviewees to better understand the topics I wanted to investigate.

The opening questions after showing the video clip which began the focus group interview were general and related to what the participants thought of the issues covered in the clip. After these initial questions the interview schedule was followed (Appendix B). The set of questions that made up the interview schedule were divided into four main categories - 1) family/community and culture, 2) diaspora and global umma, 3) British Muslims, and 4) media. Each question had some significance in itself and also had to produce data which aided in answering or uncovering some aspect of the research question. Some of the themes, including the main theme of identity, were often difficult to approach in a direct manner. Rather than use the word ‘identity’ in
questions, ideas about what types of activities people participated in, who they socialised with, what they read and how they thought about themselves - the idea that identity is 'activity(ies)' - were employed instead of asking directly - 'what is your identity or how would you define yourself?' In practice these questions may have been used as probes or for further clarification once the initial idea had been established.

Press Survey

As one of the aims of the focus group interviews was to obtain data on how young Muslims are using alternative (Muslim) media, these personal accounts were to be supplemented with background material on Muslim media. This is not a comprehensive list but several newspapers, magazines and websites are included (Appendix H). A separate list of media mentioned by the survey respondents is given in Appendix A. In addition to this print and electronic media, I collected publicity material over the summer of 2000 pertaining to events, seminars, conferences, trips etc organised by and for young Muslims around the UK (Appendix I). Depending on the definition of media these events can be seen as forming an important aspect of 'information' available to British Muslims. This in turn may influence patterns of media use, for example, as a result of the literature disseminated at these programmes.

In order to look specifically at the media use patterns of those reading Muslim media, a short survey was designed which was sent out through Muslim publications. Appendix F shows the survey. The publications it was sent through and the response rates are shown in Table 3 in chapter Five. This would provide a geographically diverse data set, focus particularly on peoples' reasons for choosing to read certain media and get feedback and views about this media. Details of the answers given to open questions about opinions on Muslim media - favourable points, suggestions and criticisms, broader use of media and other social activities respondents were involved in are also analysed in chapter Five. As some questions asked in this questionnaire overlapped with those in the focus group interviews, it was possible to compare the results to some extent. Although the purpose was not to make the focus group results generalisable, it was nevertheless a useful supplementary form of data.
Media Interviews

One of the techniques used in mass communication research to link the production and consumption of media is to examine both media producers and consumers. That is not to say the findings necessarily look for any direct links or clear relationships but it provides a general picture of the overall media environment and outlines the objectives of both sides. To achieve this I interviewed media producers, mainly editors of publications (see chapter Four). The purpose was to see what the aims were behind setting up their publications, their views of the media scene in general, concepts of audiences and general issues affecting Muslims in Britain (interview schedule in Appendix G). The media practitioners were also seen as experts able to summarise through their own experiences both past and current trends within Muslim media and clarify not only the history of their own publication but look to others too. It was also possible to find out how they saw themselves amongst the whole media environment, including mainstream media. As well as this their observations of Britain’s Muslim communities were important.

Problems and Modifications

The main problem faced during fieldwork related to arranging focus group interviews and response rates. The initial timetable had stated that focus group interviews would be conducted in the summer term of 2000. However, as this was a busy period in the academic year, many students were unable to spare time for the interviews. The summer break was also a time in which most students were away and once again it was difficult to arrange and great number of groups at this time. For this reason the fieldwork continued into the Autumn term of 2000 (the following academic year).

In the first two focus groups after the questions had finished some material was presented to the group. This consisted of newspaper and magazine cuttings in order to stimulate further discussion about the types of images of Islam and Muslims in the media. However, possibly due to the timing of this (after most people had given some general comments about media representations) there was not a good response to this. Therefore, this was not used in subsequent focus groups.
A second modification which was made related to the Activities Diary. In order to collect detailed information about media and social habits of interviewees (information which would not be suitable to collect during focus groups) a Viewing Diary was devised. This was given to each participant at the end of the interview and they were requested to complete it over one week and return it. Perhaps due to the nature and length of the diary the response rate was extremely low. The idea of the viewing diary came from another project looking at ethnic minority viewing habits (Sreberny, 1999). As a result of this low response rate in subsequent focus groups the viewing diary was modified to a shorter questionnaire and given out at the beginning of each group so that although the detail of information obtained was not for the whole week, it meant that there was at least some data collected immediately (see Appendix E for modified version). A factor I overlooked in devising the Muslim media survey was a question asking specifically about internet use. This would have been important to supplement the information on internet use discussed in the focus group interviews.

Low turnout at some of the focus groups (and in fact some were pre-arranged with only two people being invited) meant that several focus groups actually functioned more as 'mini-focus groups'. Though this may not have been the ideal setting for gathering information, I decided that gaining insights into the research question was the most important issue and this could be done even with small numbers, rather than spend a considerable amount of time trying to achieve greater numbers in each interview. Even the groups with in which only 2 or 3 interviewees were present did yield information relating to the research topic. It is important to consider that the total number of people interviewed in the focus groups (see Appendix C) means that the data derived from these is not meant to be representative of young Muslims in Britain. Even within my selected group of respondents - those identifying strongly with Islam or as Muslims - different and even contradictory views were expressed. However, the aim of the research was to identify issues which are of concern to these young Muslims and gauge trends taking place amongst this sample group rather than use the findings to determine patterns within a broader section of the population.

The response rates to the press survey were also considerably low, ranging from 4-7% (see Table 3, p 154). This inevitably meant that any generalisations could not be made.
from the findings neither could they be used to create a profile of the average reader. However, as this was not the objective of the exercise, it did not necessarily pose any great problem. The aim of the press survey was more to develop some issues which were covered both in the focus group interviews and in the editor interviews, but with a specifically media focus. As such the press survey results provide a basic understanding of some of the opinions that exist amongst a small group of the magazine or newspaper readership. Other limitations of the PhD are outlined in the Conclusion.

The relationship between the researcher and the researched is crucial in determining the type of data collected. In my case I was interviewing young Muslims and this would inevitably have an effect on the language used, assumptions about shared meanings and the openness with which certain subjects were discussed. It meant that certain terms were automatically understood and did not need explaining. These factors all contributed to the smooth running of focus group interviews and it was easy to simply mention related subjects which lead to further discussion. Conversely, knowing the interviewer (as many interviewees were friends) may have affected the responses in certain ways. Respondents may have felt that they needed to give me an appropriate or approved answer for particular questions. It was probable that they had not thought about certain issues which I raised during the interview so may have answered in agreement with others. There was however disagreement between participants which indicates that the frankness between us gave a feeling of safety to say whatever they felt. My role as the researcher/interviewer was discussed explicitly in some focus group interviews when respondents asked me why I was conducting the research and what I hoped to discover from the questions I had posed.

My own interest in the research and my 'closeness' to both the subject area and the respondents will have consequences for both the study data and analyses. This situation results in what Ahmad (2001) defines as the researcher potentially being the researched too. Ahmad elaborates on issues of concern when researching one's own 'community' as an 'insider', including the validity of the research as recognised by white academics and colleagues, responsibility to the researched communities and discussion of sensitive subjects such as domestic violence. She also alludes to how being part of the 'community' has implications for access, confidentiality and power dynamics. In my
own case I locate myself within the 'community' being researched. This community includes the wider category of 'British Muslims' but also refers to specific groups within this, that is, a second generation Pakistani Muslim woman who is also a university student. Thus, certain observations of community dynamics and the lives of Muslim university students derive from personal experience and I state where I am speaking from these observations (mainly in the analyses chapters). The purpose of these observations is not to overshadow the respondents' own opinions but to present, as I stated in Chapter One, an analysis from the perspective of someone 'involved' in the issues being researched. Sreberny (2002) presses for a 'radical subjectivity' that not only accounts for why the academic finds certain issues of interest but more importantly how the subjectivity of the academic resonates with and through the subject matter being analysed. Amongst other things, my subjectivity as a Muslim woman resonates with emerging issues on gender and the changing role and new experiences of Muslim women in British society. As a Muslim living in the same environment as my respondents, some of my experiences are shared with them. The increasing interest in Islam and the growing presence of 'practicing' Muslims that I have observed within Muslim communities has been a motivating factor for the research study. The selection of research participants reflects those young Muslims who are increasingly engaging with Islam, therefore the findings relate to a specific set of experiences and opinions.

SUMMARY

The themes and issues outlined in chapters One and Two have determined the structure and details of the methodology. My objective in combining research methods has been to compliment the various data sets and thus create a range of information from which to analyse the research questions. Therefore particular questions in each of the data collection techniques covered similar issues such that they could be compared in the analyses. The table overleaf outlines the themes common to each data collection method.
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MPI – Muslim Press Interviews, MPS – Muslim Press Survey, FGI – Focus Group Interviews and AD – Activities Diaries.
CHAPTER 4
MUSLIM MEDIA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to present information pertaining to Muslim media (publications and internet) in Britain. This is done in three ways. The first section examines the data obtained from interviews with publication editors, whilst the second outlines general information on other Muslim media, including internet websites. The third section, which forms the summary, contains my observations on the situation and issues affecting Muslim media. These three sections combined will present an overview of British Muslim media, focusing on print media.

The editors of five Muslim publications were interviewed between March and July 2000 (Appendix C). These publications were Crescent International, Impact International, The Invitation, Q-News, and The Muslim News. A copy of the interview schedule is in Appendix G. These publications were not chosen to be representative in any way, however, they are amongst the better known and with a relatively higher circulation than other Muslim publications (The Muslim News has a circulation of 60 000 and Impact International of 20 000). I was unable to set up an interview with the editor of Trends magazine which I had hoped to, nevertheless, the survey was distributed to its readers.

The purpose of interviewing Muslim media editors was to gather information on how these publications were set up and what role they are playing in Muslim communities. Examining their aims and objectives and assessing their current situation shows how they have developed to serve British Muslims. As the research is concerned with analysing the development of British Muslim identities, the contribution of Muslim media to this process is of interest. Whilst not divorcing the function of media from the broader elements of the socio-economic, political and cultural frameworks of society, the focus is on how the media (mainstream and Muslim) are helping to articulate a new presence for Muslims in Britain. Why is it that Muslims are increasingly developing and using Muslim media? To begin to answer this question the fieldwork data is examined
in two parts. The first is looking at why editors of Muslim media have set up their respective publications and issues relating to the ‘political economy’ of Muslim media. Secondly, in chapters Five and Six, I examine (amongst other factors) the consumption of Muslim media using the survey and focus group interviews data. Combining these two data sets will allow an analysis of both the production and consumption of Muslim media by young Muslims in Britain.

Background

The events of late 1989 onwards with respect to the Muslim community, specifically the reaction to Salman Rushdie’s book, The Satanic Verses, and the first military action in the Gulf, were the background events in which the beginnings of much of the Muslim media can be framed. Those with a desire to maintain (and even strengthen) cultural and religious identities saw a strong and vibrant media as was one way to help achieve this. The demand for media in English grew as this became the preferred language for a growing number of Muslims. Newspapers that had come before were often in the mother tongue (e.g. The Jang and Awaz), effectively cutting out many second generation Muslims who although had a basic command of spoken Urdu, Punjabi or Bengali, for example, were often not fluent in reading or writing it. Variations in media consumption along the lines of gender, generation, language and other factors have been discussed in chapter One in ‘Diaspora’ and ‘Diaspora Media’ (Sreberny, 2000 and Husband, 1998).

The mosque organisations which replicated structures from the Indian subcontinent, initially unchanged as they were, only seemed to address issues facing British Muslims to a limited extent. Attendance to mosques for religious instruction for most children usually stopped in the early teenage years after which interaction with Islamic teachings was limited mainly to the home environment. Therefore social activities and media become important factors through which information is sought and ideas developed. As the Muslim communities developed a more distinctly religious identity, alternatives to mainstream media were sought through which to express this. This is shown by the encouragement that Muslim media received from the community in its early stages. Talking about the initial period of his newspaper, one editor notes that during the
Rushdie crisis “when they saw there was Muslim media there, the Muslim community were so happy and we got access to everyone, so that’s why we became very popular straight away because there was something where people could express their views, because ‘til that time there was nowhere to express [their views/themselves]” (Muslim News).

**Media Aims and Objectives**

In expressing their aims and objectives for setting up publications editors noted that the intention was to produce a publication - title, content, outlook - that reflected strongly a Muslim or Islamic identity of both its producers and its readers. This took place in an environment that was also keen to promote a Muslim identity. The British Asian media had already been established so editors were conscious to distinguish themselves from this. The nature of the British Muslim population meant that a large proportion of Muslims were South Asian but despite this fact the publications wanted a strictly Muslim identity. This was encouraged both from the readers and writers themselves.

Certain aims and objectives for setting up their respective publications were shared by all editors. For example, the gap seen in mainstream media in reporting of Islam and Muslim issues and the need for a perspective more aware and sympathetic to Muslims were recognised by all editors to a different degree. A combination of both the demand from within the Muslim community as well as their own conviction brought about the realisation of Muslim media.

“We were aiming our magazine at young second generation British Muslims and these are the people who have made up their mind that Britain is their country, who want to come to terms with their lives and the fact that they are British and they are Muslims and we wanted to capture the day-to-day struggle about each aspect of their lives ... my two primary ambitions at the time were, one to produce such a magazine to be popular with young people and secondly, which has been my obsession for a long time, is that I always believe you have to create an environment for [the] young to attract young people from the Muslim community who want to do creative writing, writing in general, you must facilitate it for them”. (Q-News)

When the editor of The Invitation was asked to describe the magazine he said:
"we started [in 1989] to run a study circle... with the idea to attract young Muslim boys and to also support them with their school work and with that came other dawah opportunities like holding regular quarterly youth camps and from that sprang the idea of actually putting things on paper... the idea was really to reach the young people who couldn’t read Urdu... our priority has always been Muslim youngsters".

And the editor of *Impact International* said,

"This magazine started about 29 years ago so it has evolved over a period of time... in the beginning, we started with a very basic agenda of trying to remove so called misunderstanding and present an Islamic viewpoint but I think as we proceeded we realised .. what we are trying to do we are trying to equip and educate our readers with facts and information and understanding of what’s going on in the world so that when they go out into society they are able to explain to others, they are wiser than otherwise".

A direct reflection of the changes that were taking place in the Muslim communities in the late 1980s and early 1990s can then be seen in trends in the media. Since 1989 a substantial increase in the number and variety of publications can be noted (see Appendices A and H). It is the diverse nature of the Muslim population that each publication has identified and therefore has chosen to focus on and develop itself to serve this niche. One editor felt that there can only be benefit in more Muslim media in society, with various outlooks and that in fact Muslim media had not developed substantially as yet. "It is not such a growth since we were at ground zero... it should be more" (*Impact*). I envisage that a growing confidence and competence with the media will undoubtedly see a further flourishing of Muslim media, both established print and electronic as well as new forms of 'media' (see chapter 5). One result of this confidence will perhaps be an increased participation of Muslims in mainstream media. Similarly Muslim media is providing a training ground for journalists amongst the Muslim communities. Working with the various publications, even on a voluntary basis, may be easier than gaining access to larger, more established mainstream media for young Muslims.

"Ideally you would need Muslims who are going into the mainstream media and they are self confident and are able to articulate and write as Muslims without creating problems, in a normal way. I mean how come a Roman Catholic or Jewish or atheist can write in *The Times* and a Muslim can not? So this is bound to change" (*Impact*).

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Once the skills and expertise have been acquired journalists may choose to move into mainstream media, as has happened with journalists from Q-News (Faisal Bodi writes for The Guardian and other staff also contribute occasionally). Gradually the media is being seen as a respectable and desirable profession amongst Muslims which was not the case some years ago. Two editors (Muslim News and Q-News) suggested that there are more women involved in the media, not only at the production level but also in terms of letters and responses. I suggest that this could perhaps be because women are less likely to have access to information through mosques and religious teachings and by extension they may not be present in the traditional arenas to express themselves. The media therefore compensates as a platform to express their opinions and articulate their concerns. Having become familiar with Muslim media as a voice, they possibly develop that interest into a degree subject or career. From my own observations and interactions with university students, of those studying media or how Islam is portrayed in the media, a substantial proportion is women. The recent appointment of a female editor to Q-News has no doubt raised the profile of Muslim media amongst Muslim women who would look positively at media as a prospective career. Women have traditionally studied subjects in the social sciences and arts and this popularity may have extended to include media studies. The academic and research aspect of media may also be more attractive to Muslim women as opposed to production and presenting because of issues of Islamic dress or employer expectations. The editor of Muslim News, who has a team consisting mainly of female journalists notes,

"its changing now because before professions like media were looked down upon... and also people [thought] that if you go into media you might be deviated or whatever, .. we have an increasing number of young people going into media, but many of them I know in the media are secular Muslims, they're not practising but now slowly, like we have two trainees here at Muslim News and they both wear hijab and they are both doing journalism and I am quite sure there are others that are doing media studies as well".

This was reinforced by another editor's answer to my question about whether he felt Muslims were choosing media as a career, "yes, I think yes, I can't quantify but the answer is yes. I think it's a natural process and I would say this has happened because of the realisation that this is an area where Muslims are un-represented or misrepresented so there is a need to do something about it" (Impact).
The Muslim media has enabled readers to access certain local and global news which is not available in the mainstream media. The importance of this access in maintaining the connection between diaspora communities has been outlined in chapter One. Not only is alternative local/national news covered in community media, but vital information pertaining to international issues affecting the umma are also disseminated through this channel. International news is of course present because it is of relevance to British Muslims, however, domestic issues are often given precedence. When the editor of *Impact* was asked about the perspective his publication gives, he commented:

"Yes it is a Muslim perspective, we look at events from a Muslim perspective and of course since everything else in the world is from not only a non-Muslim perspective which is fine but unfortunately from an anti-Muslim perspective, the contrast is there all the time, you see we may be reporting about events and incidents and nobody would know about it until we have spoken about it and we have to do it otherwise its not an issue at all. That’s why our cover stories are very different from what is there in the media all the time".

Some of the issues raised in Muslim media relate to living as Muslims within a non-Muslim society, thus articles also contain information on how to function as a minority religious group and how to inform people about Islam. By providing information, even legal rulings, Muslim media serve to clarify the Islamic position regarding matters such as smoking, drugs, bank interest etc. This function of Muslim media links to Mandaville’s (2001) and Baktiari’s (2000) idea of alternative sources of Islamic knowledge in diaspora. Matters that may have otherwise been debated in schools, mosques and similar forums, have found expression in the media because these former structures are not as developed in Britain, therefore media reaches a wider audience and potentially has greater influence. Muslims can then use this information to engage in dialogue with non-Muslims. Although the majority of readers of these publications are Muslim, non-Muslims do access Muslim media. Politicians, civil servants, academics and similar professionals use the information to gauge opinions, concerns and trends within the British Muslim communities. It is difficult to assess the extent to which this information impacts on policy decisions but editors were aware that their publications were used by these people.

The issues covered by the five publications whose editors were interviewed are focused mainly on the lives of British Muslims, thereby setting an agenda for debates within the
community. There are a number of forums in which debates are conducted, for example, academia, politics and community based organisations. The media however provides the most accessible forum for a large number of people and is particularly important for those people who do not have access to or are marginalised from other platforms. The variety of debates which take place in Muslim publications reflect the pertinent issues affecting the Muslim communities. For example, ‘Drugs - The Battle for our Community (Trends, Vol 8, Issue 5), ‘Buy Them a Book ... Are Our Children being affected by their over enthusiasm for computer games and TV?’ (The Invitation, Vol 9, No 1 Hajj 2001), ‘To Vote or Not to Vote’ (Q-News, April 2001), ‘Election Debate’ (The Muslim News, 27 April 2001), religious discrimination (The Muslim News, 24 November 2000) and ‘British Muslims, Britain and the Global Ummah’ (Crescent International, Vol 29, No 6, June 1-15 2000). This last theme has been widely debated amongst academic and political circles and particularly within Muslim media. The existence of the Muslim diaspora has raised many issues such as the connection with 'home', the sense of belonging in non-Muslim lands and the universal nature of Islam. These ideas have helped to develop an understanding of how Islam is to be practised in different places in contemporary society. In the case of Britain it has meant incorporating aspects of local cultures into an Islamic framework to give rise to a distinctly British Muslim identity. The concept of a fixed identity has been disrupted by globalisation amongst other processes (Hall, 1996) and this has enabled Muslims in the West to perceive their identity in a different light. Consequently, they have often adapted their traditions into contemporary situations.

As 1989 appeared to be a watershed for British Muslims, I asked editors how they felt Muslim media (including their own publication) had changed and developed since then. They agreed that the number of publications had increased and that the quality had improved. In addition the existing publications have incorporated discussion on topics other than religion, such as politics and social issues.

"Before they would hardly discuss about issues like domestic violence or whatever now they are more open, you will even find religious publications, that is community publications, discussing these issues because they have seen that Muslim News and Q-News are discussing... and you’ve also grown in size and in confidence as well" (Muslim News).
Some publications began as small community based newsletters and have grown into much more widely distributed magazines. The editor of *The Invitation* noted that “we have learnt and we have acquired knowledge of media and have incorporated a lot of good practice from mainstream media in terms of presentation... it’s a continuous programme of evolving... we’re still developing and evolving and I hope that will continue”. The editor of *Crescent* noted that there is a higher quality of debate within and amongst Muslim media because there is interaction between different publications and their respective views. “There are so many more publications and by and large the quality is higher... in terms of debate its much higher quality now, there’s much more written debate going on than there was a few years ago”.

Editors recognised the internal and external influences on their work. Internally publications were very much dependent on available resources, financial and intellectual. The editor of *Q-News* commented on the external influences, namely the audience, “of course we have to reflect our readership and the kinds of agendas and issues and the agenda has changed, I think there is more demand on certain items”. As with all such publications this is reflected in the ‘letters to the editor’. As well as praise and criticism for the coverage of particular issues, readers often suggested new topics for discussion. Keeping up with the changes and trends which affect British Muslims was one of the tasks of the media.

All the editors were aware of the fact that their publication was not the sole source of information for their readers. Their aim was to supplement media information already available with something from an Islamic or at least Muslim perspective. Not only was the perspective different but the actual content also varied. The types of articles written in Muslim publications covered news and views more relevant to the Muslim community:

“... there may be some individuals who do, but we don’t expect anybody to read only *Impact*, we hope that people read other newspapers as well, otherwise they would not be, their education would not be broad” (*Impact International*).
The relatively young Muslim media means that the pool of writers and editors is small and less experienced than other media - including other religious media such as the Catholic Herald or Jewish Chronicle. Time will obviously enable this to change.

Each of the five editors interviewed had Britain’s Muslims in mind for their target audience. Although international events are covered, the focus still remains on Britain. Trends was aimed at younger Muslims, particularly university students, whilst Crescent and Impact had a more global, political outlook. This is influenced directly by the people responsible for setting up and writing for the publications. Trends is the voice of Young Muslims UK28 whilst Crescent started from the work of the Muslim Institute (later Muslim Parliament), particularly influenced by post-revolution Iran. Q-News started life as Muslim-Wise, which as suggested by its original title, aimed at being a street-wise publication for Muslim youth. As its original target audience of youth (16-17 years old) have now become 28-30, the emphasis is shifting to a lifestyle or society magazine. For Q-News their niche market appears to be young, professional Muslims for whom they are providing a publication relating relevant social and cultural issues. The recent expansion of Q-News into the North American market (first editions launched at the beginning of 2002) also indicates their targeting young diaspora Muslims in the West, presumably having identified the commonality between the European and North American markets. Levels of awareness of diaspora connections have most probably increased post-September 11th. As certain publications have arisen out of already established groups or movements, as mentioned, Crescent International closely follows trends stimulated by the Iranian revolution, the ethos of the publication reflects this. Whereas The Invitation (The Family Magazine), as its subtitle indicates, is aimed at young families and the simpler writing style reflects this.

The variety of issues covered by the publications varies and like mainstream media, they have regular features. Editorials, news, book and conference reviews, profiles, regular contributors, spiritual sections, question and answer, matrimonial and jobs and other advertising are amongst these. At this fairly early stage of development of Muslim media - not even 15 years for some publications - much of the focus is solely on Muslim issues. The editors themselves want to expand the topics they cover and almost be an

28 Young Muslims UK (YMUK) is the youth branch of the Islamic Society of Britain.
Islamic version of a broadsheet so that they are not always tackling negative issues or issues of concern to the Muslim communities alone. To this extent the editors are conscious of their niche within the media environment. They are providing news from different sources and also topics which mainstream media would not cover or would do so in an inaccurate way. One editor stated that he didn’t really expect anything from the mainstream media in terms of presenting stories, positive ones at that, about Islam and Muslims (Q-News). The same editor commented that the audience is very influential in terms of what goes into the magazine and it is about writing at the level of the community rather than necessarily writing what the journalists want. He also stated that readers wouldn’t expect a financial or political publication to report exclusively on these issues “yet they would expect a Muslim magazine to be totally Islamic” (Q-News). From what I understood of this comment, it appears that reader expectations can place constraints on editors who may wish to expand and include other issues or journalistic styles in their publications. Perhaps the relatively new domain of Muslim media obliges editors to be cautious in the material they transmit in order to gauge their audiences before attempted anything novel or indeed controversial.

As the Muslim communities change and develop it is likely that so too will the media to reflect these changes. In addition editors felt that their full potential is not being exploited. The editor of The Muslim News said that he would like to be able to produce a ‘daily’ similar to mainstream media whilst the editor of Q-News stated that:

“Q-News in terms of its quality is less than 20% of the potential Muslims can produce in this country... we are having a major revamp.. so we will have a totally different Q-News for two reasons, one is that we have realised that people who we have started with have grown, then they were 16-17 and now they are 28 or 30 so they have different priorities,.. and the other is that we want to be more entertaining, we want to be a lifestyle publication, we don’t want to be a political publication, we want to discuss real daily issues, to give advice and exchange views”.

And the editor of The Invitation stated:

“I’m not satisfied of course with The Invitation at the moment, I feel that there is so much that can be improved in it and its just a matter of not having the personnel to do it really... as a dawah magazine we are in the business of
proselytising, influencing really but we’re not achieving that simply because we haven’t got the time or the means at the moment to do that really”.

Representing all Muslims in Britain is probably a grand claim to make for any one publication. In fact even at the level of national organisations this has presented problems and perhaps only in the past few years has the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) been recognised as being reasonably representative of British Muslims. However, the role media is playing in bringing issues onto the agenda - inevitably in the Muslim communities but also in mainstream institutions - is substantial. As many of the writers are volunteers and have contacts with people across the country, their input comes from the community level. The community’s concerns are therefore transferred easily onto the canvas of Muslim media. Creating a knowledgeable Muslim society is one of the objectives of the editors as it will only be then that more open debate can take place. The politics of representation amongst Muslim communities is a contested terrain and there is no reason to expect that one publication represents the point of view of every Muslim. As the Muslim community itself develops and forms different groups and perspectives, this will be reflected in its media. In reply to the question about whether he thought Muslims would isolate themselves with specific media, one editor said:

“Those who know themselves better will be able to respect others and will be able to share with and understand others. I think its not being isolationist or separatist in any sense its really trying to get that very fundamental right that people have to learn about who they are... I think having your own ethnic or religious media is an opportunity for you to express yourself genuinely” (Invitation).

The editor of Impact predicted that a greater diversity in Muslim media was something to look forward to as the communities themselves contained many different aspects which needed to be expressed.

“I think there is a great proliferation of house magazines, societies have their own journals and magazines and handouts, I think that’s a good training ground for people to do their own thing.... It’s a factor of time, in the course of time, the Muslim media is also going to be part of the mainstream, I don’t think this so called ghetto situation is a permanent situation, the difference is that Muslim media primarily addresses a Muslim readership so it creates an automatic division but later on I think this is going to change.” (Impact).
Muslim Publications

The diversity of Muslim media is illustrated by the different kinds of publications available. Appendix H shows a selection of publications with some basic information about each. Most publications (excluding specialist ones) tended to have a combination of current affairs, social and 'religious' issues. The latter category comprised of faith or belief issues, explanations on the Qur'an and hadith, 'how to' guides on certain practices in Islam and reminders of special dates in the Islamic calendar. Social and cultural matters relating to Muslims in Britain and dealing with problems in the community were also a focus. Letters to the editor carry comments about articles in previous issues, opinions about current affairs and also contain questions on Islamic fiqh.

The target audience of many of the publications tended to be young Muslims. Therefore it is common to find the types of issues affecting this age group in the pages of magazines. Frequency of publication (weekly, monthly, bi-monthly etc) automatically influenced the currency of topics. Clearly the contents and outlook of each publication are determined by the background of the publications itself, the ideological or political stance it takes, its editor/writers and its expected readership. It is also determined by whether the producers’ aim is to provide a current affairs (political) source of information or are more concerned with addressing social and cultural issues. All publications advertise events taking place around the country aimed at young Muslims, have book reviews and also publicise charity appeals (mainly Muslim charity/relief organisations).

I will give brief descriptions, as opposed to critical reviews, of some publications to provide an overview of what is available in the category of Muslim press. Reality, Reflect and Trends are aimed at young Muslims, particularly students, and are written in a less academic style. Trends normally has poetry and a pull-out poster as well as quizzes and discussions. The articles in Reflect consist of accounts of the life of the Prophet (saw) and his Companions, poems, general information, question and answers and word searches. The magazine of Hizb-u-Tahrir reports on international politics affecting Muslim countries. Its focus is on the re-establishment of the Islamic Khilafah as a solution to world wide problems of corruption, wars, oppression, poverty, and social degeneration. It also publicises activities such as rallies, marches and
conferences. Several issues following September 11th 2001 were focused on the new world order, the domination and oppressive nature of Western powers (particularly the USA), the role and response of Muslims (especially leaders) and the proposed solutions to such conditions. Apart from the feature issue, there is analysis of world wide events, focused on Muslim countries and including the activities of Hizb-ut-Tahrir. There is also a regular article on the tafseer (exegesis) of a Qur’anic sura (verse) or otherwise about an Islamic issue. As-Sahwa is the magazine of Al-Muhajiroun (The Emigrants) which raises similar issues to that of Hizb-u-Tahrir’s publication. Websites for both organisations contain additional material. Though less proactive than these two, Crescent International and Impact International adopt a political approach. Their world wide coverage is extensive and often carries news from countries which have been ignored or forgotten by the mainstream media or even other Muslim media, for example, continuing coverage of Kashmir, Chechnya and Indonesia. In Crescent International these are covered in the ‘News in Brief’ section which follows events around the world or are found in the more detailed ‘News/Analysis’ pages concentrating on leading political events. ‘Islam/Movement’ and ‘Islam/Fundamentals’ looks at issues relating to the political Islam and general Islamic issues respectively. There are also book reviews, special papers/reports and notices. Impact has a circulation of approximately 20,000 of which 30-35% is UK based subscription. It is one of the first magazines to have been established and is professional and ‘serious’ in its presentation and analysis. Main articles are dedicated to the key events taking place around the world and the rest of the world is covered in ‘World A-Z’. There is also an ‘Economy/Business’ section, book reviews, obituaries and an article on great personalities of Islam (or other such Islamic topics).

The Fountain (science), Al-Huroof (children’s) and Majubah (women’s) magazines could be classified as specialist as they cater for a particular audience or focus on a specialist topic. Dialogue is the monthly newsletter published by the Public Affairs Committee for Shi’a Muslims in London and covers political issues and analyses as well as book reviews. Islamica is the journal of the London School of Economics Islamic Society (in association with the Muslim Academic Trust) and has the format of other academic journals. As a journal, it is of a higher calibre then normal Islamic society newsletters and its contributors are not confined to the student body of LSE. It
“seeks to reflect contemporary Islamic thought, and address issues and problems pertinent to Islam and the Muslim *Umma*, and the world, through the principles, concepts and values of the Islamic paradigm. Topics covered include Theology, Comparative Religion, Sufism, History, Philosophy, Economics, Law, Politics, Media, Current Affairs and International Relations” (*Islamica*, 3.1/99). It also presents several book reviews. The most appropriate way to describe *Q-News* is using the editorial team’s own words. Describing itself as “Europe’s leading Muslim magazine” it states its brief is “to produce a magazine of outstanding style, appeal and relevance... a breakthrough in responsible journalism and entertaining writing. And the perfect vehicle for discourse on the challenges of creating a dynamic Muslim community in Europe”. The news section “is the most comprehensive archive of major developments taking place within the Muslim community”, its *fiqh* page “a trailblazer in the evolution and development of a modern and pertinent *fiqh*”, review pages “an educated discussion on the products and processes of the day, their context and effect” and the overall profile of the magazine is that it “provides a multi-dimensional insight into the individuals who make our community tick. Similarly, other pages are intended to make you smile, think and act” (*Q-News*, No 336, October 2001/Rajab 1421). Although many of the publications provide similar platforms for debate and information dissemination, I think *Q-News* articulates its objectives in a very comprehensive manner making the reader fully aware them. By saying that “among the generation who define themselves as British Muslims, *Q-News* is becoming a must read”, it recognises itself as an expression of that particular identity. By making its readers ‘think and act’ as a result of what they read in its pages, the concept of active identification as Muslims is apparent.

*The Muslim News* could perhaps be seen as incorporating aspects of the ‘serious’ publications and the ‘society’ element of media. It covers political issues and current affairs at an international level but dedicates much space to national news. Reviews of conferences and events, updates of campaigns, book reviews, reviews of government policies and publications are also given. There is poetry and discussion on debates currently taking place amongst Muslims. There are numerous other publications which have not been mentioned here because of the limited space and because I did not employ a technique to conduct a comprehensive search. However, some other publications cited by the respondents of the media survey are in Appendix A.
In a way the diversity within Muslim media represents the variety of opinions, organisations and perspectives within the British Muslim population. Identifications with various ways of thinking and approaches to Islam such as different political inclinations, *dawah* oriented outlooks, academic or spiritual Islam, are facilitated and reinforced by different publications. Certain fundamental aspects of identifying oneself with Islam are shared by almost all groups of Muslims, but there is also diversity amongst them like in any other community. A pool of trained journalists and writers emerging amongst Muslims will possibly alter the intellectual resources available to Muslim media and this should influence the nature of publications themselves. As Muslim media becomes a more familiar feature amongst British Muslims, the expectations of readers may change. This will possibly be a reflection of the maturity of readers as well as the changing circumstances of Muslims. Standards expected from the journalism may too increase because readers will have more and more publications to compare with, in addition to the already existing mainstream media.

**Internet Websites**

Any examination of Muslim media must take into consideration internet websites. However, rather than attempt to list all (or indeed even many) of the different expressions of Islam or Muslim-ness on the internet, I will only make some general comments here. The subject is worthy of a whole study in itself but I refer primarily to Bunt’s (2000) work on Cyber Islamic Environments for my information. His study provides probably the most comprehensive record of the presence of Islamic and Muslim websites. Of course the rapidly changing nature of the internet means any ‘comprehensive’ register of websites will probably be out of date by the time it is published, both because sites are removed and new ones appear all the time. Nevertheless, it is useful to gain an understanding of the discourses being articulated on Islam and Muslims. As one might expect entering ‘Islam’ into any search engine will produce hundreds of thousands of hits. From my own brief search of internet websites on Islam and Muslims, I noted the following:

- Due to the structure and distribution of the internet and its users, many websites are based in Western countries and are in English;
There is diversity in the ideological or sectarian outlook of websites; various categories of websites exist, for example, organisations' homepages, individual homepages, academic and research forums; the contents range from dawah material, informative/educational, political, current affairs, inter-faith dialogue and indices of articles.

The pages contain a variety of information but some of the most common themes are listed in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fundamentals of Islam</th>
<th>The Holy Prophet (saw)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Qur'an</td>
<td>Muslims in the West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to pray</td>
<td>Events listings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic articles</td>
<td>Women in Islam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosques listings</td>
<td>Pray times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question and Answer</td>
<td>Qur'an and hadith browsers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News from the Muslim world</td>
<td>Political groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Dawah</em> (invitation to Islam)</td>
<td>Rulings on various legal issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common misconceptions</td>
<td>Matrimonials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charity appeals</td>
<td>Interfaith</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bunt (2000) explores the internet presence of Islam and Muslims using specific categories. He surveys the diversity of material available, for example, Qur'an and *hadith/seerah* material (including various translations of the Qur'an available to search, download and listen to using audio technology), jurisprudence according to the four schools of thought, ideas of Muslim philosophers, Shi'a literature and 'converts' related literature. The diversity he finds is also along ideological lines with Sunni, Shi'a, Sufi and unorthodox groups all expressing themselves online. Political dimensions are explored by using the examples of several countries around the world were the internet is playing a part in articulating Islamic and Muslim discourses (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kashmir, Malaysia, Singapore, Sudan and Saudi Arabia). He also demonstrates how 'political Islam' is manifesting itself with groups such as HAMAS and Hezbollah and what he classifies as dissident groups such as the Campaign for Democracy and Legal Rights (CDLR) also having a presence on the internet.
This diversity does not mean however that there are no common grounds between different websites. There is 'connectiveness' on certain issues such as the five pillars of Islam. Similar to Mandaville's (2001) analysis of how the internet and global technologies are affecting Muslims, Bunt (2000) sees the role of the internet as one of an authority dealing with people's questions and concerns about being a Muslim. Again dawah and Christian-Muslim dialogue is also one area Bunt highlights. The servicing of Muslim websites has also developed with web designers, maintainers and navigators in place to help existing websites and create new ones. Some of these bigger 'gateway' sites provide links to further sites making navigation of the internet easier for users. In the notes and bibliography of his work Bunt lists hundreds of websites relating to Islam/Muslims.

Bunt (2000) often refers to the need for further research in this area and in his conclusion notes that the direction Cyber Islamic Environments will take Muslims in is open to speculation. Issues of authority, censorship, authenticity, regulation of anti-Islamic pages and access all mean the initial euphoria surrounding the internet needs to be questioned. Ahmad's (n/d) webpage article "Muslims on the Internet: the Good, the Bad... the Ugly" reiterates some of these concerns. She notes that whilst there have been positive aspects of coming on-line, there have also been conflicts between different Muslim website regulators, a proliferation of deviant sects, blatantly false information about Islam, unregulated chat rooms enabling un-Islamic behaviour and a very limited (if any) presence of scholars and shaykhs to act as proper authorities. Despite these cautions though the internet undoubtedly presents many possibilities for Muslims in the future.

Baktiari's (2000) study of the 'Cybermuslim and the Internet' also lists various websites relating to Islam and/or Muslims. As mentioned in chapter Two he sees the net as having three consequences for Muslims; reducing geographical limitations, challenging traditional methods of learning and accelerating pluralism in Islamic political activity. Websites have also been useful channels for conversion to Islam, where ironically people who have been curious about negative media portrayal of Islam or have tried to

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29 For continuously updated information on this see www.virtuallyislamic.com
convert Muslims, have themselves become Muslims (Winter, 1999b). By presenting details about 100 converts to Islam, Winter notes that the internet plays a significant role in missionary activities.

Muslims and the Mainstream Media

There seemed to be optimism about Muslims becoming involved in and more aware of how to deal with mainstream media. This was probably because in comparison to some years ago Muslims are now writing to editors and taking constructive action when the media reports inaccurate or offensive material about Islam or Muslims. However, although the number of letters and emails about programmes or articles have increased, Muslims are still seen as needing to develop greater competence and confident in dealing with mainstream media.

"In a small way the mainstream media, slightly, not in a big way, is becoming sensitive, the problem is that... we read something in The Times or The Guardian and we feel angry or unhappy but we keep our unhappiness within ourselves, we don't write to them, I believe if you write to them, even though they will throw away your letter in the waste paper basket I think this will have an effect, we are not doing it. I think this is a problem with our community, we are more attuned to the culture of protest rather than the culture of doing things" (Impact).

Those who are more articulate, familiar with the media and perhaps have easy access to the internet, do have greater interaction with media. The importance of the media in portraying certain images of Islam has been recognised by Muslim communities. This is reflected in the case of organised media monitoring and response as well as individual or informal methods such as email. In May 2000 the BBC aired an Arena documentary entitled 'The Veil' and prior to its showing emails had been circulated alerting Muslims to it, encouraging them to watch and react to it. The producer and series director were obliged to reply to all letters of complaint explaining their standpoint. Yaqub (2000) reports on the negative feelings roused by the programme and a possible link between it and increased sexual harassment of Muslim women wearing the hijab and niqab.

More organised methods of writing to newspapers to voice complaints are developing amongst Muslims. Individuals are still involved but the focus has shifted to media
monitoring projects which are seen as being more effective. The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) has a particular unit within its organisation to deal with Islamophobic reporting and has been successful in setting up meetings with newspapers to discuss their use of inflammatory language. In May 2001 the Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism (FAIR) was launched in London and one of the organisation’s projects is the 'Media & Popular Culture Watch' whose objective it is to 'monitor and identify specific incidences of Islamophobia and issues of concern in print media, television, radio, the internet, novels, cinema, theatre, museums and art galleries, fashion, music, sports and local events'. Again this reflects the growing confidence amongst British Muslims that institutions such as the media need to reflect the diversity of cultures and religions in society by being sensitive in their work. Muslims as consumers of the media are now more aware of their role in challenging the stereotypes which exist of them in the media and of the stereotype that they are passive to inaccurate and derogatory reporting. The disillusionment felt by Muslims about much of the mainstream media has perhaps been one of the strongest factors to encourage the growth of Muslim media.

The importance of the media was something which editors felt the Muslim community had come to realise, not least because of the negative impact mainstream media is thought to have had on the image of Islam and Muslims. Many Muslims now focus on how media can be used for their benefit. Access to mainstream media was seen as difficult.

“I don’t think they [Muslims] will be given an opportunity, the mainstream media is in the hands of extremist secularist people who have their own clear agenda and will ensure that no other agenda is put forward and I find them very intolerant and a powerful group” (Invitation).

As a result of this Muslims are concentrating on setting up their alternative publications and forms of media. Another editor echoed this idea:

“I think there’s a lot more awareness of the potential of media and that we can use it for our advantage but I think Muslims are also right that this is an area where the non-Muslims have a big head start, the anti-Islamic lobby, particularly the liberal lobby has a huge head start and the resources they can put into it are massive but I think that broadly speaking people understand that it is essential that we are in that area” (Crescent).
Whilst acknowledging the breadth of mainstream media, he notes that it is part of a political debate "which is always going to be hostile to us, we can occasionally score points in it but the bulk of our efforts and any progress that we make is going to be through our own media" (Crescent).

I asked editors what role they thought media played in society in general and specifically how powerful the influence of media was in helping people to think about their identity. All editors agreed that the media does have a role to play in informing people but that this forms part of a wider network of influences. One editor thought that in fact the media was more powerful than it ought to be and that people needed to use media in a useful way rather than as 'mass or mob psychology' (Impact). School, community, home and parents, friends and the general environment were factors which were seen to be as important, if not more important, than the media (Muslim News).

"I think it [media] is quite important but it shouldn't be overrated. Its only one factor, its almost if you like a reinforcing factor rather than a defining or shaping factor. I think it informs and it often provides substance and support for their self identity but I think an individual sense of self identity tends to be defined much more by community and by friends and peer groups rather than purely by media.... There's always a difference between influences on an individual and influences on a group, I think an individual might be more shaped by the group but the group as a whole might depend a lot on media for defining itself and for its collective identity" (Crescent).

Access to and use of the internet varies amongst Muslims as with other groups. For this reason perhaps editors held different views about its use and usefulness. Not all publications have websites, not least because this would reduce subscriptions and therefore income substantially. However, correspondence has been increased due to email and internet access, meaning that letters are more frequent. The number and variety of websites on the Internet is enormous and is examined only briefly in a later section.

Media and Identity

Editors were in a good position to report on community issues and what they thought of the experiences of Muslims over the past decade. One of the issues I asked them to
comment on was identity - whether they had seen any particular trends or changes in the identity of British Muslims and if so what were they?

“There’s change. There’s much change ... when we started .. we made an assumption about the need for a Muslim identity and we felt two things, we didn’t want only to record it as it was happening but more important to be active participants in what kind of identity [developed] .... so Muslim-Wise did more than anybody to discuss this .. there is definitely a very big shift and this was reflected in our success as a publication because you see if there’s no sense of a strong Muslim identity, of this young British Muslim identity, we would not survive because our whole thing is based on that.” (Q-News).

Other editors mentioned various factors which they felt influenced the emergence of a specific British Muslim identity. One of these was the idea that Muslims have put down their roots in Britain and know that Britain is their home. For subsequent generations born in Britain there was the automatic assumption that they were settled here. One editor felt that two extremes had emerged as a consequence - one group adapting to a British or Western way of life and behaviour and the other, smaller group coming to Islam. Within this latter group though he felt a shortage of good teachers and institutions had sometimes promoted an antagonistic and extremist version of Muslim identity (The Invitation). Anti-Islamic racism was another factor that had kept the Muslim community alert and aware of its position in society. The impact of the Rushdie affair was significant in this sense and since then there has been growing awareness of increasing Islamophobia in British society. This has been acknowledged by academic, community and government bodies (see reports by The Runnymede Trust, 1997, Derby University/Home Office, 2001 and Islamic Human Rights Commission, 2000).

“I think in Britain certainly the impact of the Rushdie affair has been massive. Muslims here have become much more aware of their place in this community and of the problems we have as Muslims.. there’s hostility towards us, I think in that sense the increased political awareness has been huge over the last 10 years and I think its reflected in the emergence of magazines like Q-News and Muslim News and on political activism on university campuses. The other thing that has emerged during this period much more has been the cultural problems of young people, who are neither eastern or western, the emergence of a British Muslim identity, partly that is a demographic factor that the children born to the immigration boom in the 1960s have grown up in the 80s and 90s but partly also its simply a matter of awareness and partly it reflects the global re-emergence of Islam politically and the impact that’s had on Muslim identity, women, sisters wearing hijab for example which in itself is extremely un-
Pakistani if you like, it doesn’t come from anything traditional amongst Pakistanis, it comes from purely a matter of Muslim identity, so all these things have really emerged much more in the last ten years than ever before” (Crescent).

This comment summarises many of the issues I am investigating which have been noted in the theoretical chapter. The editor reinforces the findings of the studies cited in chapter One about the emergence of a Muslim identity, manifest through visible markers such as the hijab, but also notes the dilemmas facing young Muslims because of different cultural pressures. From his comment, perhaps he implies the way to resolve these conflicting pressures has resulted in the emergence of a strong Muslim identity because Islam is seen as presenting solutions to these conflicts, with connections to global changes in political Islam also being an importance factor. All of these appear to have been triggered post-1989 (post-Rushdie affair). The response below is from the editor of Impact when asked how he thought the Muslim community had changed in the last ten years;

“Well it has become more integrated I must say. Integrated in a positive sense, Muslims have began to feel that they are part of the society, may not be an equal part or a wholly equal part but they do take part, they take part in elections, they take part in various activities of this society which means they are not immigrants any more. One of the defining event for this integration was the Satanic Verses affair, when Muslims started to protest and they started to object, they did not object as outsiders, if you’re an outsider you don’t object, you don’t care what other people are doing, so Muslims were angry they said look here we are part of the society, how come you dare insult us, our sensitivities, so this was the first strong and organised assertion of self identity, it appeared to be a protest but it was for something of very positive reasons and from there on I think the Muslim society, community began to gel, it was good that so many questions were thrown at us and people started to answer them on their own... so this was a kind of internal solidification the response to the Satanic Verses but now I think something is happening in the political process in the last local council elections the number of Muslims councillors and mayors has gone up, there are more younger people.. we have the younger generation more educated, even for parliamentary candidates it is a better input... so this is an improvement... there are a lot of things which are happening and we can’t change it overnight but I think the way Muslims protested and made their position known again it was defining event in their political role in society, I am sure this was felt in the political structure as well” (Impact).
Again this editor restates that the *Satanic Verses* affair marked a watershed in the history of Britain’s Muslim communities. Political activities and involvement in mainstream politics as ‘Muslims’ rather than by ethnic identifiers, resulted from Muslim solidarity following what was seen as an attack on their religious sensitivities. I mentioned in chapter One that a stronger and more assertive Muslim identity emerged as Muslims born and brought up in the UK became more confident to claim their rights as British citizens. This is the type of process mentioned here by the editor. The organisation and assertion of a Muslim identity/ies following the *Satanic Verses* controversy has been noted by various academics (for example, Vertovec, 1998, Samad, 1998 and Asad, 1993).

There was also a sense that a shift had taken place away from colour racism to a more cultural based racism.

"The whole sense about it is that we live in a very racist society, in a society in which every aspect of it is imbued by Islamophobia and the negative images about Islam [have] really lead to low self esteem, particularly amongst the young people... When you have low self [esteem] you try to find a way out and one of them is you re-assert your identity... you become pro-active in the identity that your oppressor has imposed on you and this is the same with the Muslims... Even Asian culture is becoming a bit mainstream, people want to be different - being young, British and Muslim, following Osama Bin Laden, dressing like him or Hamza Yusuf” (*Q-News*).

When asked specifically about whether the media influences people’s self perception or trends in the community influence media, one editor said “I think it works both ways, the growth of media reflects this increasing self awareness and also feeds it, I think it works both ways. I think its probably more a reflection” (*Crescent International*). He notes that because there was very little media in the 1980s, the issues and problems within Muslim communities were the catalyst for the emergence of Muslim media. The preference of being identified as Muslim as opposed to Pakistani or Bangladeshi or even as Asian is taken up in publications. One editor stated the uncompromising stance that “we are Muslims and only Muslims, nothing else... when you write you write from a particular perspective and you say there is something wrong with you being an Asian but its alright to be a Muslim” (*Q-News*). The Asian influence is considerable but even
this was seen as diminishing because of people’s insistence that they be recognised as Muslims.

Editors felt that there was a clear emphasis on being a British Muslim in terms of any construction of identity. For example, *Q-News* has for numerous editions carried a photograph of a white Muslim girl wearing a Union Jack *hijab* with the words ‘The Future is *Halal*’ written next to it. From reading the magazine I would suggest the image connotes the new face of British Islam or British Muslims. It breaks away from the traditional, even stereotypical, image of Muslims being immigrants from former colonies. Rather it says, the British Muslim is young, confident of her belonging to Britain, proud of her Britishness and part of its culture. It also challenges the idea that Islam is foreign by showing ‘indigenous’ Britons as Muslims. ‘The Future is *Halal*’ implies a positive outlook to the future, opposing the negative idea of Islam clashing with British values and being unable to adapt here. In addition a young Muslim woman on this subscription page poses the question about the overall image of British Islam not only from outside but within the Muslim communities. Many Muslim communities have traditionally had older male representatives or spokespersons and seeing young Muslim women in influential circles gives a different perspective. The editor of the magazine was aware of this, “right from the beginning I sent a *hijabed* woman to a press conference and we were the first ones to send a woman with *hijab*, I liked the shock tactics of it”. The subscription page in recent editions carries a photo of the new female editor alongside a copy of an article written in *The Independent* about her and her experiences of working in Muslim media (Vallely, 2000). Vallely writes “the average *Q-News* reader is a young British Muslim graduate in a professional occupation for whom English is the first language and critical engagement with the style and values of the Western world is taken for granted”. Again the direct appeal to the type of reader and therefore the type of magazine is given and it retains elements of the first image. Young, female, professional and thoroughly British whilst at the same time assertive of a proud Muslim identity. A later edition of *Q-News* also carries the same photo of the Muslim woman with the Union Jack scarf but the caption has changed to “British Muslims: 2 million souls, 1,200 mosques, 72 jamaats, 69 schools, 7 Mayors, 4 Parliamentarians - One Magazine. *Q-News*. Get the *halal* picture.” (No 333. July

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30 *Q-News*, Issue No 328, Feb 2001/Dhu Al-Qa’dah 1421. See Appendix K.
The sense from this caption is that Muslims are not just in Britain but of Britain and have established their lives here.

Issues which were previously seen as being the concern of the ‘host’ community such as crime, drugs, divorce and abuse within the family are now openly discussed within the pages of Muslim media. Perhaps because of the discussion of these issues, seen as taboo for more conservative elements of society, the readership and involvement in the media seems oriented particularly towards women. As more and more women get involved in the media issues of concern to them will gain a higher profile. This reflects the developments within the community with the inception of organisations such as The Muslim Women’s Help Line (MWHL) and other societies set up to deal with domestic violence, abuse, divorce, marriage counselling and welfare issues. Although not their main objective, publications are approached for advice relating to marriage issues or cases of discrimination.

"It’s actually asking questions on Islamic issues as well as questions... on problems that they are facing, so its like an agony aunt... Sometimes quite saddening situations which I have to respond to" (The Invitation).

"I am really surprised whenever there’s a problem now we have phone calls from young girls, as I said before, from schools, saying we are having problems with hijab, so even now they have confidence with the paper so that’s why there’s a much better response and when we campaign about any issue we get support from the community who then take it up and especially Muslim leaders, they do take up issues because they read Muslim News to get information. " (The Muslim News).

Newspapers and magazines also contain matrimonial columns. “We get a lot of people ringing wanting to know advice on divorce or getting married. Our matrimonial column, since we started, we have done 192 marriages” (Q-News). The anonymity of seeking help and advice from Muslim media is probably an attraction for many people. Legal rulings are also presented either in special features on fiqh (Islamic law or jurisprudence) or in the shape of letters to the editor. Thus, the ‘space’ needed to debate these issues has been provided by Muslim media. Ease of access to media and its

31 Or in another issue, “British Muslims: 2 million souls, 1,200 mosques, 72 jamaats, 69 schools, 7 Mayors, 4 Parliamentarians - One Halal Magazine. Q-News. The Muslim Magazine”. Issue 334, August 2001/Jumada al-Ula 1422. See Appendix K for image of woman used with all captions.
relatively informal writing style as compared to journals and authoritative learning material means that Muslim publications are a more accessible source of basic Islamic knowledge and are used as guides.

"Since a lot of young Muslims don’t have access to Islamic teachings through teachers and books the media does actually exert a lot of influence because what is printed in black and white tends to have authority... so I think it has a tremendous impact" (Invitation).

This resonates with the points Mandaville (2001) and Bunt (2000) make about lack of access to teachers and traditional methods but greater access to media and information technologies, such as the internet, from which to learn about Islam. For those with limited access to teachers and those who prefer to learn by using media, the Muslim media becomes very important as a source of knowledge.

Establishing an infrastructure of Muslim institutions such as the media, social and cultural activities is helping to create an alternative social life for Muslims. At the same time there is an appreciation of these organisations and structures retaining an element of Britishness. The ArRum Private Members Club recently opened in London offering an environment for young Muslims to socialise and learn about Islam whilst providing an opportunity for networking on a professional level. Art and film exhibitions, promotion of Islamic calligraphy and music are all evidence of the development of a 'halal' alternative to mainstream cultural activities (discussed further in Chapter 5).

Summary

Community media has grown out of a set of circumstances that have determined its progression where the overall focus has been on concerns and issues affecting British Muslims. The need for Muslims to express themselves and be represented was partly fulfilled by the Muslim media. Thus, media needs to be included in the broad socio-cultural and political infrastructure of representation. Political representation begun in local government in the 1980s and representatives in the House of Lords were nominated in 1998 as Working Peers. An active interest in elections and strategic voting (as opposed to the traditional Labour vote) was another factor demonstrating the
involvement of British Muslims in British institutions. Having a platform on which to voice their opinions within the Muslim community is a positive step towards having greater representation in wider society. The Muslim media serves a number of functions. It acts as a source of information on issues of relevance to British Muslim communities. In this way the British Muslims acquire knowledge which helps them to understand the situations affecting them and how to make informed decisions on relevant issues, such as, political representation, religious discrimination and education. Within the Muslim communities the Muslim media's functions include the creation and development of a knowledgeable society. As one editor commented Muslim media should be working towards creating "a better informed society, better informed Muslims" (Impact). Investing in Muslim media as well as keeping involved with mainstream media is important if Muslims are to develop and contribute in society.

Apart from reporting on events around the country and globally, Muslim media works to influence and shape the way Muslim communities themselves develop. Not only does the content of Muslim media set a particular agenda but the way in which this is written also has an influence on how the readers frame issues. For those readers who are actively looking to Muslim media as their main source of information and as a way through which to measure their own opinions, its presence is vital. Using the media as a stimulus for discussions with other Muslims is one way of developing concepts and issues in the community. As the concept of British Muslim identity is often discussed, readers are automatically focused on this issue. By writing about experiences and possibilities of being a British Muslim, readers can relate to others in their community. Cases of discrimination, issues of education, employment and similar concerns are shared and the media highlights these experiences to reflect the reality of living in Britain as Muslims. The shared experiences portrayed in the media then lead to a perception of shared identity because Muslims in various parts of Britain are tackling similar issues and facing the same challenges. So whilst raising awareness amongst its readers, the Muslim media is also contributing to a sense of belonging to a particular community and therefore it has helped enhance a British Muslim identity. Radio Ramadan is a good example of this solidarity experienced and expressed through media. It is undoubtedly a manifestation of the spiritual solidarity felt by Muslims during the

32 For an analysis of the increasing involvement and competence of Muslims in mainstream politics see Siddiqui, 2000.
month of fasting and is an additional way in which the community feels part of a broader collective.

For young Muslims connections with 'home', that is, their parents' country of origin, remain. However, a stronger affiliation with and assumption that Britain is their home means attachments and priorities are different to those of their parents. Muslims want to express their identification with Islam both to other Muslims and wider society and the media provides a vital outlet for this. Amongst Muslims themselves there has been encouragement to promote the concept of unity through identification with all other Muslims rather than ethnic or national groups. Schooling in English, familiarity with British institutions such as libraries, newspapers and other media, computer literacy and most importantly confidence that they are as British as their white peers, enabled Muslims to access resources and create Muslim media for alternative sources of information. That is not to say all Muslim media were set up by second generation Muslims. In fact many first generation Muslims who had experienced British culture recognised the importance of popular culture in influencing their children and subsequent generations. It was relatively easier to preserve language, dress, food and other cultural habits at home but parents recognised the huge impact that the outside environment would have on their children, not least mainstream media. To ensure preservation and enhancement of their culture and identity and to counterbalance the impact of mainstream media and culture, resources were invested into creating Muslim media.

British Muslims have recognised the importance of mediated communities in today's global setting. Media and technology have brought together seemingly dispersed communities (Mandaville, 2000) and this unification has found expression in local media. Not only has access to information increased the opportunities for learning about Islam but it has also developed a sense of belonging and identification with a local, national and global umma. It may appear that virtual Islamic/Muslim spaces are challenging traditional methods of acquiring knowledge, but the former may in fact enhance the latter. An obvious example of this is magazines that are encouraging their readers to learn about their religion in the traditional manner and simply use
publications to supplement their intake of Islamic knowledge\textsuperscript{33}. Another example is the use of technology to compile, store and retrieve data such as complete hadith literature (Mandaville, 2000).

The emergence of a distinct Muslim media has provided a focal point through which Muslims, and particularly young Muslims, can find expression of their concerns and aspirations. Enthusiasm for Muslim media demonstrates the need for a public discourse on Islam and Muslims and Muslim media have articulated a British Muslim-ness which their readers find increasingly relevant to their lives. The next chapter explores how media is being consumed by young British Muslims and what influences it has on their lives.

\textsuperscript{33} For an example of how a Muslim publication promoted the traditional methods of learning see Baksh, 2001.
CHAPTER 5
MEDIA CONSUMPTION AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

This chapter analyses the data collected from the Muslim press survey and Activities Diaries, including a summary of social activities. It also presents two case studies of Muslim organisations. The main objective of the media survey was to identify who read Muslim publications, their reasons for doing so and their opinions on the four selected publications through which the survey was conducted, as well as Muslim media in general. This was not however intended to be representative of the whole readership as the survey was only conducted on a small scale. It would also enable a comparison between the views of readers and the aims and objectives of editors and in this way allow an examination of the production and consumption of selected Muslim publications. The media survey would also supplement the data from the focus group interviews. The figure given in brackets after quotes corresponds to which publication the answer was taken from (Q - Q-News, T - Trends, M - Muslim News and C - Crescent) and the date it was received. All were received in 2001 and the number refers to the day and month. Brief data was also made available through Activities Diaries that were distributed to those interviewed in focus groups. This data and an examination of ‘Social Activities’ are presented in the second section of this chapter. The Social Activities data is gathered from publicity of events and other information gathered during the summer period of the year 2000. It also includes a brief review of two Muslim organisations, City Circle and ArRum. This is to elaborate on the types of social and cultural spaces being created by Muslims.

MUSLIM PRESS SURVEY

Below is a table showing the number of questionnaires distributed for the survey to selected publications, the edition in which they were distributed and the response rate. The survey questionnaire is in Appendix F. One important factor that was overlooked during the design of the survey was a question on ethnicity of the respondent. This would have been very useful to delineate the groups within the Muslim population who were using Muslim media (although not representative of all readers).
Table 3. Muslim Press Survey - Distribution and Response Rate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Edition</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Response (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crescent</td>
<td>Jan 2001</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q-News</td>
<td>Dec 2000*</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim News</td>
<td>Feb 2001</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trends</td>
<td>Dec 2000*</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Ramadan issues

The average age (by gender) of respondents is given in the table below. Respondents from *Trends* had the lowest average age (26) which was to be expected considering it is a publication of the Young Muslims aimed at students and young readers. Similarly *Crescent International*, with a more serious and political outlook, had the highest average age of 48. The youngest respondent was 15 and the oldest was 79. These figures, as well as other information derived from survey responses, are reflective only of those returning the survey and should not be used to generalise about the whole readership.

Table 4. Sex and Average Age of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Average Age</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crescent</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q-News</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim News</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trends</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* One left blank.

The duration for subscriptions to the publications varied from a few months to over ten years. As most editors commented the subscription renewal rate for their publications was high it could be expected that readers keep subscribing to a publication for several years. A high proportion of respondents said they came to know of the publication through a friend or family but people had also received or picked up free copies after which they had begun to subscribe. Although two respondents noted that they came to subscribe through the *Muslim Directory*, advertising as such does not appear to be the main method of attracting readers. Apart from this people had picked up copies at conferences or similar events and at mosques, *The Muslim News* in particular was picked up by readers from mosques where it is distributed free. It would seem that the channels of distribution for Muslim media are not as developed as for mainstream media. Muslim publications on the whole are not available through newsagents (except
Q-News and then only in specialist/selected newsagents) and therefore do not have the same publicity as mainstream print media.

From the Muslim media survey it is apparent that Muslims read the respective publications for two main reasons; to obtain news and information about Muslim communities both in the UK and abroad and to have access to religious knowledge. Other reasons are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5. Reasons for Reading Publications**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muslim current affairs (national and international)</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious knowledge</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting news/articles</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting Muslim media</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News from alternative perspective</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of community/unity</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disillusionment with mainstream media</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviews</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic study</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents often gave more than one reason.

Reasons also depended somewhat on the individual publication, that is, the type of approach adopted by it and the information given in it. Crescent International and Impact International readers were concerned with obtaining information on the political situation in Muslim countries and their 'serious' nature of news reporting was recognised. For readers of The Muslim News this was also true although its focus on domestic news meant that political issues were amongst others covered. Q-News did cover important political issues but the focus is more on the social and cultural aspects of being a Muslim in Britain, a more 'society' publication.

Trends is similar though it has its focus on young Muslims, especially students. Other publications (Muslim and mainstream) were mentioned by respondents which confirms the editors views that Muslim media makes up one part of the overall diet of media used by Muslims (see Appendix A for list). As mainstream media does not cover Islamic/Muslim issues to any great extent and conversely Muslim media is not as broad

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34 The majority of respondents were Muslim. Five respondents (all *Muslim News* readers) stated that they were Christian. One Q-News reader wrote 'confused'.
in its coverage, the two complement each other. The editors echoed this when they felt that the Muslim community sought news from alternative, that is, Muslim, sources. In addition readers sought news that was of more relevance to Muslim or Islamic issues. They also felt that supporting Muslim media was an important factor to ensure its progress and expansion. Obtaining religious knowledge was one major reason for reading Muslim publications, including information on Islamic economic, educational and social issues. Although they did not specify how, several respondents said they would eventually like to contribute to Muslim media publications. This is probably through writing articles or providing other skills and support for the running of publications.

Mainstream and Muslim Media

The main differences between mainstream and Muslim media were seen in terms of coverage of Muslim issues, both quantity and quality. Not all respondents expressed the same opinions about the issue of anti-Muslim coverage in the media. Whilst many stated that Islamophobia existed in media, some attributed this to a generally anti-religion standpoint. Others felt that some articles had been sympathetic and tolerant (without giving examples). Some of the publications were acknowledged as being specialist, such as the Financial Times and New Scientist.

"The Independent is good for unbiased reporting regarding Iraq/Palestine especially Robert Fisk's articles and it employs Yasmin Alibhai-Brown who sometimes gives the Muslim perspective. Generally mainstream media ignores Muslim issues and sticks to conveying standard images/ideas about us, that is, stereotypes" (Q 18/5).

"The Guardian is probably the best of the dailies at the moment in terms of coverage versus the Muslim media" (C 11/1).

"[The media] does not address issues relevant to Muslims at all, and on the contrary are always on the look out for news and articles that can damage the image of Muslims" (T 143).

However, the overall feeling gained from the survey responses indicates that people see mainstream media as biased against Muslim or Islamic issues.
“All of them are biased about Islam especially the Muslim movement. They always try to exploit the news against Muslims” (C 4/1).

“The viewpoints of English media represent Western viewpoint, twisting the news against Islam depicting Muslims (law abiding, docile and God fearing) as terrorists, etc, etc” (C 2/2).

“They manage to distort the facts and consistently misrepresent Muslims, further reinforcing dangerous stereotypes already out there” (C 8/3).

“Increasingly mainstream media portrays Islam in an extremely negative light. Words used to replace ‘Muslim or ‘Islam’ include terrorist, fundamentalist, extremist, murderer” (T 6/2).

A perceived difference between the influence of mainstream and Muslim media was also clear. Although both were seen as sources of information on the same issues, their credibility was not equal.

“Muslim media definitely has a lot of influence as I tend to believe their reporting more than that of non-Muslim sources. Non-Muslim media also has a small degree of influence but is generally counter balanced by Muslim media” (M 28/2).

A distinction was made between media being a source of information, consisting of ‘facts and figures’, and something that influences. “Mainstream media has no effect on me. Muslim media makes me feel humble and closer to my Creator” (M 23/3). Other differences between mainstream and Muslim media were also noted:

“The quality. I do not expect The Muslim News to be as The Times. It is a younger publication, costs much less and does not have the revenue as The Times” (M 1/3).

“Depending on which Muslim literature you read both are quite biased and only rarely do you find honest, non-partial reporting” (T 1/2).

“Muslim media is far more spiritually based but lacks greater detail of news (globally) whereas mainstream media, though they have a vast amount of information cannot be regarded as fully accurate (more exaggerated perhaps)” (T 23/1).
Encouraging the media to grow and supporting it also meant that readers were ultimately supporting a medium through which their own concerns could be voiced. Five respondents were non-Muslims and from academic or government institutions (for example The British Council). This is an indication, confirming what editors said, that professionals are using Muslim media. As interviews with prominent politicians, including the Prime Minister, have been given to Muslim publications this automatically opens up the potential for mainstream media and other institutions to take interest.

In the survey respondents were asked to say how they felt Muslim media helped the participation of Muslims in society and how it impacted on non-Muslims.

“It helps Muslims to find a mature consensus as British Muslims so they can debate within British society rather than criticise as outsiders - definitely better for Muslims and non-Muslims” (Q 13/12). (original emphasis)

“A better voice in society and political representation - decrease Islamophobia” (Q 7/12).

Generally the media was seen as contributing positively to the situation of British Muslims by giving them a voice and increasing the amount of knowledge the community has about itself. There was an anticipation from the respondents that the impact of Muslim media will filter through to all levels of society. Participation in Muslim media will also produce trained journalists and writers who will potentially bridge the gap between alternative and mainstream media. For the Muslim community knowledge about Islam will increase and strengthen the conviction of those practising Islam as well as re-educating others about their faith.

“Muslim journals/journalists should be supported and encouraged... There should be a campaign by all sections of Muslim media, i.e. all publications, to encourage the Muslim masses to read and thus contribute to Muslim issues - otherwise its all rather pointless” (T 17/3).

Muslim media reflects on the changing culture and demographics of Muslims in Britain. The views it represents and the way it does so differ from the first generation of British Muslims, with the most obvious shift being from ‘mother tongue’ newspapers to a
growth in English as the medium of most publications. In addition to this the content and style itself has changed. Whereas many of the earlier publications read by first generation migrants tended to have a focus on the politics of the Indian sub-continent, the focus has become much more British centred. Issues affecting the daily lives of Muslims, such as schools, employment and welfare, appropriate Islamic jurisprudence in a non-Islamic land and rising social problems amongst British Muslims, are just some of the topics reported in publications. There are various reasons for this; language, length of time settled in the UK, changing dynamics of the communities, new issues arising and different expectations. Equally a more global perspective is becoming apparent in media coverage with events affecting Muslims across the globe being communicated. Identifying with Islamic or Muslim causes in other parts of the world has been facilitated by the media and at the same time is prompting the media to widen its scope. The global outlook within the media landscape is thus apparent.

The 'spaces' within which the community operates have also changed. Whereas before Muslims were focused around the mosque, now the arenas in which they are working and socialising have extended and become more diverse (discussed later in this chapter). This movement out of the mosque has given rise to Muslim media and as one respondent remarked "its taken Islamic issues out of the mosque and given a different generation a voice" (Q 1/12). There was a certain inevitability of this happening simply as a matter of time and gradual familiarisation with how mainstream institutions work. It does not mean however, that the mosque has no role to play. What it does mean is that the dynamics of the Muslim community are working in such a way that the mosque is just one area of activity. At the same time, the function of mosques is also expanding, as was the tradition in Islamic societies, to encompass more than just daily prayers and religious teaching. As communities settle, the purpose of mosques has extended such that they are now often called 'cultural centres'. For example, the Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre in London has a library, computer training suites and conference halls as well as prayer rooms and facilities for learning and teaching. It also aims to attract non-Muslims who want to gain a better understanding of Islam.

"These types of publications give Muslims the opportunity to develop their knowledge of Islam so they can convey the truer picture of our faith" (T 2/3).
“We will have free thinking independent Muslims growing up in this society. It is really important that these publications flourish” (T 15/3).

There is a realisation amongst Muslims that we have not developed fully as a literate community - literacy not in its basic sense but referring to the ability of people to communicate effectively through reading, writing and verbal expression. The limited number of British Muslim fiction writers is an indication of this. Although the current generation has been educated in the same school system as the indigenous population, involvement in the non-traditional sectors of society, including the civil service and the media, is proportionately low. Therefore supporting Muslim journalists and journalism was one of the reasons given for subscribing to publications. The importance of media is being recognised and therefore people are encouraging its development and also encouraging young Muslims to pursue media as a career.

“It [media] should strategically think about how this generation can have an impact on British society. Engage us and let us know how we can have an impact. Help educate the Muslim community about issues we need understanding about” (M 27/3).

It was generally felt that non-Muslims did not read Muslim media. It is probably a fair assessment that of those that do subscribe, they are not from the general public but specialists of some sort, for example, academics or policy makers. Respondents seemed to think that the best-case scenario would be that non-Muslims would learn something about Islam and Muslims not as a direct result of Muslim media but indirectly by its influence on the practice and behaviour of Muslims. Therefore it would be through an increasing awareness and assertiveness amongst Muslims of their religion that non-Muslims would feel the impact of Muslim media. “People in power from the non-Muslim community will have to read it to know what we are thinking and want. The rest of the non-Muslims, very little impact” (C 4/1). It was thought however that for those who may read it, it would dispel stereotypes and perhaps by doing so show the inaccurate reporting of mainstream media.

“The British community is I think learning more about the ESSENCE of Islam (hence the rise of British reverts) and Muslim media could only further benefit this growth” (T 23/1). (original emphasis)
Other comments were made on the need for the publications to be aware and promote the fact that Muslim does not equal South Asian. The cultural diversity of Muslims needs to be taken into account, including Muslims from the Far East, Middle East, Africa and converts who are all altering the landscape of British Islam. Editors had themselves expressed a desire to be ‘Muslim’ as opposed to Asian but also stated that the high proportion of South Asians in Britain and those involved in media meant that there was a bias towards the latter. The balance needed between alternative and mainstream media was noted by a survey respondent:

“Muslims really need to have an independent voice where media is concerned. Also they are needed desperately in the mainstream as well, as they are British and the politics of the country affects everyone” (T 20/1).

Belonging and Identity

Accessing Muslim media facilitates the desire to keep informed about fellow Muslims and therefore feel part of a larger group. Keeping in touch with what is happening in the rest of the Muslim world leads to a greater sense of belonging to the global *umma*. The importance of this belonging and identification with the global community was noticed by Jacobson (1998) and Vertovec (1998) in their studies of young Muslims (cited in chapter One). Anderson’s (1983) concept of an ‘imagined community’ is evoked in people’s reasons for using the media. Increased awareness means identification with other Muslims is stronger and this is facilitated by the media. “It increases my self esteem to know that millions of people feel the same way as I do” (T 6/2). People are also aware of the Islamic teaching on needing to know how the rest of the community of believers are living their lives. One respondent noted that the media provides a focus which gives a sense of belonging to a British Muslim community, perhaps as there seems to be no other focus such as a representative group or person (Q - 16/12). Writers and editors of Muslim media are often British Muslims born and educated in the UK so readers find the perspective of articles and their contents geared towards a British Islam. Alternative discussions of issues such as arranged and forced marriages take place in this media sympathetic to Muslim sensitivities. Another respondent noted that the media is pivotal and of utmost importance in making her feel part of the British Muslim community (Q- 23/12). A sense of community and belonging existed prior to the advent of media, however the media has increased this sense although it has by no
means permeated all spheres of the Muslim population. Moreover some respondents stated that the sense of belonging existed without media or that it had not influenced how they felt as Muslims. Additionally some people felt there wasn’t a sense of community amongst British Muslims.

Of the respondents that stated reading Muslim media gave them a sense of community or unity one said it “creates a sense of unity” (M 14a/3) whilst another commented:

“I get a feeling of belonging to the Muslim umma as I go through Muslim media - something that was not there before I started reading Muslim publications” (M 14/3).

In order to say how Muslim media is being used to articulate a Muslim identity or at least aspects of a Muslim identity, the survey asked specific questions on the sense of belonging gained through media and how this helps readers to think about their own identity.

“Definitely helped in increasing knowledge and Muslim self esteem” (Q 12/12).

“Muslim media is pivotal and of the utmost importance in making me feel part of the British Muslim community. I find that Q-News is well aware of the situation we as Muslims in Europe are in. We need information about Islam but this needs to be specific and take into account the environment we are in... we need to be creative and use our intellect but always remain faithful to Islam” (Q 23/12).

In some responses there was a clear distinction between feeling part of a British community and a global umma. The question had been worded such that respondents could either say whether they felt part of both a British and global community or whether they felt part of one and not the other. The sense from some responses seemed to be that there was more of a feeling of a global umma rather than local or national community. A global-local dynamic appeared to be as work whereby those geographically close did not actually seem close compared to those who were geographically distant yet more accessible via media. It is perhaps also a reflection on the prominence and reporting of international issues which results in this feeling.
"Muslim media has immensely developed my sense of belonging to an 'umma' as articles on Islam are unifying as they entail Islamic beliefs. I don't think the sense of belonging to a British Muslim community is all that evident, as Muslim media is too intent on showing the pitfalls of young Muslims living in Britain" (T 23/1).

Some people actually answered how they thought the media gave them a sense of belonging. This was mainly through knowing about other Muslims around the world and keeping updated with current affairs.

"There are a number of Muslim newspapers I've seen and I feel they strengthen the Muslim community here and inform people about what's happening and what they should do" (T 26/1).

"Muslim media has been hugely important to me as I live in a Christian family in rural Wales. I have no communication with other Muslims as there are no mosques further west than Swansea and therefore I depend on the Muslim media to answer my questions and give me a sense of belonging" (T 1/2).

This was echoed by another respondent in saying how Muslim media had developed their sense of belonging, "Very much so. It is important to those who are geographically isolated as well as those in towns to be able to feel in contact with other Muslims" (M 25/4).

"The Muslim media has contributed greatly to my sense of belonging to a British Muslim community because it has made me aware of worldly issues that concern me as a Muslim. The Muslim media has greatly contributed with equipping me with the necessary knowledge of Islam to inform my non-Muslim friends what Islam is really all about and I can now also answer their questions about Islamic issues which I would otherwise have difficulty with" (T 2/3).

But some respondents suggested that the Muslim media did not really have much of a positive impact on the unity or belonging of Muslims, locally or globally.

"Not much - media is too disparate, each publication is separate just like the Muslim umma" (T 17/3).

"It hasn't especially. Its just good to know about what others are up to" (T 20/1).
“Very much so. Ten-fifteen years ago we were not organised or coherent but are becoming so and Muslim media assists these developments and sense of belonging” (M 28/2).

“I am now aware of my identity as a British Muslim. Thanks to the ‘Muslim News’. It has generated my interest in Islamic and Muslim issues in the world and specifically in the UK and the West” (M 5/3).

The concept of identity linked very strongly to knowing about other Muslims and their condition. Being informed about Muslims around the world seemed to have a direct link to how people identified themselves as Muslims.

“I certainly feel part of an active community. I feel less isolated, better informed about Islamic issues” (T 6/2).

“Reinforces my faith and strengthens my identity and provides me with the fact that we should stay strong in our faith” (T 6a/2).

“Yes it does give me a position of belonging and not feeling strange, old fashioned and unfamiliar, it increases my self esteem to know millions of people feel the same way as I do insha’Allah” (T 6b/2).

“It has helped me to understand a Muslim perspective on issues and made me more confident to be a Muslim and has reinforced my identity as a result” (M 28/2).

For many then identity has been influenced directly by the existence of Muslim media. That is, the media has facilitated being a Muslim in Britain. This seems to have been done mainly through providing knowledge and information about Muslims and obtaining religious advice and instructions.

From the responses it would seem that the Muslim media is indeed playing a role in establishing and developing a sense of being a British Muslim. This sense encompasses beliefs and practices and various elements of socio-cultural, political and economic issues affecting Muslims as citizens of the UK. To reinforce what the editors have said, the media and its readers are influencing one another in setting the agenda for Muslim communities. News from the communities reaches and is published through media and then this in turn determines how issues are approached and problems resolved.
The information obtained from media was often used to answer non-Muslims’ questions and develop a dialogue. Others saw the media just as a source of information that did not impact on their sense of Muslim-ness. Again not all respondents felt the Muslim media itself or alone was responsible for giving them a sense of ‘identity’. Some felt that it was only partially responsible or that it had little influence, “I always knew my Muslim identity, Muslim media merely informs me of what is happening elsewhere. It will be a sorry state if it is media that helps one to identify with one’s identity” (C 24/1).

**Media Influence**

There appeared to be a two-tier system operating when it came to evaluating media influence. On the one hand people felt that the media had a powerful impact but at the same time they stated that they did not allow themselves to be influenced because of their critical reading of media, especially non-Muslim media. As people are aware of its potential to influence, not least because of its prevalence in society, they often make a conscious effort to limit contact with media or avoid it altogether if possible. Fashion, advertising and anti-Muslim reporting were particular reasons for avoiding the media. The second set of responses stated that the media did influence them considerably because it informed them of what was happening in the world. Included in this was the desire for media to influence them positively in terms of learning more about Islam.

Some respondents felt that there was a powerful influence of media, both mainstream and Muslim. “I feel it can be a strong influence which is why I believe that the media in general, be it Muslim or non-Muslim, should be careful to give accounts and most of all honest information to the audience” (T 16/1).

“To be honest, not that much [influence]. I feel family and friends and community have a bigger influence. I tend not to believe everything I read or see in Western media as I know it can be manipulated” (T 26/1).

“Undoubtedly. Media plays a big role in influencing our decisions and opinions whether we like it or not. Its constantly barraging images, ideas and viewpoints at us which eventually do affect our decisions” (T 24/4).

“Muslim media definitely has a lot of influence as I tend to believe their reporting more than that of non-Muslim sources. Non-Muslim media also has a
small degree of influence but is generally counter-balanced by Muslim media” (M28/2).

Readers are aware that Muslim media have limited resources available to them compared with mainstream organisations. As a result of the focus of Muslim media readers will use other newspapers and publications for expertise such as business and financial news. Respondents stating they read mainstream media mainly read broadsheets. *The Daily Mail* was also cited but was used to obtain ‘the word on the street’. Local newspapers were mentioned but by only a small number of readers. They commented on the secular perspective adopted by the papers that often meant anti-Islamic reporting and that generally giving space to any Muslim perspective was something they did not expect from the mainstream media. Interestingly four respondents (male) stated that they used to read mainstream media but had since stopped because of the negative reporting on Muslim issues (3 used to read *The Guardian* and 1 *The Times*).

“Did read regular *Guardian* but couldn’t stomach it after Gulf war and the propaganda views. Now read it only sometimes, their views are materialist and secular and nationalistic” (C 4/1).

“I do not read mainstream media but I used to. I ceased due to the abundant immoral content and also their anti-Islamic stance that would upset me. The benefits did not outweigh its negative effect on my eeman [belief/faith]” (T 26/2).

Some young Muslims who have made the effort to steer clear of all mainstream media, to the extent this is possible, feel even Muslim media is not of great benefit to them. Seeking knowledge about religious beliefs and teachings has priority over their time so that they are using traditional methods of learning and media has become less of a concern. One respondent commented that because knowledge wasn’t available in the community, subscribing to journals and magazines was the alternative (T 21/1). Without suggesting that media are replacing traditional ways of learning and teaching, the absence of teachers of Islam means that Muslim media are filling the gap to some extent. As this Islamic knowledge grows this is reflected in people’s behaviour and manifests itself in their identity. “It has helped me to understand a Muslim perspective on issues and made me more confident to be a Muslim and has reinforced my identity as
a result" (M 28/2). This links with what one editor felt; that people did change their behaviour because of what was written in articles and that this was a gradual process of adopting certain habits to become a more ‘practising’ Muslim (The Invitation). One survey respondent said that they had become a Muslim through Muslim media and another that they had began to practice Islam because of it. “It has helped me a lot. After reading a few magazines I got more into Islam and then started practising” (Q - 26/1). The sense of a stronger Muslim identity came from the sense of belonging. A pride in being Muslim, through learning about achievements and situations of other Muslims was evident from the responses. “It has certainly brought about in me awareness of my Muslim identity” (M 14/3).

Although survey respondents or focus group interviewees weren’t asked about this directly, following Gillespie’s (1995) work on the television viewing of South Asian youth and the construction of their identity, it is a reasonable claim to make that readers of Muslim media are using it as a stimulus for debate. This is also in line with Anderson’s (1983) idea of the collective act of reading newspapers giving rise to a feeling of belonging with others, who are perceived to be partaking in the same actions, thus relating themselves to each other. A tangible outcome of this has been political activity, protests against human rights atrocities, local campaigns and organisations that have been publicised through Muslim media keeping the Muslim community informed of issues here and abroad. A good example of this is the Islamic Human Rights Commission’s electronic mailing list and website through which they publicise campaigns and encourage readers to take action. Many annual conferences/events are publicised through Muslim publications and are even sponsored by them, demonstrating their partnership in such events. The Muslim press is also a primary source of information on the launch of new organisations such as the Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism (FAIR). These factors clearly demonstrate how the Muslim media is pivotal to the activities of Muslim communities in Britain.
ACTIVITIES DIARIES

A combination of data obtained from Activities Diaries\(^{35}\) (AD) and an overview of the events being organised by and for Muslims (next section) provides an insight into the types of social and cultural actions undertaken by young Muslims. From the AD\(^{36}\) it becomes apparent that young Muslims are accessing types of media and information sources beyond what might be traditionally understood as media, that is newspapers, magazines, television. These consist of lectures, seminars, study circles, tapes, videos and internet pages. Books on Islamic teachings and religious knowledge also occupied an important place in the overall diet of media and information. Books were seen as a more serious aspect of reading whereas media was thought to be a stepping-stone to more structured learning. However, the easy access, style of writing and kinds of topics in the media were seen as more conducive to reading in limited time.

A variety of TV programmes were listed by the respondents, including soap operas, sports programmes, news, quiz shows, comedies and dramas. Judging by this it would be fair to say that the general TV viewing of young Muslims is similar to their age groups from any other religious background. Boys tended to emphasis sports more than girls, again perhaps a trend reflected in the population as a whole. Most of the shows were from early to late evening as a result of college/university or work patterns. In the ‘comments’ section respondents were asked to give reasons for watching/reading what they did and what their opinions were on this. Although reasons were cited frequently, only a few opinions were given. Not surprisingly reasons such as ‘wanting to catch up with what’s happening in the world’, ‘keeping up to date’ and similar responses were given for the news. Entertainment, light hearted fun and relaxation were reasons for watching soaps, dramas and other such programmes and listening to music. Looking at the jobs/careers section in general newspapers and the use of specialist magazines (for example the Pharmaceutical Journal or Times Higher Education Supplement) were also listed.

What is of more interest to this research is the other literature and activities used by young Muslims. Two of the dairies were probably unusual because one was filled by a

\(^{35}\) See Methodology (Chapter Three) for details.

\(^{36}\) See Appendix E for the Activities Diary schedule.
Politics student and the other by someone particularly involved in the Islamic Society at a university. For these reasons the former was very active in his use of newspapers and online news to keep up to date because of his studies. He was also active in terms of organisation membership, including the Muslim Council of Britain, the Labour Party and community organisations, therefore his responses were probably not representative even within the sample group used. The second of these two respondents did not watch any TV or listen to the radio. He tended to concentrate on reading a variety of Islamic literature, including the Holy Qur’an, and used tapes and videos. Apart from this he read literature on health and travel. This response was from the same young man who said in the focus group interview that he used to listen to popular music but had replaced that with CDs of the Qur’an and Islamic information.

In answer to the question ‘how important is the media compared to other social and cultural factors in helping you think about yourself and others?’ he replied:

“I am very selective as to media input in my life, restricting myself to the odd Islamic magazine (e.g. Trends, Impact, Reality, etc). I have no contact with music and very little with TV, hence to me media has a very small influence on my perceptions of myself and others. I do accept on a social level, the media in all forms has a very big influence, but I feel I am not under its umbrella” (FG2).

Other than the four sisters (of which only three completed the AD) in Focus Group 1 who also tried to avoid media completely (with the exception of news, job searches and Islamic videos/tapes), the other young Muslims did tend to use media, to a greater or lesser degree. Some were selective and focused only on news and items which would enhance their general knowledge but for most others is was a combination of both mainstream sources and Islamic information. This reflects what one of the editors of a Muslim publication said - that in fact young (teenage) Muslims have similar interests to non-Muslims in many cases, such as sports, popular culture, but from a Muslim perspective or with some Islamic input (Q-News). Common interests are probably developed and maintained during the school and college phase but as they mature, some Muslims perhaps begin to incline towards a more Islamic outlook. This was reflected in the diaries of the college students being geared towards sports and general entertainment, with a small input of Islamic activities or literature, whereas the
university students and those in employment had a greater amount of books, articles, other media and activities focused on developing their Islamic knowledge. It perhaps also reflects how moving away from home and community may strengthen the connection with Islam. The home provides a relatively secure environment, with family practices, social and cultural activities having an Islamic element, but moving out of this environment one may feel less secure. As a result of this the focal point in young people’s lives may become Islam. For this group of Muslims, their identification with Islam becomes stronger and other associations perhaps become less important. Of course religion is only one direction which young people can take, the opposite could be totally rejecting Islam and moving away from its teachings and practices. Alternatively some people may choose to adopt a combination of both Islamic and secular practices.

In completing the section on social and cultural events and educational activities, a variety of different responses were given. A summary of the activities mentioned is given in Table 6 below, differentiating between what females and males said. Many respondents cited more than one activity, hence the number of occurrences is greater than the number of respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Females (12)</th>
<th>Males (6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study Circles</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lectures</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Learning*</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family/Friends</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weddings, parties, events</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinema</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camps</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Islamic learning</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferences</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosque</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhikr</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoga/Meditation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This includes Arabic and Tajweed classes.

Although both men and women attended study circles, the women mentioned this a greater number of times (83% as compared to 67% of boys). The same is true for visiting/meeting family or friends. Again the sports were only mentioned by boys and
this could be a reflection of the lack of sports facilities available for women only to
which Muslim women would probably go. Only two occurrences of mosque based
activities were given by males. Compared to their father’s generation this seems fairly
low and may signal a relocation of activities in and around the mosque to study circles
held in houses, or organised seminars and lectures and similar events. However, it may
also reflect the relatively fewer community (mainly mosque) based activities of
university students who are away from their home city. Overall, the emphasis on
learning is clear from the types of activities respondents have mentioned.

A question was asked in order to determine the role media played in the lives of these
respondents. Other than having gathered information about what they watched, listened
to and read, I wanted to examine what in their perception was the role of media in
influencing their thoughts and views. Overall media was given less importance than
other social and cultural factors, though they did not specify what these were,
presumably they included such factors as contact with family and friends and
membership of groups/organisations. However, it appeared that media influence was
appreciated, but that respondents themselves felt unaffected by it. The potential it had to
influence was acknowledged but a distancing/avoidance or otherwise critical reading
meant that on a personal level they had limited the impact of media. Because the media
is perceived to be a distraction - fashion, adverts, entertainment, music, gossip etc -
wanting to distance themselves, at least from any influence if not the product itself, was
seen as desirable.

“Not very important at all. What is here in my life and those around me are
more important. But that does not mean that it [media] does not influence me
in any way. Advertising I think has the most influence on me” (FG4 - F).

This reaction is probably one that takes a realistic view of the relationship with media.
Though it takes a much lower priority than other factors, this doesn’t ignore the fact that
there is some influence exerted by media.

“Not much [influence] actually. The social and cultural factors I’ve grown up
in have always determined where my life is moving towards”. (FG5 - F)
What I inferred from my respondents, particularly when talking about the news, was that media was something of a necessary evil. It was important to keep up to date with local, national and international events but not get too absorbed in media. Light entertainment was also seen as temporary entertainment for relaxing and passing the time and some respondents seemed to defend their watching of such programmes by saying how it was only for passing time, not to be taken seriously or of any long lasting relevance.

A direct question on religiosity was also included. This perhaps seemed out of context but at the planning stage of the AD I thought it might have been useful to actually obtain data on how people perceived themselves in terms of religiosity. In fact this type of question would have been more effectively explored in focus group interviews. Nevertheless it revealed some ideas about how people articulated their responses to 'how religious would you say you are?' being able to define and describe this in any way they chose to.

“I’m not very religious. I don’t pray 5 times a day like I should. I don’t spend as much time as I would like to on my religion. I pray when I can but its not much anyway. I don’t do anything like drink, drugs, girls etc on religious grounds”. (FG 8 - M)

“My faith is very strong and my belief in the truth of Islam grows with my understanding and experience. I feel spiritually stronger after being alone [at university] and contemplating a lot on where I am going. My submission to Allah has grown from just a fear to an unlimited love and compassion”. (FG 5 - F)

“I don’t think you can judge yourself on how religious you are - I fast, do namaaz, read Qur’an - I might judge myself higher/lower than someone else - its tricky”. (FG 6 - F)

“I try to practice Islam as much as I can. I think about God a lot and try and obey all His commands in the Qur’an as much as I can. I try to advance my Islamic knowledge so that I know how to please God and everyone else’s rights that I should meet as a Muslim. I would say I am aware of the need to gain more knowledge and I practice physically all the obligatory deeds incumbent on me as much as possible (insha’Allah)”. (FG 7 - F)
Religiosity is a complex concept to measure. Even if a 'checklist' of characteristics is constructed against which people could be measured, it would probably only include external factors which can be tabulated - someone's religious conviction and level of faith is probably immeasurable. If each individual is defining his or her own understanding of their religiosity then any comparison becomes even more difficult. However what is of more interest are the thought processes or criteria people use to present some categorisation of themselves regarding their level of religious belief. These criteria are contested such that what is important to one person may be of less or no significance to another. A strict theological perspective will perhaps enable us to define different types of Muslims, but sociologically there is room for a diversity of opinions. A 'loose' criteria could include praying five times a day as a good indicator of someone's religiosity, but there may be Muslims who feel strongly about their Muslim identity who perhaps do not pray regularly (as noted in Knott and Khokher (1998) or in Vertovec's (1998) study of how non-practicing Muslims asserted a strong Muslim identity during the Rushdie crisis). They may associate themselves with or participate in other activities which they feel are sufficiently Islamic to render them Muslims. This could even be an interest in Muslim media such as reading a particular publication which they link with being Muslim.

SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL EVENTS

A review of social and educational events organised across Britain during summer 2000 reinforces how the consumption of 'media' by young Muslims incorporates more than simply print and electronic media (as noted by Dayan (1998) in chapter One and as illustrated by the AD data above). It also indicates clearly the importance placed on acquiring Islamic knowledge and creating a social environment that is conducive to this. As outlined in chapter Two, Muslim communities in Britain had initially established a basic infrastructure for themselves as a minority ethnic and religious group. Contemporary circumstances required developing this further to include social and cultural factors. The selection of events I have summarised (primarily derived from publicity material) are focused on education or acquisition of knowledge\(^\text{37}\). Most if not all consist of lectures and talks aimed at informing the audience of some aspect of

\(^{37}\) See Appendix I
Islam. On the basis of this material, as well as from personal observation, I would argue that the growth in this type of event has been phenomenal in recent years. It coincides with the second generation of Muslims in Britain reaching an age whereby they have felt the need for these outlets but also have the capacity to access resources to arrange such events. It also reflects the awareness amongst young Muslims of their religious identity (Jacobson, 1998, Dwyer, 1998, Vertovec, 1998). Many of the events are aimed at the young (possibly between 18 to 25), particularly university students. In fact university students probably make up the majority of the audience because many events are arranged by organisations such as the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS) and YM (Young Muslims) and are held during university breaks. One or two of the events were for the duration of 2-3 days, normally known as camps. These include sports and recreational activities often in a countryside setting. In this way not only is knowledge being imparted to the participants but alternative social arrangements are also offered (alternative to mainstream gyms, sports facilities, music, etc). This may be particularly important for Muslim women who may otherwise avoid male and female mixed recreational facilities.

Most of these events have a 'glocalised' element to them; they are at once global in their outlook whilst addressing issues specific to Muslims in the UK. The main factor providing a global outlook is the attendance of international speakers. Many are from North America, the Indian sub-continent, the Middle East, and to a lesser extent East, North and South Africa. Speakers from diaspora communities (the West) will be able to transfer ideas and apply solutions with greater relevance to British Muslims. Scholars from Arabic speaking countries are valued for their contribution of classical knowledge as well as their command of the language.

As I mentioned in chapter Two the demand for and the appeal of scholars from overseas reflects a global consciousness or awakening amongst Muslims of their faith. A number of organisations have a major annual event, into which presumably they focus much of their resources and in doing so are able to invite international speakers. The structure of the events does not allow teaching on a one-to-one basis neither does it involve long periods of contact with the teachers. The issues discussed are general, pertaining to basic knowledge of belief and practice and do not involve in-depth learning. It is not
possible to list all the topics and titles but just to give an idea, I will mention some common themes; living as Muslims in the contemporary Western climate, issues relating to *dawah*, unity amongst Muslims, concerns of Muslim students, and essentials of *fiqh* relating to *salat*, *sawm*, *zakat* and pilgrimage. There are selected courses which do however offer intensive teaching and are normally residential courses lasting about a month during the summer. For example the Dar al Mustafa Intensive (2000) offered Arabic, *tajwid*, *aqida*, *fiqh*, *hadith*, *seerah* and *ilm al-akhlaq* with teachers from Egypt, Syria, Tunisia, Mauritania and the UK. Publicity for similar ‘*deen* intensive’ courses to be held in the USA (Zaytuna Institute, California), Syria (Dar al Muhammadia, Damascus) and Spain (Dar al Mustafa, Granada) was also circulated in the UK.

Exhibitions of Islamic artwork, spiritual music and religious poems are also available at these gatherings. This indicates the increasing awareness and appreciation of Islamic arts, crafts, visual material and similar skills. Calligraphy, architecture and fine arts are once again being used to express an Islamic identity and present a side of the religion which is perhaps ignored in mainstream society. Overall the emergence of these kinds of gatherings signifies that Muslim communities, particularly the younger generations, are finding expression of their religion in an increasingly holistic way. This includes the structures put in place by their parents but has developed to incorporate what is now seen as essential to maintain Muslim communities in Britain. The methods of seeking knowledge have transformed from what was common in the Indian sub-continent, if for no other reason than that schools in Britain do not impart even the most basic teachings of Islam (though religious studies classes at school may scratch the surface).

An assertion of Muslim-ness combined with the confidence of being British and being able to navigate the social environment has enabled second and third generation Muslims to be more forthright in their active identification with Islam. The more private practice of religion adopted by their parents is being replaced with a self-confident and assertive declaration of what it means to live as a Muslim. A growing understanding that Islam does not confine itself to the private sphere has brought the presence of Muslims noticeably into the public domain. This ‘discovery’ of Muslims from within the ethnic minority Asian population owes at least something to incidents talked about previously (such as the Rushdie affair) and in addition social events are reinforcing a
distinct Muslim presence in the Britain. There has been negative publicity surrounding the activities of some Muslim groups, mainly those with an overtly political agenda, but on the whole events continue without any problems.

Academic conferences are another distinct feature evident amongst Muslims. The growth in organisations dealing with the academic or intellectual development in Islam has manifest itself through conferences and publications. An example of this is the Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS) which has a branch in the USA and Germany but was launched more recently in the UK (1999). Again there has been a recognition of the need for articulating the presence of Muslims in academia and a corresponding Muslim discourse in institutes of higher education, amongst professionals and researchers. The first two annual conferences organised by AMSS were held in 1999 and 2000. A further conference organised in September 2000 had the theme ‘Muslims in Europe in the New Millennium’. Though these discourses may not be classical Islamic sciences (such as *tajweed* or *fiqh*), they are aiming to enhance the body of knowledge that exists in Western discourse with Islamic knowledge of the social sciences. They have also highlighted what can sometimes be dilemmas for Muslim researchers working with emotive issues relating to Islam, conducting research in Muslim communities, being responsible about their work and to their respondents and balancing their Islamic obligations with the demands of academia.

This conscientious approach to studies and research perhaps again reflects the growing understanding of how adopting an Islamic or Muslim identity affects all aspects of one's life, including academic commitments. There is also a recognition that much of the research conducted about Muslim communities is by non-Muslims and that this needs to be rectified by encouraging more Muslim academics.

Dwyer’s (1998) findings that the social networks young Muslims are setting up for themselves may be influenced by wider society’s perceptions of them, particularly negative stereotypes, may be applied to activities I have outlined here. Judging by the

38 For example, The International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS) and Association of Muslim Researchers (AMR).

39 For a summary of the two annual conferences see AMSS Newsletter Issue 2 (2000) and Mian (2000) for the 1st and 2nd Conference respectively. For the ‘Muslims in Europe’ review see Newsletter Issue 3 (2000). Newsletters can be found at http://www.amssuk.com/
title of some of the talks/lectures, there seems to be a reactive element present, for example, women in Islam, Islam and science and Islam in the 21st century. This last theme was particularly prominent in 2000 because of the start of the millennium. Not only was it a useful to adopt the Y2K style of publicity as a marketing tool but it was especially important to present Islam as relevant and attractive in the 21st century. ‘Islam Transcending’ (abbreviated to IT2K), a camp organised by Young Muslims UK is a good example of this. The wording and marketing of these events has a deliberate appeal to the contemporary nature of Islam, its applicability in Britain and its benefit to young people. This issue will be further developed below when I briefly examine two Muslim organisations to illustrate the social channels being created by Muslims.

What can be understood from the range of activities I have presented here? Firstly it must be said that these are only a small selection of the overall social setting in which young Muslims participate. Not only are there many other similar activities taking place but there are also many social outlets that do not have Islam as the main focus. Though they are part of the South Asian culture, they would not be seen as religious in nature. Numerous examples of these exist, such as the ‘Bollywood’ genre of entertainment; films, music, shows, literature and even Bollywood tourism. Asian popular dance, clubs, festivals, celebrations and exhibitions also thrive in Britain. As the editor of Q-News quipped:

“there is enough Asian input around anyway because there are [sic] so much invested into Asian culture by the material, commercial world because they want Asian culture, Asian culture sells video films, and its powerful. Muslims always tell you ‘oh masha’Allah we’ve got over a thousand mosques in Britain’ - we’ve got over 10, 000 Asian video shops in Britain! And if you look, if you say ½ a million people every Friday go to pray in Britain, how many people... watch an Amitabh Bachan [famous Indian film star] film every week in Britain?”

Though he was answering my question about whether his readership expected the publication to be very clearly Muslim, his answer demonstrates the point I am trying to make that “Islamic” social activities are proportionately fewer than other South Asian socio-cultural pursuits. What needs to be noted is the growing demand and popularity of not Asian but Muslim avenues of entertainment and cultural space, in addition to the desire for educational content. As this editor continues to say, though Asian-ness is
important in identity make-up, a rebellion is taking place both against the Asian-ness of communities themselves but also of the appropriation of Asian-ness by mainstream popular culture. Being different, being young, British and Muslim is now more desirable. The adoption of a Muslim identity for the purpose of fashion is unlikely in the majority of instances, but peer pressure amongst certain groups would perhaps encourage people to support an Islamic persona rather than any other. Interestingly the editor finished answering this question by saying that the turn towards a Muslim instead of an Asian identity was good for business because there are only a few Muslim publications around therefore people are turning to them. What this demonstrates is how changes in identification - through thought and behaviour - manifests itself in (changes in) media consumption.

It can be said that all the Muslim media have been set up to serve a particular audience. The concerns expressed by media editors in their aims and objectives for setting up their respective publications must to some extent be shared by the organisers of these events. Recognising the need to provide not only outlets for learning but alternative meeting points for Muslims becoming more conscious of their faith, these events have become an established part of the 'socio-educational' environment for young Muslims. They have facilitated opportunities by which to further develop a sense of Muslim-ness - individual and collective. Because young Muslims are looking for new avenues of instruction/acquiring knowledge to supplement what they have been taught by parents, their attention is frequently focused outside the home and immediate community. The learning opportunities provided by these organised events involve collective participation which results in the expansion of the concept of community and unity. Personal contact may not take place but a sense of belonging to a wider group is instilled in participants. These sentiments have been articulated in the survey data above when talking about media and I suggest the sense of belonging derived from actual gatherings is probably even stronger. Whereas the first involves an imagined or mediated community, attending events confers a tangible idea of who it is that makes up the community. Due to this fact, these activities fulfil an important function in community building and cohesiveness. This community is different in nature to what is perhaps understood from the conventional use of the term. Its locality is immediately expanded as it does not depend on close proximity of its members, so they can be from
any part of the country, indeed world, yet share the desire to learn and participate in similar functions.

MUSLIM ORGANISATIONS

As part of their 'active identity', that is, things that they do, Muslims have been concerned with ensuring their social life is also incorporated into an Islamic framework. Having rejected some of the mainstream social activities they have developed new 'spaces' - physical, cultural and intellectual - for their social life. Two organisations give interesting examples of this new space occupied by Muslims. The first is an organisation called The City Circle. Its existence demonstrates a number of points. Firstly the fact that young profession Muslims are employed in the City, which in itself signifies a movement of Muslims into a traditionally white, male dominated sector and one in which there were very few first generation Muslims. A second, possibly more interesting matter though is the fact that the organisation was actually set up in the first place:

"A Registered Charity, the City Circle forms a network of Muslim professionals drawn mainly from the city of London. Its primary purpose is to harness the dynamic and unique energies of Muslim professionals by challenging them into targeted community based projects, such as Mentoring, Saturday Schools and others. The City Circle convenes weekly gatherings which act as forums for intellectual discourse, spiritual nourishment, community activity and social networking". (http://www.thecitycircle.com/main.html)

The organisers felt a need to maintain and develop a specifically Muslim identity of their participants which they understood to be particularly important because of the environment they were in. It served as a meeting point for people who were possibly faced with similar challenges, such as working in an interest based economy, multinational companies with different ethical stances towards the third world, taking time off for religious holidays and observing prayers in such high pressure surroundings. Some of the topics discussed during their regular meetings covered these points. These weekly meetings held by the organisation consist of an invited speaker talking about a chosen topic followed by a question and answer session and general announcements. Talking to one of the women attending I understood that a secondary
purpose of the meeting is that it serves as a social gathering at the end of the week. In this way young British Muslims are aiming to strengthen their Islamic identity by gaining knowledge of their religion as well as interacting with other Muslims. A summary of the lecture is then circulated via an electronic mailing list and is also posted on the website.

An overriding theme in many of the lectures and study circles, the City Circle as well as others, is how Muslims can live and work in a majority non-Muslim society whilst remaining true to their religious convictions. The attitude of the City Circle and of others has been to acknowledge their settling in Britain and use it as a way to enhance their understanding of Islam and spread this understanding to others, Muslim and non-Muslim. It is this acknowledgement which helps people see British Muslim identity as a positive factor. Organisers are also conscious of their potential to contribute to the Muslim community with the pool of skills that exist in their membership as summarised in one organisers words:

“For the organisers, the City Circle presents a pioneering opportunity to channel the dynamic talents and unique energies of young Muslim professionals into grassroots community activity. (e.g. education projects with youngsters in the inner city). By fulfilling their social and community responsibilities, these young men and women are applying the learning they take on board from the study circles and social forums. In this way the City Circle hopes that it can make a contribution to the betterment of civil society in the UK in the 21st century”.

The second of the two organisations is ArRum, based in London. It is a social club which opened in October 2001, after being four years in the making. At first glance ArRum appears to be as some have labelled it, 'a social club for the emerging moderate Muslim middle-class'. However, the founder stresses that it is open to everybody, including non-Muslims. Incorporating beautiful Islamic art and design into its surrounding, it is a space within which Muslims can interact with each other and develop their own social life. “Celebrating our cultural heritage, promoting a God-centred approach to life, asserting our Britishness and associating Islam with beauty” are amongst the aims of the founder for her club (Yaqub, 2001). Within the Club there

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40 All descriptive information clarified by Faiza Siddiqui, organiser in the City Circle and this additional paragraph supplied after a telephone conversation with her (February 2002).
are ‘circles’ for art, cultural knowledge, business and careers. Some of ArRum’s activities include involvement in an anti-war movement through fundraising, organising an awareness campaign and housing a photographic exhibition of Afghanistan. ArRum’s webpage carries comments from various members of the Muslim community expressing their aspirations for the Club, for example;

"The establishment of ArRum can be taken as a sign of the coming of age of the Muslim community .... Islam does not isolate different aspects of life but tries to bring them together, so the Club will emphasise the splendour of Islamic art and culture while proving a venue for productive networking between Muslims who are active in public life, in industry or business". (Hasan Gai Eaton, http://www.arrum.co.uk/about.htm)

Currently (March-August 2002) ArRum (in conjunction with IMAN, FAIR and Khayaal Theatre) is hosting a Festival entitled ‘Best of British Islam’. One method of publicity has been mail-shot flyers with a postcard format carrying a Union Jack on the front\(^{41}\) (compare to the Q-News Union Jack hijab in Appendix K). The Union Jack is illustrated with Islamic geometric and artistic patterns and quite deliberately superimposes a very obvious icon of Britishness (the flag) with Islamic symbolism. The festival, held at the ArRum premises, consists of over 100 events (lectures, workshops, films, theatre and musical performances) in visual, creative, performing and literary arts, faith and spirituality, Islamic thought, community affairs, business, gender dynamics, Islam and science, current affairs and Islam - past and future. The festival aims to “reach out, inform, provoke, entertain but above all celebrate the depth and diversity of Islam in Britain” (www.fairuk.org). What does this type of activity demonstrate about the outlook of Muslims in Britain? ArRum itself is an example of a new social, cultural and educational space for British Muslims and this Festival shares similar elements to some of the events cited above. However, its audience is perhaps more diverse than just university students or young Muslims. My reading of it is that the need to appeal to Muslims and well as non-Muslims through a more ‘human’ side of Islam has been one of the motivating forces behind the Festival. By advertising the rich cultural heritage and diversity of Islam and its emphasis on aspects of Islam which are seen as attractive amongst non-Muslims in the West, the organisers perhaps want to project an image of Islam that is more acceptable and challenges the stereotypically negative perceptions of

\(^{41}\) See Appendix L
Muslims and Islam. Aggression, harshness, backwardness, remoteness and conflict are replaced with sophistication, artistic elegance, intellectualism and progressiveness. The image and the title of the Festival can be seen as a positive and assertive manifestation of how Muslims see themselves in society. Rather than represent Islam as detached from British society, something sitting uncomfortably on the surface, they have presented it as in the grain of Britishness. Best of British Islam gives a sense of permanency, like that of any British heritage, creating an alternative discourse to Islam being a foreign entity in Britain. As well as appealing to non-Muslims (whom probably form the minority of attendees) I suggest the Festival is a way of rescuing the image of Islam amongst Muslims. Where young Muslims may be presented with a contradiction between being Muslim and being British, the Festival steers away from this dichotomy by showing that it is possible to be Muslim and British. It dispels fears that being Muslim means having no social life, no contact with arts or ‘culture’ and no capacity to develop intellectually, by offering entertainment and debate with an Islamic ethos. Arguably the Festival and indeed the Club itself will appeal to a certain niche in the Muslim communities. It could however provide a blueprint for creating similar activities and organisations. Other organisations do of course exist but ArRum has marketed itself in a different way, combining social and cultural elements with education, careers and business expertise. Though aware of the political climate, its focus is not on presenting political solutions or a political ideology. Perhaps the people involved in the Festival, both organisers and visitors, are saying we want to be recognised as British Muslims, without compromising either our Islamic values or our affiliation to Britain. In addition the message that it appears to be presenting is that Islam can exist in Britain without posing a threat or being a danger, either to itself or to Britain.

It should be noted that both of these organisations are based in London and my own research is conducted in Leicester and Nottingham. In addition many of the socio-educational events and activities examined above (cited in Appendix I) are based in other cities around the UK. London undoubtedly encompasses very different dynamics to any other city in the UK, for obviously reasons. In fact it could be argued that the emergence of both The City Circle and ArRum could only have taken place in London because of its demographics and other dynamics. Nevertheless, their emergence does at
least indicate particular trends that are taking place within Britain and which may in the near future be replicated in other cities, though with their own specificities.

**SUMMARY**

Using data from the Muslim press survey, Activities Diaries and social activities, and two organisations, I have presented evidence of the emerging socio-cultural landscape which young British Muslims are increasingly occupying. My aim has been to combine the various types of data to present a more comprehensive account of the situation. By examining the wide range of activities that young Muslims are participating in, I have demonstrated that the idea of 'media' consumption can be expanded to include less conventionally recognised media. Indeed the significance of these types of activities may surpass the importance of traditional print or electronic media. This may be especially the case if young Muslims are deliberately excluding or limiting their intake of mainstream media, though their attention may turn to Muslim media, which includes audio and video cassettes, websites and electronic mailing lists (including daily reminders) as well as publications.

Muslim media is certainly playing a key role in developing and disseminating Islamic knowledge to Muslims, particularly in diaspora communities. Not only have young Muslims utilised Muslim media as an alternative to mainstream media but they are actively seeking out Muslim 'media' (used in the broadest sense to include audio-visual, electronic, print and social and cultural activities) to fulfil the requirement of obtaining religious knowledge. Disillusionment with reporting on Islam and Muslims in British mainstream media (and Western media in general) has been a specific reason for opting for Muslim media. For those particularly conscious of their religious obligation to seek useful Islamic knowledge, mainstream media has been of less significance, in fact to be avoided wherever possible. This focus on Islamic learning is also visible in academia, with organisations emerging to deal with the roles and responsibilities of Muslim academics, researchers and students.

The availability of these alternative information sources is transforming the cultural habits of those enthusiastic about their religious identity. Simultaneously this interest is
initiating new and innovative channels in which to socialise and educate oneself about what it means to be Muslim. This resonates with what Mandaville (2001), Bunt (2000) and Baktiari (2000) note about the changing ways of learning about Islam, often bypassing traditional sources and undermining conventionally recognised authority in these matters. This may not be a deliberate act on the part of organisers and attendees of such events as those examined above but reflects the reality of the availability of traditional knowledge in Britain (and the West in general). It must be noted however, that much of this revival actually promotes a return to traditional ways of learning and practicing Islam and new technologies and resources simply assist in achieving this. The impact of globalising forces on media consumption is apparent in the media use of young British Muslims. Before the current information and communication technology revolution, access to sources of Islamic knowledge were somewhat limited to local materials (though the core texts were and remain the same throughout the Islamic world). Now however, access to varying, even conflicting, material has resulted in great diversity of interpretations of Islam within even the same locality.

An entire social, cultural and educational infrastructure appears to be developing amongst young Muslims which provides 'Islamic' alternatives in areas of entertainment and social life but more importantly in knowledge acquisition. There have been unique initiatives such as ArRum but often this infrastructure consists of organised events and activities targeting Young Muslims. By furnishing themselves with information about fellow Muslims, readers of Muslim media perceive a feeling of community or belonging created by this media (both through its production and consumption). This belonging includes local and national Muslim groups but also extends to the global Muslim umma, going beyond simple diaspora connections (mainly to South Asia and other South Asian Muslims around the world for those in my research).
CHAPTER 6
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS ANALYSIS

This chapter examines the data obtained from the focus group interviews. Similar to the Muslim press survey the purpose of the interviews was to examine the media and cultural habits of young Muslims and consider the connections between these and their constructions of self identity. The focus group data builds on and connects to the data from the previous two chapters. Issues relating to Muslim media publications, attitudes towards mainstream media, media consumption, social life and community issues are all expanded here. In addition, factors which connect with the broad research questions proposed in chapter One, are also examined (such as diaspora and global communities, Britishness and matters relating to Britain’s Muslim communities).

The themes which emerged from the focus group discussions connected with one another in a similar way to the theoretical themes in chapter One. In order to make the connection with the theoretical themes discussed in chapter One and the issues raised in chapter Two, I have divided the analysis into similar themes as these two chapters. This does not ignore the complexity of issues and their close relationship with one another but for the purpose of analysis they have been split into separate themes which are not exclusive and can overlap with each other. For example, Britishness and identity have been chosen as two separate themes, however, they have a strong relationship to each other. These themes are then used to examine some of the processes taking place in the lives of a group of young British Muslims and the relationship between these various concepts helps us understand the formation of a specific British Muslim identity. In order to distinguish who is speaking I specify when I am summarising what my respondents said and also give direct quotes from the interviews. Where I have not done so, I am making my own observations relating to each theme. The code in brackets after quotations refers to the Focus Group number and the M or F refers to whether the respondent(s) was male or female. Appendix C gives information about each focus group.
Muslim Communities in Britain

One of the main areas discussed was the state of the Muslim population of Britain, the problems they face and developments relating to their future. When asked about the attitudes and condition of the Muslim community respondents suggested that it could be divided into two main groups. The first group had a close affiliation to Islam and lived as what might be termed 'practising' Muslims. The second on the other hand was moving away from the teachings of Islam to a less religious outlook.

"I think as well as Muslim converts you have to realise that on the other side there are many Muslims who are lacking in their faith and who are really sedentary Muslims and people who turn away from Islam as well and those statistics don’t reach us. So I think these statistics serve to bias the positive.” (FG2 - M)

In two interviews one person commented on the positive trend of people coming into Islam but then another person reminded them of the opposite trend and that there were probably a greater number of people in the latter group.

1. “I think there’s a real awakening, people are unhappy with the world as it is, OK maybe we are OK here but especially if you look around the world and how Muslims are being treated, Bosnia, Kashmir, all over the world, people are getting to a point where they are really questioning and the solutions from Islam are coming so people are awakening and trying to use their Islam to take them out of the rubbish they are in.”

2. “I don’t agree, I agree that might be happening but from the people that I know or who I see, I haven’t seen any of that. The things that I see mostly with Muslims, people that I know, is just living for this life here and trying to earn money, it sounds awful but they want to earn as much money as they can and have wealth and material things, I don’t see people trying to live an Islamic way of life.”

3. “I think again it’s very sad, it’s to do with lack of knowledge.”

1. “I think now you can define Muslims as practising and non-practising isn’t it?” (FG4 - F)

They continue to discuss this idea of categories of Muslims and the first young woman who initially suggested there was an awakening taking place then seems to agree with the second young woman and takes a broader perspective on the situation:
"... you get different types, you get those who are just living their life according to what society dictates and then you have those who have had some kind of influence from Islam, they're basically the ones who are redefining their identity according to Islam. Whereas the ones who are sort of living their lives according to how society is they are becoming very much more like western society..." (FG4 - F)

The reasons they gave for the latter group was distractions in everyday life such as education, work and the day-to-day running of a household. This polarisation of Muslims tended to refer to the present and coming generations as opposed to previous ones. Also, this polarisation seems to point to two easily identifiable groups - practising and non-practising, whereas in reality the definition of these two is perhaps contested. People may classify themselves as practising Islam but within this there are different levels of practice and belief. In additional to this there is a large body of people who span the spectrum in between these two extremes (see Activities Diaries section on religiosity in chapter Four).

Both positive and negative feelings were expressed about what it is like to live as Muslims in Britain. In the case of the former, interviewees thought that being brought up in the British education system and society had enabled them to access certain resources which subsequently helped them to understand Islam. As they did not say specifically what they meant, this could include access to information, methods of learning and questioning, opportunities to travel and interaction with Muslims from numerous other countries. Some of the questioning about oneself, self definition, identity, culture and religion seemed to have come about as a result of being the 'other':

"I think the good thing about this country is that at least it teaches you how to think, to a certain extent, because we're different... you stick out like a sore thumb and when you stand out... you're not secure when you're different and when you know you're different you will think well what makes me different... as an Asian you can either be a coconut which is what a lot of the time people do or you can realise I am Muslim and I want to learn more about it... I start questioning life in this country and life is your own religion first." (FG1 - F)

42 Coconut is an expression used for Asians who aspire to be like white people, thus brown on the outside but white on the inside.
The existence of racism and specifically Islamophobia coupled with a desire to be distinct from non-Muslims appears to have been a push factor for Muslims thinking about their own identity. The position of Muslims can be seen as becoming more stable and influential, so optimistically the impact of Islam on non-Muslims would be positive and greater. On the converse side though, tensions which have manifest themselves in the ‘race’ riots in Spring 2001 could be a sign of things to come if this permanency is seen as something undesirable by racist elements in society.

One young woman reflected that Britain was in a transition phase and that it was difficult to tell the way things would turn out. This would only become clear once this present generation was in the driving seat as it were but whether Muslims attaining professional degrees and getting to ‘high’ places would affect legislation remained to be seen (FG7 - F). Other respondents too questioned how much of an impact Muslims would really have on the lives of people in Britain. Genuine interest in Islam and the lives of Muslims may lead to non-Muslims increasing their understanding and tolerance of another religion in their midst.

“We are always confronted about our deen, when it comes to Ramadan we are asked why do you fast, what is Eid, what are you celebrating, so we have to learn for a start to be able to answer and if we don’t know we cant answer and we feel that we are put in a corner so we have to read and study... and as we get older the questions get harder and insha’Allah a lot of Muslims are looking into it more for themselves and then they tend to open their minds.” (FG8 - M)

The young Muslims I interviewed acknowledged the work their parents had done and the struggles and sacrifices they had made to establish themselves as a community in Britain. They saw their own work now as building on this initial framework, one in which mosques, schools, shops and similar infrastructure had been established:

“We as Muslims, second, third generation living here, carrying Islam to this culture, stand in a very promising position in that we can... our fusion of culture and religion hasn’t been formalised yet so we can really develop the umma to become something really big and properly functioning in the future.” (FG2 - M).
Other respondents made similar comments expressing a positive attitude towards taking the message of Islam to wider society, either as individuals or through organised group activities.

Second and subsequent generations of Muslims find themselves interacting with non-Muslims in a greater and more diverse number of setting compared to their parents (for example, university/academia, different employment). This greater interaction may lead to a better understanding of society from the Muslims point of view and for non-Muslims it will increase their knowledge of Islam. Many of the practical considerations as well as religious and cultural issues which the first generation of migrants faced in Britain are less of a concern for subsequent generations. The fears which early immigrants had about preserving their religion, culture and identity still exist today but not necessarily in the same way. A greater confidence amongst Muslims born and brought up in Britain means they perceive themselves as part of society and the 'myth of return' is no longer a consideration for most young British Muslims.

A different set of considerations now exist for Muslims in Britain, including *dawah*. Employment in a greater number of areas has meant the presence of Muslims has changed and the spaces which are occupied by the Muslim community - as individuals and organisations - are more widespread than 30 years ago. Arguably they are still under-represented in important fields such as media and the civil service or are at lower ranking positions, but they have nevertheless expanded into different disciplines and sectors of employment. As well as establishing a physical presence, the Muslim community is eager to gain representation in spheres of influence and power, including mainstream media. There was an appreciation amongst by interviewees of what could be achieved by Muslims in Britain if the opportunities were given and Muslims were proactive in their efforts to contribute to society.

"The way that’s gonna change, that you’re gonna break that chain of people having a negative perception of Islam is through our generation. Now we are more educated, we’ve brought it [Islam] to this society.” (FG3 - M).

Establishing themselves in Britain may herald a better future not only for Muslims here but may also have positive consequences for the global *umma*. “I think the key to the
Muslims in the future is with Muslims living in the West who really are living in the seat of [power].” (FG2). Recognising the influential position of Muslims living in Britain on an economic and geopolitical level, respondents were aware of the role they had to play. This role was seen as vital for the relationship between Islam and the West and converts to Islam were thought to be an added advantage in this regard. In almost all interviews there was a mention of the high rate of conversion to Islam of white British men and especially women. These converts were usually viewed in a positive light in that their Islam was seen as more pure and one which had undergone a carefully considered process as opposed to being born into Islam. The extreme case of this appreciation sometimes verged on what might be termed an 'anti-culture' stance. This could be defined as an attitude in which all South Asian culture was seen as un-Islamic and because white converts did not carry this they were seen to be 'culture free' and therefore more 'Muslim'.

The presence of converts will mean that Muslims of the indigenous culture will speak on behalf of Islam and Muslims around the world in a language easily understood by wider society. Historically it has been an important factor in bringing people to understand and accept Islam that people from within the same community take the message to others. For the average British non-Muslim hearing about Islam from a Muslim of the same colour and cultural background may have greater impact than hearing about it from a 'foreigner'. This phenomenon of conversion to Islam will undoubtedly change the landscape of British Islam and possibly Britain itself. The fusion of Muslims from all over the world, including South Asia, Far East Asia, the Middle East, Africa, the Caribbean as well as English, Scottish, Irish, Welsh and other European Muslims who have settled in the UK will give rise to new individual and collective identities. Not only will it break the stereotype that Muslims are from overseas but it should enable non-Muslims to consider the appeal of Islam to people of diverse backgrounds. Presumably this was the type of challenge that Q-News were intending when they used a photo of a young, white Muslim woman (convert) in their magazine (discussed in chapter 4, 'Media and Identity'). Interracial marriages are another factor which will add to this trend. The essentially fluid nature of culture will therefore develop and adapt in such a way that British Islam will take on board these different elements. Ultimately it will bring into question, yet again, what it means to be
British. White Muslims will also be another reminder to the government of the inadequacies of the current Race Relations Act in protected against religious discrimination.

**Britishness**

The report published by the Home Office following the riots in the North West of Britain in 2001 once again raised the issue of being British (Building Cohesive Communities, 2001). Similar to the reactions given by the deputy to the Home Secretary, John Patten after *The Satanic Verses* affair, David Blunkett also made comments about what it meant to be British. In 1989 Mr Patten warned Muslims to learn to behave properly British if they were to make the most of their lives and opportunities as British citizens (Asad, 1993). In the latest development of this ongoing and often controversial debate, Mr Blunkett suggested that all foreigners entering Britain should take an ‘oath of allegiance’ to Queen and country to ensure nothing like the riots of Burnley, Bradford and Oldham take place again. He recommended that taking lessons in the English language would help alleviate the problems which led to the rioting. He also mentioned the problems of forced marriages and female genital mutilation in his analysis of the tensions. The report contained many other recommendations about employment, policing, service provision, media and extremist groups but these received less attention then the above issues. The comments of one critic summarised what many people felt about his point of view:

“I have no doubt that Blunkett’s intentions are sincere in needing to open up a serious debate on multiculturalism in Britain, but I thought Blunkett’s comments were confused... he talks about ‘integration’, but integration into what... ‘Britishness’ means different things to different people. We need to be careful that we are not drawn into talking about integration under the guise of a discourse of ‘assimilation’” (Ahmad, 2001b).

Thus the sometimes thorny issue of Britishness was central to the debate ensuing after the riots and was particularly pertinent to what was said by government representatives. Ahmad (2001b) also criticised Blunkett’s juxtaposition of integration, the disturbance, recent asylum and immigration, use of the English language, loyalty tests, forced marriage and female genital mutilation.
“These things have nothing to do with each other - the riots involved young Asian men who had no trouble speaking English. Blunkett’s mention of forced marriage and female genital mutilation assumes that it is only the mainstream ‘white’ British community which finds these practices intolerable, when we do as well. Issues of identity, what it means to be British and multiculturalism do need to be discussed, but we also need to remember that integration is a two-way process; we need to question the prevalence of institutionalised racism, social exclusion and poverty in the UK, to look at why members of the ethnic minorities are still failing to achieve their full potential. Yes there is a debate, but lets be clear about the issues first and make sure we are all talking the same language.” (Ahmad, 2001b).

This last point illustrated what many people felt, that is, that the government had simplified the matter to one of integration whilst ignoring some of the structural inequalities facing minority groups. They questioned why it was that this so called integration had not taken place, bearing in mind language and loyalty were not issues for most second and third generations Asians. Resolving social and economic marginalisation and eliminating persistent racism would probably help achieve this integration, rather than looking to acculturate young Asians into ‘Britishness’. Statements like Blunkett’s, similar to Norman Tebbit’s ‘cricket test’, often made by prominent figures or politicians, tend to occur regularly and highlight anxieties which the government and general public may have about ethnic minorities in Britain. Integration and assimilation have always been contested issues. For advocates of integration it is a positive thing as it means accepting the values, norms and culture of the country in which immigrants have taken residence, thus blending into society and not causing any friction. For those being asked to integrate though integration may not always present such a positive idea. To abide by the rules and regulations of society is a reasonable enough concept but to then shed all cultural and religious traditions is seen as taking integration to an unacceptable extreme. For the generation of young Muslims that I interviewed the extent of mixing or fitting into society is different to their parents. Again schooling has had a great impact on this. Education and work patterns mean a greater presence within certain areas of employment which first generation Muslims were not as represented in. Finance, the City, medical professions, management positions and similar professions all now have Muslim employees. This is not to overlook the fact that Asians in general and Muslims in particular are still underrepresented in higher positions and white collar positions and also that they suffer from the highest unemployment rates in many areas (Modood et al, 1997). It is just to
illustrate the point that the spatial dynamics of the Muslim communities have changed. As a result of this some of the issues and challenges facing second generation Muslims are different from those of their parents.

On a day to day level perhaps the issue of Britishness or belonging did not feature strongly in peoples’ minds. In fact during the interviews when Britishness was mentioned one or two of the respondents asked - 'what is Britishness?' This is telling of how difficult it can be to define such a complex concept, especially because of its changing nature. The definition needs to be broad enough to encompass its multiple facets in a similar way to the definition of culture. The meaning also needs to be fluid and open in order to embrace the diversity existing in Britain. At a technical level respondents said that Britishness meant holding a British passport, having British nationality or being a citizen of the country.

"Well if you forget about your colour and that you’re Pakistani and Muslim then everything you do, all the activities you take part in are British activities but if you bring your religion into it and your culture into it then it depends. OK if I play Scrabble that’s a British activity, but if it’s a Pakistani playing Scrabble, do you say that’s a British or Pakistani activity...? it’s an activity whether it’s British or not, we don’t see it as a big deal, well I don’t see it as a big deal.” (FG3 - M)

This quote is an interesting response to a question on whether what young Muslims do is British. The young man interviewed begins by saying that if colour, ethnic origin and religion were taken out of the equation - presumably that if you imagine him to be white and non-Muslim - all his activities would be British. This begs the question then that if the colour, ethnicity and religion were to remain, what would it make a person and their actions? It could be that for their own part young Muslims feel British enough but that the assumptions about being British which circulate in public discourse make them question the authenticity of this claim. Added to this there is perhaps a feeling of awkwardness that to say proudly one is simply ‘British’ is to reject or diminish one’s own culture or religion. A young woman in another focus group interview commented:

“Britishness I think, living in this country and taking what’s best of this culture because I come across Muslims for who Britishness is.. they have become completely engrossed in because there are a lot of things about British culture that are explicitly haram and I know Muslims who drink, they take drugs, they
dress completely... there’s something deep rooted in there that they’re trying to become so so British and they say very passionately ‘I am British’ and they are just saying it for the wrong reasons and I think this is a negative Britishness if you like but I think there is a very positive side to it as well.” (FG5 - F)

Having to identify yourself as different from the Other(s) has probably been a factor in motivating Muslims to learn more about themselves and their religion. Experiences of racism and discrimination in a country where anti-Islamic/anti-Muslim feeling is a growing phenomena has further singled out Muslims as the ‘Other’ (Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, 2001). The ‘cultural’ dimension of racism has been a greater cause for concern than in previous years and movements such as the BNP have not missed an opportunity to warn people of the threat of Muslims rather than any other minority (McRoy, 2001).

In the light of racism and Islamophobia it is ironic that many of Britain’s ethnic minorities still feel confidently British. Many of the respondents in this research did prefer to state their Muslimness before their Britishness and some even said that they only say British because it is a fact they can not deny.

“I think that because of my belief I know that Islam doesn’t allow nationalism so I wouldn’t say that I was British but I would agree that being with a British passport allows you freedom to do things that nobody else like in Pakistan can do but I just see myself as a Muslim.” (FG 4 - F).

“I would say.. yes because I was born here, brought up here all my life, I know its stupid to say that’s the stamp you’ve got on your passport but being British allows us to do a lot of things that we wouldn’t be able to do if we weren’t British, you know get up and go to any part of the world you want to go to and come back here and it gives you some legal rights that can benefit you but then I think being British would probably come second after being Muslim” (FG4 - F).

**Diaspora and the Global Umma**

As a diaspora population, young British Muslims with South Asia roots were influenced by the traditions and trends of their parents’ country of birth (Pakistan, India or Bangladesh in almost all cases). The extent of this influence did vary and some interviewees had actually visited the Indian sub-continent whereas others had just heard
about it through family and friends and had developed their ideas using secondary information. There was an element of comparison between life in South Asia and life as Muslims in Britain. Interviewees felt able to take what they saw as positive features of South Asian culture whilst removing any aspects they saw as contrary to Islam or otherwise difficult to adopt in their environment in Britain. Several respondents commented that if they lived in Pakistan where the majority of the population is Muslim, the issue of identity would not be so pertinent. As almost all of the people around them would be Muslim, there would not necessarily be a need to identify oneself as Muslim. In contrast, in Britain, expressing their Muslim identity was an important factor. For women this was most obviously done through their Islamic dress.

“If I was in Pakistan I don’t think I’d be like this, I would be a different person... if I was in Pakistan I wouldn’t wear it [hijab] but for identity or whatever...” (FG5 - F)

This reaffirmed what the interviewee said in the Islam in Europe documentary clip used at the beginning of focus group interviews, where she stated:

“If I was living in Pakistan I think I’d have no reason to wear a headscarf because everyone doesn’t [sic], why would I ever be questioning my identity? I’d have a stable sense of being Pakistani, being Muslim, that’s it. Because I’m in Britain, the questioning is constant” (see Appendix D for full transcript).

This point explored the issue of identity from the perspective of ‘Otherness’. The main point it seemed to investigate was how expressing identity differs in different environments, dependent on the identity of other people. Wearing hijab (or Islamic dress) appears to be a particular aspect of this expression.

Some respondents felt keeping in touch with family in the subcontinent was vital. This was because they wanted to ensure future generations know about their history and appreciate the traditional ways of their forefathers and maintaining these traditions will help preserve their Islam in a non-Islamic environment. As one young woman commented, the nature of Islam being universal meant there was no problem in developing it within an English or British culture:
"Islam is for the whole of mankind and it doesn’t matter whether you’re English or Indian, you can adapt to it... and if you choose Islam I really think that we get the best of both worlds because you can pick... because every culture has its good and bad points and you can pick the best of everything.”

(FG5 - F)

This attitude was shared by other young Muslims interviewed. Whilst aware that certain things in their surrounding environment are incompatible with their Islamic beliefs, they also recognise that there are many others which can easily be adopted into a Muslim’s life.

As well as diaspora connections interviewees were asked to talk about issues affecting Muslims globally. Increased awareness of certain political struggles had been facilitated by accessible information on, for example, Kashmir, Palestine, Kosova and Chechnya. At university Islamic Societies also helped highlight these issues and this was coupled with easy access to the internet. Organisations campaigning for certain causes target universities to increase awareness and this is another route through which information was gained. For example, in July 2000 at Leicester University, Voices in the Wilderness gave a talk about the ongoing and often forgotten plight of the Iraqi people who continue to live under sanctions and military attacks. In answer to the question about what they felt were the issues affecting the global umma, one young man said:

“It’s oppression really, we see it every day, Bosnia, Kosova, Palestine, Chechnya, they’re the main issues. I think its sad to see how the media can really neglect it when they want to.” (FG8 - M)

Respondents were also aware of problems within the Muslim communities and thought that these too were responsible for the state of the Muslim population worldwide. There was an understanding that some problems could be seen as external but that it was also crucial to acknowledge those which exist amongst Muslims.

“I think the issues arise because of the diseases that Muslims have, one of the main reasons that these issues arise is because Muslim men aren’t doing what they are supposed to be doing.. we have got diseases in our hearts without a doubt. One of the big issues is racism within Islam, some of my friends have just accepted Islam and they are saying brother I have never experienced more racism before Islam than I have when I have actually became Muslim and it really is upsetting when you’ve given them dawah for about a year and you are
telling them how good it is and they can see the fruits of Islam and they want to
taste it so they come into Islam and then they see the diseases and it really does
sicken them.” (FG8 - M)

A third issue which was brought up in this focus group interview was that of disunity
amongst the Muslims. “Its disunity basically, we’ve got so many divisions in Islam.”
(FG8 - M). This was seen as the basis for many of the problems which face Muslims,
nationally and globally.

“I think related to this issue of identity and unity is the issue of lack of
leadership in the Muslim community, as a result we find competing factions,
competing groups within the Muslim community so those who do earnestly
want to become active may become active at the detriment of other Muslims
and aren’t really helping Muslims as a whole.” (FG2 - M)

This matter of leadership has been seen as a problem for many years amongst British
Muslims. Another respondent mentioned that the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB)
was probably a good representative, “still not the best thing around but at least
something... there’s a Muslim voice... it’s a pretty big achievement to have something
like that.” (FG2 - M). Recognition of the MCB by the government has helped to
establish it within official circles, though they themselves recognise that not every
Muslim organisation is affiliated to them. The organisation has provided a platform for
various debates and has acted as an intermediary between the community and the
government on certain issues. It has also campaigned for better representation of Islam
and Muslims in the media. However, as suggested in chapter One, the MCB is not
without its critics who recognise that the internal diversity of Muslim communities has
to represented.

An interesting response was given by one interviewee to the discussion on unity:

“...There’s problems with fighting between factions, different groups but I don’t
think that can be overcome. Its not a problem that’s faced only by the Muslim
community,... and it’s a problem that’s always going to be there. I think our
objective should be a little more modest, accept some basic common factors,
first of all that we are all Muslims and perhaps we can unite under that
umbrella rather than trying to find other factors to unify all different factions
because those factors aren’t going to be there, people are always going to hold
on to those factors which identify their own sects, so just basically
acknowledge that we’re all Muslims and work on that basis and perhaps then there will be a more unified front.” (FG2 - M)

It is perhaps this pragmatic attitude that will enable British Muslims to progress rather than hindering themselves with minor differences. It is probably easier for young Muslims to have a feeling of unity within the university environment as they are not only a minority here but the ‘politics’ are far fewer than in outside organisations. Whereas communities have established themselves along ethnic and political lines, university students arrive with less awareness of these issues and therefore do not see a need for this type of differentiation. It could be argued that university life also has inter-group tensions but overall it is probably more united than in the community. The politics of campus life are less far reaching, with students leaving after a few years and whatever takes place is normally within the student body anyway.

When comparing themselves to their parents, the young men in this group felt they were more united across different ethnic groups whereas their parents often had strong association only with their own ethnic group, sometimes at the expense of others.

“Even in this room there are two Bengalis, two Pakistanis and one Gujerati! So it shows the difference in our cultural angle and also here [university] we are a minority.” (FG2 - M).

The respondents were proud of the fact that they had ethnic diversity in their friendship networks and felt they had developed this because of their Islamic attitude towards other races.

“I think our generation, the ones that have been brought up in the West, here, America, Canada, Europe, I think they see it as more, they see the broader picture that you’re a Muslim and you’re not.... Ethnicity doesn’t really come into it as long as you’re a Muslim.” (FG2 - M)

They also felt that for them religion took priority over ethnicity, in for example choosing a marriage partner, whereas their parents would be very conscious of the ethnic background of a potential husband or wife for their children. Much of this attitude could be attributed to a return to the teachings of Islam about equality of the races. So on the one hand respondents noted that racism did exist amongst Muslims but they saw a correct understanding and practice of Islam as the way to combat this.
The grounds along which minorities unified in earlier generations may easily have been ethnicity simply because of the reasons and patterns of arrival in Britain, but now that subsequent generations feel established here, the lines along which they are united have changed. Much of the British culture, particularly schooling, has been shared by Muslims of all ethnic backgrounds so this has probably been a unifying factor. This shared experience contrasts with the memories that their parents have of the partition of the Indian subcontinent which makes divisions along national, regional and ethnic lines stronger. Those who are more inclined towards an Islamic outlook have taken ethnic and cultural diversity to be a strength for the community.

**Parent-Child Relationship**

Of interest to the whole issue of how young Muslims are living and dealing with life in Britain is their relationship with their parents and elders. What has interested academics in the case of migrant populations has been the idea of potential conflict between parents and children due to their transition into another culture. The contrast between the Indian subcontinent and Britain, with different social, cultural, religious and economic environments, is seen as a determining factor for this potential friction. Ethical and moral codes, lifestyles, media and popular culture, education and similar institutions all exert an influence on young people and at the same time the home and family have a strong input too. It is when these inputs conflict with each other that disagreement can occur. How some families have dealt with these dilemmas and how relationships between generations have stood these tests can be illustrated using examples from the focus group discussion.

The young Muslims I interviewed obviously all had different relationships with their parents. Each family has its own individual dynamics, household structures and circumstances. For my respondents the focus of the intergenerational relationship tended to be on how Islam was perceived and practiced by parents and children. The nature of the interview questions were such that this became the focus. The two specific questions were; ‘do you think of your culture in a different way from your parents?’ and ‘how do you see your generation of Muslims thinking about Islam (how is this different from your parents)?’ This therefore narrowed the broad area of parent-child relations to
an issue more relevant to the research, namely the understanding and practice of faith within families.

These young Muslims felt that their way of learning about, understanding and practising Islam has different elements compared to their parents. These differences have the potential to lead to disagreement but the younger generation often adopted a subtle yet pragmatic approach to prevent or at least reduce the tension. It was suggested that children becoming 'too' religious, according to their parents' definition, might lead to differences of opinion within families. The focus which younger Muslims felt their parents place on culture rather than religion is one of the main factors in determining this relationship.

"I think with our parents, would I be correct in thinking that all our parents came over from South Asia... so the environment was totally different, because their environment was different, the circumstances and challenges spiritually they faced were a lot different, those who want to develop the Islamic side of their personality in this country face a lot different challenges and so that's why their Islamic identity, their Islamic character takes on a lot of difference". (FG2 - M)

"Well for them it is enough to pray five times a day and fast and that's it, that's satisfying for them but we want to learn more and read and attend lectures but they think that there's no need for that, we're just being extra but we know that we have got to seek knowledge and we want to be a different kind of Muslim. They have their cultural ideas of Islam which is OK but we want more. They do other things and we are trying, I say trying, to make it our way of life." (FG1 - F)

These two quotes demonstrate a number of factors which lead to diverse opinions between parents and children. The parents own upbringing, their cultural background and early experiences in Britain, in turn the children’s upbringing and their culture and then their desire to learn and practice a different kind of Islam, all work together to create a particular dynamic of religious practice. For parents to understand their children and visa versa there is a process of negotiation in which both are presenting their own arguments in the hope that a compromise is reached which suits both parties.

"At the start I used to say to my mum where's your evidence for this, why are you doing this, I can't see any evidence in Islam but now we've just basically
established I practice like this but I think they’ve all got respect for me” (FG4 - F).

Some in the younger generation have stronger personalities and ensure their opinion is heard. In these cases parents probably back down.

“You question things more and you question your parents more when they say you shouldn’t do this and you shouldn’t do that, you ask why whereas before [at a younger age] you used to say OK but now you ask them why and you want answers rather than just sitting back and letting them tell you what to do”. (FG4 - F)

“I tell my parents straight, it’s not in Islam to do this or to do that then they accept it because they know the situation, they know they’ve been brought up in Islam and they know our position that we’re more likely to go and research into Islam and the way it’s supposed to be”. (FG3 - M)

Many aspects of a child’s identity are determined or at least influenced by his or her parents. These influences have already established themselves before interaction at college or university begins and they continue to shape a person’s thinking. One of the respondents noted that if you come to university with a good grounding in Islamic knowledge you are one stage ahead of people who have to relearn the basics from the beginning. It also means that your personality is attuned to Islam so that it becomes easier to adopt other teachings about Islam as and when you come to know about them. The influences at university can be so strong and persuasive but would need to be even stronger if they were to distract a person who is anchored in faith (FG5 - F). The influence of parents was seen as being much more powerful during childhood and this sentiment was expressed when talking specifically about Islam. Some respondents thought their interest in Islam had inspired their parents to learn more about it too. Although this sometimes meant having to accept to learn from their children, one person’s decision to start practising Islam often guided the rest of the family in the same direction.

“When I started practising or became more aware I found there was a rivalry between me and my mum, my mum thought I was showing off to say that I know more than her, whenever I would say anything she would try her best to add something on to it to make it sound as if she already knew and it’s taken five years for her to accept that we all want the same thing and that it’s a good thing that I know Islam and that she knows Islam... I think me and my sister
coming into Islam has encouraged her to learn and she has learnt a lot more so at first there was rivalry but *alhamdulillah* at least some good has come out of it and when I go home now we can all have a nice conversation about the Qur'an". (FG7 - F)

In contrast this young woman's friend in the same focus group interview told how although her mother's focus on Islam was probably different from her own this was a positive point because they both learnt from each other, as they had knowledge in different aspects of religion. Ultimately it depended on the relationship between children and parents and their understanding of Islam itself. There were therefore different reactions to younger Muslims becoming more Islamically inclined from within families and within the community at large. If people compared to the alternative lifestyles which the younger generation may have adopted they were pleased that Islam had been chosen. However, it was felt that some parents thought their children were being *too* Islamic, especially as this often meant questioning the conventional wisdom passed down through parents themselves. In this case the adoption of a 'milder' form of Islam, which consisted of mainly cultural norms such as wearing *shalwar kameez* and *dupatta* rather than Arab style dress, including headscarf, was preferable to an Islam in which girls were asserting their right to an education or choice in marriage.

"I know a lot of people that think Islam is something that you come to when you are older, when you're retired and you haven't got anything else to do then you can do your namaaz and your Qur'an and go to hajj and when they see someone young in *hijab*, praying whatever, they immediately come to the assumption that you're not educated, that you're doing this because you can't do anything else, which is very, very irritating! I think that's a big misconception that a lot of people within our communities have". (FG7 - F)

Having brought these issues to light, respondents did not give the overall feeling that there was any great conflict between themselves and their parents. They seemed to have reached a 'good working relationship', so to speak, with their parents whereby they practised Islam in a way they felt appropriate whilst at the same time respecting their parent's right to understand it as they did. Respondents felt that their parents held an image of their countries of origin which are no longer true, as those countries too have moved on and adopted new social and cultural ways. They thought that realising this and accepting the good things present in British culture would help them to take benefit of living here.
“People come from abroad and they bring their children up here and they want their children to live in their country but even they don’t realise that their country has changed from the time ... because parents are living in like Syria 20 years ago [others agree] and its changed there as well, the different attitudes of the young people, the different way the parents are. I think for us its really important, my father always says take advantage of what’s around you because you have a lot at your fingertips and you can make a big difference... don’t be stuck in your country and traditions, open your mind up, Islam allows you to do that so take advantage of it”. (FG5 - F)

Inevitably society changes from generation to generation and so each generation’s experiences and thinking will differ. For British Muslims the additional factor of being a diaspora community, with parents holding an image of life ‘back home’, adds another dimension to the transition from one generation to the next. I suggest that the conflict between South Asian or Muslim children and their parents which is often referred to occurs mainly when children have total disregard for their parents’ culture and religion. In contrast, when they simply reinterpret Islam and adopt different religious practices into their lives, the conflict with parents is reduced somewhat because parents realise that their children at least have an appreciation for their faith.

Marriage

Marriage is an interesting issue with which to demonstrate some of the intergenerational dynamics of British Muslim life. Not only does it tell us something about the practice itself but to continue the above theme, it can be used to gauge the views of parents and children. It is also a favourite topic of discussion for mainstream media, often used to disparage the practices of South Asian communities, particularly Muslims. The particular issue of ‘forced marriages’ receives regular attention and the recent Home Office report investigating this has brought the issue to light once again (A Choice by Right, 2000). Marriages contracted with spouses overseas were also of concern to the Home Office and Labour MP Ann Cryer aimed to raise awareness and campaign against forced marriages. Once high profile media attention is given to such issues the Asian communities are themselves expected to respond by outlining the measures they have been, or have not been taking as the case may be, to alleviate the problem. Organisations such as An-Nisa Society (London), Muslim Women’s Helpline (London) and many similar organisations nationwide have been aware of the problem of forced
marriages within the Muslim community for some years now and have been working at
the grassroots level to resolve the issues.

For young Muslims marriage often represents an aspect of their lives which requires
carefully balancing different demands and expectations. On the one hand they have to
be sensitive to their parents and elders aspirations about marriage whilst at the same
time remaining true to the reality of marriage in Islam. This often involves bringing a
correct, Islamic understanding of marriage to their parents and to the rest of the
community as well as others. On the other hand they have to bridge the gap in the
understanding of non-Muslims about the cultural and religious aspects of marriage
which though may seem negative to the outsider are perfectly acceptable to the people
involved themselves. Changes in the practice of marriage amongst young British
Muslims may be one of the best ways of spreading these ideas.

Whilst not ignoring the problems which face the community about marriages, overall
my respondents spoke positively on the subject. One of the young women pointed out
that the image people have of arranged marriages is often wrong compared to the
reality.

“There's a concept of arranged marriage in Islam but that is where arranged as
in somebody helps you, introduces you to a person with your consent... if
you're not happy then I wouldn't say it was arranged, that was forced... My
idea of an arranged marriage would be if I said look there's a guy like this, find
out and the girl willingly says 'yes, I agree, I would like to..' so she's not been
out with this person because somebody else has introduced them, that's my
idea of an arranged marriage”. (FG5 - F)

“I think its become more Islamic and less culturalised from being here and that
does mean more freedom... now it's a lot more normal to follow the Islamic
way, to meet and have a chit-chat and see if you like each other, if you get on
and then make a decision after that” (FG5 - F).

What seemed to dominate the discussion on marriage was that change was taking place.
Whereas in previous years a particular model of marriage may have been employed by a
large number of people in the Muslim community, now a diversity of methods had
developed. It seems to me that various factors are responsible for this, not least the
concept of love and marriage in the West. This scenario, in which the man and woman
appear to have total control and freedom of choice in who they marry, is presented as a stark contrast to the marriages in which parents choose marriage partners for their children, make all the important decisions and wedding arrangements, in extreme cases without consulting the couple to be married. Elements of this type of marriage now present themselves in Asian marriages in Britain. The average age for marriage has also increased to be more in line with the rest of the population. This is partly due to young men and women attaining their higher education after which they spend some years establishing a career. As well as these factors a seminar held by The City Circle to ascertain marriage expectations and how to chose their spouse, found that expectations amongst young British Muslims have changed (Siddiqui, 2000). Men and women who are inclined towards Islam will prioritise religious practice in their perspective spouse. In addition to this though education, appearance and family background are also important. These changes were recognised by my respondents:

“It’s changing, it’s changing as parents are becoming wiser as to how the society we’re living in and how its affecting us because this is something that parents deny or don’t realise the effect that education has on us, TV, the media in general has on children being brought up here and our perceptions of life and our ambitions and they don’t realise how much of an impact that has and how it influences how we are as people and the more they begin to realise this the more their attitudes are changing and they are becoming less persistent or insistent on us going back home to marry”. (FG8 - M)

The young people in my research were not in any way representative of the British Muslims population as a whole. Their way of thinking and living is very much influenced by Islamic teachings, which may be true of other Muslims, but because of their age, circumstances and associations, a specific framework is created within which they live their lives. As a result of this they see marriage as part of their worship of Allah and therefore aim to choose a partner who will share their desire for a religious life and who will help them in their own worship.

“I think they expect a lot more [laughs] a woman now... if you look at our mothers generation and you see a lot of what they have had to put up with in terms of the sacrifices and coming here and whatever kind of verbal and situational problems that have come along and you think I wouldn’t take that and you know your sister or friends wouldn’t take that so I mean... and also I think being more educated Islamically it tells you the ideal of what marriage
should be and I think a lot of this generation is looking for that ideal, you want the best you can get”. (FG7 - F)

A stronger Muslim identity and knowledge of Islamic teachings was particularly important to young women in relation to decision making about marriage. They are using Islam to challenge older teachings and to argue against the restrictions imposed on them about marriage, something confirmed in Jacobson’s work (1998). Though cultural practices or parental aspirations continue to exert an influence, it is difficult to make generalisations about the pressure to conform to these. Each individual case probably involves negotiation between parents and children as to what constitutes a proper decision about a marriage partner. I asked one group of women what would happen if the child was conscientious about Islamic teachings but his or her parents still wanted to use ‘caste’ or other criteria for marriage:

1 “It does become a conflict”
2 “I think it depends on how strong the person is in their own belief and if they can influence their parents…”
1 “… do they really object to who their parents are asking them to marry as well?”
2 “Maybe they can try and convince their parents that you don’t just look at caste and things as long as the person you’re interested in is a practising Muslim”
1 “Like for me its not really an issue because I know I will have full control over who I marry, so long as my parents will approve as well, within limits and reason” (FG4 - F).

One trend which was probably very uncommon in the Indian subcontinent that Muslims are experiencing now is interracial marriages. The conversion to Islam of white European and Afro-Caribbean people has facilitated this phenomenon. Although there may be resistance to this from families and the community, using the grounds that Islam allows marriages between Muslims from different parts of the world, this trend is bound to increase. Marrying within the same ethnic group though is seen as the most important way to preserve culture for coming generations.

“I know some parents who when they look for a wife for their son they’re not looking for a wife for their son but for a daughter-in-law, it’s two different things and they’re definitely some people out there that are saying ‘that’s it you’re getting married to this person from Pakistan, no questions, no doubts about it, you’re going, we’re taking you there [all laugh]. That’s happened to
someone I know and it's really sad but on the other hand the good point, there are a lot of people now parents that are saying OK if you see someone you like talk to us and we'll see what we can do. It is changing but very slowly I think". (FG8 - M)

Gender

The question of marriage ties into gender issues too. As mentioned above increasing marriage age for girls due to continuing education has cast a different light on parental expectations of the boy’s education, background and family. The role of women who migrated to the United Kingdom from South Asia has changed considerably over the past 30 years. Education has become a top priority for many Muslim girls and their families and it is seen both as a means to achieve individual potential as well as a safety net in case of marriage breakdown. Indeed in some instances it could be seen as a way of delaying marriage. The diversity of careers being undertaken by Muslim women illustrates their conviction to progress in academia and employment. A lot of group discussion centred on how Muslim women are perceived by non-Muslims:

“I think that’s one thing that’s really important when we’re talking about Muslims in the west, it’s the position of women. Many western people’s views about Islam are defined by how they see women being treated within Muslim communities and there’s always this perception that they’re oppressed, that they have very little power... something as obvious as their dress, why do they cover themselves up and all the rest of it, it’s because of lack of understanding primarily, why Muslim women dress in this way, they automatically assume that it’s because of oppression within the religion and that just conveys a negative image so again we need to basically circulate information as to why women do dress in this way and that in many cases it’s due to their own choice because their beliefs dictate how they dress and they’re not dressing that way simply to appease their husbands of their communities”. (FG2 - M)

As such this was seen as vital to the relationship between Islam and the West. Respondents were aware that the media was often responsible for portraying Muslim women in a negative light. This negativity normally consisted of discourses of oppression, restrictive dress codes, tradition, unequal status and male domination. Respondents thought that one of the most frequent ways to clear misconceptions about Islam was to make the distinction between cultural practices, which were sometimes un-Islamic, and religious teachings.
“You’ve got people going on about customs and traditions that aren’t Muslim, they’ll follow those kinds of customs and traditions that are from the subcontinent and people pick up on those and say yeah that’s how Muslim women are, they say that’s what religion dictates, but religion doesn’t dictate that at all and they discriminate against Muslim women”. (FG2 - M)

They thought that people’s knowledge of Islam and Muslim women often appeared to be limited to what they knew of cultural practices as opposed to being acquainted with the actual religious teachings. The above response was given by a young man and it seemed that the men interviewed were as conscious of the inaccurate and negative perceptions of Muslim women in the West. For women themselves the experience of negative attitudes may have been further intensified through their own personal experiences.

One young woman spoke about how being involved in the Islamic Society at university had given her more confidence and made her feel good about her academic course as well. This increased knowledge and growing confidence had resulted in a stronger Muslim identity and this in turn lead to a more assertive personality in other roles and relationships. Developing spoken, written, communicative, organisational and other skills within the Islamic Society setting, which is to some extent sheltered from the outside world, enabled young Muslims to transfer these skills to other aspects of their lives and careers. This confidence is perhaps also one of the factors which feeds into young Muslims’ assertion of their British Muslim identity. Some of these ideas are reflected in interviews carried out with young Muslim women in The Guardian:

“I found liberation in Islam. It gave me the confidence to insist on a good education and reject the arranged marriage. Islam made sense to me, and I could understand it, as opposed to what I had grown up with. Plus, it was compatible with being British - being British Muslim, rather than Pakistani” (Bunting, 2001, p 19).

Where cultural barriers have perhaps placed limits on a woman’s education, including religious knowledge, or employment, religion has enabled them to assert these basic rights to develop themselves. Where there has been flexibility and communication within families, children and especially girls, have presented a reasoning based on Islam
to gain permission to attend college or university. Research has shown that girls from minority ethnic groups perform better than boys at school and this is perhaps continued to the higher education level (Haw et al, 1998).

The issue of women in Islam could be approached from two different levels; the first is re-education within the Muslim communities and the second is at the level of outsider perceptions. I anticipate that the young men and women I interviewed are able to work at both levels. In the latter it would involve a process of interacting more with non-Muslims to dispel many of the myths that have come to surround all aspects of Islam and the lives of Muslims. This was essentially a matter of *dawah* which could work at an explicit level, that is, talking to people and debating about Islam with them, or at a more subtle level through the correct Islamic behaviour of Muslims. The first level would involve changing the understanding of Muslim themselves, including parents. For this greater knowledge would need to be acquired and disseminated throughout families and communities, keeping in mind the difficulties of asking people to change their way of thinking. The older generations would no doubt hold fast to their own understanding of Islam and some in the younger generations may not even express an interest to re-learn or even learn. Ultimately both these efforts would depend upon how young Muslims can influence the people they come into contact with through their understanding, acting upon and presenting their faith.

**Social Life**

Examining the social activities of Muslims gives us an idea of their cultural practices and hence their identity as young Muslims. The way that my respondents structured their social life depended on whether they were students or working. For university students much of their social interaction took place through Islamic Society activities. For groups of students living in halls of residence, often in blocks with mainly Muslims, socialising outside of university was often arranged with hall mates. I have illustrated the types of activities young Muslims are involved in and who is responsible for organising them in the previous chapter.
Respondents in my focus group interviews stressed that their social life was part of their learning and worship, and this was seen as one of the fundamental differences between their socialising and that of most non-Muslims.

“We talk and discuss things and share knowledge. We actually get together and do practical things, we will go to a lecture together or go to Islamic courses, whatever we do there should be some progression in it. Not just this routine to get together and go to pubs and clubs, we actually do something that means something... they [non-Muslims] think we haven’t got a social life, its different to them, we pray together and make dhikr and we class that as fun but they don’t.” (FG1 - F)

Muslims have found alternatives to places that serve alcohol or where free mixing between men and women takes place. Instead they have encouraged socialising at home or have otherwise claimed spaces that are conducive to their beliefs43. It is true that many Muslims do involve themselves in ‘mainstream’ social environments such as cinemas and restaurants but most of my respondents were perhaps more conscious of their Islamic obligations and therefore made an effort to ensure all aspects of their lives were lived according to Islam. Family life also played an important part in the social life of young Muslims.

Of my respondents who were university students, family life was ‘suspended’ to some extent whilst they were at university but the influence of family was still seen as important. Visits back home at weekends and during holidays simply meant a resumption of the home routine. A sort of surrogate family life was adopted at university with other Muslim students taking the role of brothers and sisters. This was especially true during the month of Ramadan when fasts were opened together and prayers were said in congregation. This was also a time when the Islamic Society increased its activities, inviting speakers, having gatherings of dhikr and reminders on different aspects of Islamic teachings.

“I am really close [to my family] that’s why I found it really hard when I first came here but I had already made my mind up before I came here that I would join the Islamic Society and make Muslim friends because it’s hard to meet people just around campus anyway... there wasn’t anything like an Islamic society [at school or college] so I found it really good meeting all these

43 This has been examined in more detail in the previous chapter.
different people from all over the place and bringing everyone together and I think my mum’s really happy because when I went to the fresher’s party I really felt as though I belonged and I felt happy and it’s just like that every time we meet on Wednesdays, we don’t necessarily talk too deeply into religion but it makes you enjoy your religion more. It kind of strengthens your faith in a way.” (FG6 - F)

Some of the other respondents were not university students but were college students or in employment. For the former living at home meant that much of their spare time was spent with the family. The college boys interviewed noted that this was particularly the case for girls, whereas they may have more social contact outside, for example, playing sports or ‘hanging around’ with friends. Those who were working had a similar pattern of socialising to the university students but were obviously more restricted in terms of their free time.

Associating with certain groups or movements is another expression of cultural habits. The emergence of various and differing groups within the Islamic world have their equivalent amongst British Muslims. Some of those in Britain are actually affiliated to or are sub groups of international movements, such as the Tablighi Jamaat or Hizb-u-Tahrir, whereas others formed specifically within the context of British Islam, The Islamic Foundation and The Muslim Parliament being examples. The ideological differentiation amongst Muslims which I looked at in chapters One and Two has sometimes led to youth activities and groups being divided along similar lines. As I observed earlier the conflicts may not be as intense within the university campus, but they can lead to difficulties, including the struggle for dominance of the student body.

Active Identity

Identity is expressed through the actions of a person or group. By behaving in a particular manner, associating with certain groups or adopting specific habits a person demonstrates aspects of his or her identity. To give a practical example of this, I quote one young man from university:

“... CDs, tapes, videos, films, all these things, throughout my life they’re played a big influence ... even at this point last year I’d say I was consuming music and films and this year now all that’s changed. I’ll have CDs of Qur’an
instead, lecture tapes by prominent Muslim scholars instead of Michael Jackson". (FG2 - M)

He uses the example of various media, which is relevant in itself for this research, to show the way in which cultural and social activities change to reflect one’s new outlook or identification. Another respondent in the same interview agreed that many Muslims would have music collections but would neglect their religious education. However for those more conscious, knowing that Muslims have certain Islamic obligations will influence their behaviour, though the extent of this influence differs from person to person.

“As a Muslim [who you mix with has an influence] because I wouldn’t... you can’t mix with ... as a Muslim you can’t mix with the wrong type of people, you have to know will their personality reflect on you, will it show your personality up if someone’s going with 5 different girls at a time and you’re hanging around with that person, you have to think is someone else, a non-Muslim, personality going to rub off on a Muslim, so that’s why you have to watch your company”. (FG3 - M)

These types of decisions and thought processes are what precede active identity construction, whereby something is decided or decided against with a view to the consequences it has on a person’s own character and behaviour. Associations and friendship networks were an important part of the lives of young British Muslims as is the case for other groups of people. For those involved in organisations, especially the more politically vocal ones, expressing this association was of significance. Something as apparent as the headscarf for women could be used as an expression of Muslim identity, and an element of this was present in some women’s decision to wear it. Again a practical step through which one is automatically associating oneself with certain groups, beliefs and practices. Referring once again to the video clip (Islam in Europe – see Appendix D), the first interviewee states that living in Britain and experiencing racism made her think about who she was and once she had decided to focus on the Muslimness of her identity, the headscarf was simply a manifestation of this identity.

Although many negative stereotypes are associated with Muslim women’s attire, including the headscarf, there have been a few articles and discussion programmes which allow Muslim women to express their own feelings about Islam, including their
motivations for dressing the way they do. In the interviews carried out with six Muslim women, Bunting (2001) asks, 'Can Islam Liberate Women?' and answers in the subtitle, 'Muslim women and scholars think it does - spiritually and sexually'. This is an example of media providing an opportunity for Muslims to speak for themselves, albeit within the writer's own framework. In describing her interviewees, Bunting writes

"all university graduates, all in their mid-twenties in careers ranging from journalism to teaching, all have chosen in the past few years to wear hijab. They justify wearing hijab, either as a public statement of their own spiritual quest, or of their political identity in a world where Islam perceives itself as under threat, or both... most strikingly, however, all of these women fluently and cogently articulate how they believe Islam has liberated and empowered them." (p 16).

In debating they try to clarify misconceptions that the West, especially feminists, have about women in Islam. They try to illustrate the framework within which rights, for men and women, are constructed and how ultimately it is the equality in the eyes of their Creator that matters. Views on sexuality are a good example of how misunderstanding exists about Islam's position on women. These Muslim women have no desire to express their sexuality in public but rather they believe its proper place is in the privacy of an intimate relationship.

"Sexuality is not to be used to exert power but to express love. What they hotly deny is that veiling, and modesty in public, is a form of repression. It is not about shame of the female body, as western feminists sometimes insist, but about claiming privacy over their own bodies" (p 19).

By keeping their sexuality in the private domain women felt they had to be engaged with at an intellectual level and that attention from the opposite sex directed towards their physical appearance was limited. This was one of the reasons they felt liberated in a society where women's physical appearance was often the criterion by which they are judged.

The hijab has come to symbolise Muslim identity in a very obvious way. This includes expressions of political struggles worldwide and for some women the wearing of hijab may have come about during the process of searching for a Muslim identity. Living in a non-Muslim environment may have triggered a kind of questioning about one's identity.
and one result of this learning or re-learning process was the adoption of Islamic dress. Two of the young women in focus groups commented that although wearing the hijab relates to identification as a Muslim, ultimately it was about understanding your religion and that God had prescribed certain dress codes on Muslims. “I don’t think the hijab is just something about identity, it is but that’s not what it is, I’m not a big fan of going out and making a statement but I know for a lot of people it is” (FG5 - F).

What this demonstrates is that even something as simple as the hijab, which appears to represent the oppression of women to others, is a complex phenomenon and much thought has gone into its various aspects. The reasons for wearing it may include a similar element for most women, but each experience is individual and contains unique circumstances. The same can be said for other aspects of Muslim identity and in this way it is difficult to generalise about people motives.

Culture

Culture is an essential part of the identity of an individual or community. It is through the actions and practices encompassed within culture that a person may be identified. In the case of my respondents much of this culture stems from their religious beliefs as well as the practices of their parents’ culture. In addition to this there are individual habits, preferences and experiences which inform how they think about themselves and how they conduct their lives. A further element in this combination is the presence of their ‘British’ cultural habits, all of which combine to produce their particular identity. The influence of being brought up in Britain yet with Islamic teachings, especially in the home environment, has in fact given rise to what has been termed a ‘British Muslim’ identity. Whilst many of the cultural practices from previous generations have been adopted by young Muslims, some have been modified and yet others have been completely discarded. The culture of the Indian subcontinent still exerts a strong influence on the lifestyles of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims in the UK, however, it has often undergone a process of adaptation before it has been taken on board by younger Muslims.
In talking about their parents’ culture and the way they practised their religion, the respondents expressed both positive and negative aspects from which they had developed their own lifestyles. One of the feelings that could be gathered from comments was that parents often gave more importance to ‘cultural’ practices which were not necessarily based in any religious teachings. Also there were certain practices which were not against Islam neither were they derived from the religion but were taken as seriously as religious practice, the abandonment of which was frowned upon. As these were practiced like religious observance, non-Muslims may also mistake them for Islamic teachings when clearly this is not the case. An example of this could be dress, such that not wearing traditional shalwar kameez is equated to abandoning an Islamic requirement, whereas it is a specifically South Asian custom.

“Well for my parents religion is very, very culturalised and they started separating it from culture after me. My mum started reading a translation of the Qur’an quite recently and she started learning everything again from scratch because they were brought up in a community where Kashmiri culture was Islam and they don’t say be a good Muslim, they say be a good Kashmiri.” (FG5)

At the same time there was value for cultural diversity within Islam, such as different languages, dress, food and other traditions as long as they didn’t take priority over Islamic teachings.

“I think culture is really important because that’s what makes life beautiful, it really identifies the person and that is what shapes you, it is where you came from, your culture is your language, the way you dress, the way you behave, the way you speak, the way you live basically and not to quote the Qur’an or something but Allah (swt) said ‘I made you into nations and tribes so that you would recognise each other’ and there’s so much diversity and beauty in that because that is what it’s all about, educating yourself about the world around, about other people and Islam allows for this and we can come into this country and we do have this English culture... I see myself as lucky that I can clue into that but at the same time if there’s a bunch of Indians sat here and they’re talking away I know what they’re talking about and that’s how I’d identify culture, the way a person is, the way they live but the way I see it is Islam doesn’t have a culture as such, it says yes take your culture but we’re all Muslims and you can adapt little things...” (FG5)
For this group of women the positive or negative aspects of culture seemed to be determined by whether there was an element of choice in its being practised and of course whether it adhered to Islamic teachings.

"If you accept Islam has no flaws then if you can pick out all the positive things about Indian culture that tie in with Islam and the same with English culture then you really do get the best of both worlds. You can fit in because you can go into your workplace and you can say I am English I have a northern accent, I have a southern accent, Scottish whatever but at the same time you’ve got your hijab and you’re saying I am an English Muslim, I’m a British Muslim, Indian Muslim whatever but you can fit it.” (FG5)

For those respondents who had chosen to prioritise Islam in their lives a change of focus had taken place. Their perspective on life had modified so that gaining knowledge of Islam and aiming to be living examples of its teaching was uppermost in their minds. The various inputs into their culture as young British Muslims, as mentioned above, would then be scrutinised to ensure that they were within the parameters of Islam. If this was not the case they would be rejected.

In this way British Muslim culture continues to be developed. Culture is constantly changing and adapting, therefore it is difficult to define precisely what constitutes culture, rather a broad classification may be used to encompass its various aspects. However, rather than finding a definition for culture, I am working through the data to show how young Muslims are themselves defining their own cultural practices. Thus the themes emerging from the focus group interviews all relate to aspects of young British Muslim culture.

**Media, Perceptions and Islamophobia**

This section examines the perceptions of Islam and Muslims which interviewees thought existed amongst non-Muslims in Britain as attitudes towards Muslims are an important facet of the lives of British Muslims. How they are perceived affects their day-to-day life in terms of education, employment, service provision and general interactions with other members of society. The issue of perceptions is linked to media portrayal and talking about one instinctively brings to mind the other as many of the ideas about Islam and Muslims are developed through the media.
“Media provides non-Muslims the only point to get in contact with Islam and some non-Muslims who learn anything about Islam is from the media and the media is biased and portrays a very negative, outright slanderous picture of Islam. I mean when I first got to university there was some sort of media coverage about Pakistan, what was happening there and obviously people watch the news and I heard general stereotypical comments and it was not because they were racist or that they were Islamophobic, its just that what they had known or perceived to be and it took me a little while to explain things to them and they realised that Muslims are not all barbarians and they didn’t have a kalashnikov in one hand and the Qur’an in the other standing on top of a tank, they eventually realised that Muslims are decent and that the media shouldn’t be, not necessarily be trusted, but that they should go out and do some more reading about Muslims” (FG2 - M).

As noted in previous chapters, Muslims in Britain share concerns with their fellow Muslims around the world and because of this they are perceived by non-Muslims to have interests which may conflict with British attitudes or aspirations. This perception is normally acutest during an international crisis involving Muslims. The role of the media in these situations is vital as almost all of the information is relayed through it. Associating Muslims abroad with Muslims in the UK then has an impact on attitudes towards them, often negative, for example, during the two Gulf wars, after the Oklahoma City bombing in the USA and most notably in the aftermath of September 11th 2001. If the focus group interview had been done after this last event there would have been more information to substantiate this, however, there has been documentation of the repercussions of the attacks on Muslims here and in other countries, especially the USA (Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia 2001, The Muslim News, October 2001). The predominant method by which people formulate their opinions and understanding during these situations is the media. An intensification in anti-Islamic discourse proliferated both media and academia following September 11th. Many of the commentaries were analytical in their nature, debating either the reasons for the attack, the situation in Muslim countries or foreign policy issues which may have prompted the attack. Unfortunately much of this rhetoric was accompanied by verbal and physical abuse on Muslims, including knife and baseball attacks, as well arson and bomb threats on mosques and Muslim organisations. The Runnymede Trust’s Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia felt it necessary to publish a resource booklet ‘Addressing Prejudice and Islamophobia’ as a result of the reactions in Britain to the WTC attacks. It cites examples of Islamophobic behaviour and attitudes which transpired in the days after the attack and it also provides guidelines and resources on how to deal with the
situation and combat prejudice. The role of the media can not be underestimated in these situations. Generally the images and ideas portrayed in the media about Muslims, both in Britain and abroad, make up a substantial proportion of peoples’ understanding of Islam and Muslims. Therefore, at times when there is such intense focus on Muslims, the information circulated within mass media is crucial.

Most of the young Muslims I interviewed shared the view that the media portrays an inaccurate and derogatory image of Islam and its followers. There was an underlying assumption that this portrayal was responsible for the unfavourable attitudes towards Islam which seemed to be held by the majority of the non-Muslims in Britain. There was discussion about the types of images commonly found in both the broadsheet and tabloid press as well as electronic media. Also, there were suggestions as to how they felt the media operated to achieve this type of discourse. I will briefly illustrate this with some quotes, but not go into great detail as this represents the majority of comments and is also material covered previously.

“At the moment I have seen the media’s mentality to be out of fifty Muslims they interview they’ll pick the most derogative comment made and focus on that, they’ll ignore all the decent comments that are true but one person who sadly doesn’t know that much about Islam, who just practises Islam without knowing why, they’ll interview that person... and they know that’s the kind of Muslims they want the public to see”. (FG3 - M)

“Everything that is oppressive to women is link to religion... the other thing is that every time something comes on about Islam in the media you are never given 100% of the picture, Islam isn’t like take one topic and derive your opinion from that, you have to look at the whole social system and to give all that information on TV you really need to go deeply into Islam and understand and they just get one topic and say ‘oh arranged marriages’... what’s their concept of arranged marriage and what’s the understanding in Islam?... They take it out of context and make their own context and then say lets put it into that”. (FG1 - F)

“They do it themselves sometimes, beating their sister up or something like that, there are some families, a minority but it does happen, it more cultural, its to do with the fact they’re illiterate but the third person will see that’s to do with the fact that they’re Muslim... and then the media pick up on that and society only sees ‘oh they’re Muslims’, it must be in Islam to kill your wife if she doesn’t cook!’ (FG3 - M)
This last quote demonstrates that Muslims were themselves seen as participating in acts which were un-Islamic, giving fuel to the media. These messages were then being relayed to members of the public who were perhaps unaware of the complexities of a situation but instead drew simplistic conclusions from the limited information given.

Respondents made a distinction between educated and uneducated people as to how they perceived Muslims. The former, by definition, had more knowledge or as importantly were more inclined to gain knowledge so that they acquired an accurate picture of Islam and Muslims rather than rely on sources such as media and popular opinion.

“I think here in this society the white people that are educated don’t see Pakistanis as being like that [wear pyjama-suits, have 101 kids, eat curry and stink!] but those who are still say the lower classes think ‘oh she’s a Paki she’s not allowed to do this, she’s not allowed to do that’ but I think the educated who go out to university and see that there are so many Muslims in university and so many Muslims in the working environment in top firms realise that that’s now what its about”. (FG4 - F)

In a number of focus group interviews respondents were asked explicitly whether they felt people make an association between them and other Muslims, such that if anything negative is reported about any Muslim individual(s) or country, they are also seen as part of that. Ultimately this was a question trying to ascertain whether the media is more powerful or whether personal experiences and interactions are. It could be assumed that having contact and interacting with Muslims would be the best way to tackle stereotypical ideas, however, respondents tended to give a mixture of opinions about this. The impact of media seemed very powerful when it came to ideas about Muslims and even knowing a Muslim for some time may not have dispelled myths about them.

“I find it sad that that’s what they think of Muslims generally, they might like me for who I am but they won’t like Muslims for who they are... just from what they’ve heard so they will always keep a bit weary of me ‘oh careful he’s... he might end up bombing your house or something!’” (FG3 - M).

In one focus group interview the young women debating this ‘media versus personal contact’ issue concluded that even if you as a Muslim contradict all the stereotypes, for a woman that often meant being educated, articulate and working in a professional
career, people would insist that you are an exception to the norm and that actually the rest of the Muslim population lived up to the stereotypes (FG4 - F). Another commented:

“There’s lots of places in England where they haven’t seen Muslims, when I came [to university] I met people who were like I’ve never seen somebody who is not English where I live, never mind a Muslim, a Muslim girl who wears a scarfy thing and I don’t even know one... so there are a lot of people who don’t know anything and all they hear is they see these films about Muslim terrorists, they read these articles about oppression, they see what’s happening on the news around the world... just these words, people don’t know what the word fundamentalist means, they link it with terrorism”. (FG5 - F)

Of all the interviewees only two (both in the same focus group interview) said they had never heard of the word ‘Islamophobia’. They knew prejudice against Muslims did occur but had not heard of the term. One of these two stated that this was probably because at university there isn’t much Islamophobia or that at least one is not aware of it (FG6 - F). I suggest that the university environment may shelter students from explicit forms of anti-Muslim behaviour to some extent. If Muslim students chose to study and socialise with other Muslims they may reduce the opportunities in which they can be discriminated against. Also, optimistically university students should have a higher than average intelligence level which perhaps enables them to overcome stereotypes and develop more informed opinions. However, that is not to say anything about institutionalised Islamophobia. Many of the other respondents said that although they had heard of Islamophobia, to their knowledge they had not suffered from it.

“I know about it, I know it definitely does exist, I haven’t personally experienced it but I know that once you tell someone who has educated themselves about Islam just through the media... then they are very scared of you... the first thing on their mind is ‘oh no terrorist’ or ‘he’s going to do something, he’s an extremist fundamentalist’, you know that’s what they’re first thinking, then you have to take it from there and educate them and they still won’t believe you cos they believe the media first”. (FG3 - M)

For several years now organisations have been highlighting anti-Islamic attitudes in Britain, the occurrence of which appears to have increased since 1989. The young Muslims interviewed were asked how they felt this affects Muslim identity. The few answers that were given could be divided into two obvious categories, the first is a
strengthening of Muslim identity and the other a disassociation from Islam or at least a
less overt identification as a Muslim.

“I think it’s quite an individual thing from what I have seen anyway. Those
who are strong in their faith and those who have encountered these types of
discriminations it makes them stronger, it makes them angry, they fight it in
their own way. Those who are weak in their own faith they’ll say ‘oh I’ve got
to encounter all these problems to get to where I want to get so therefore I am
just going to leave it because it’s not worth it’. As for a mass strengthening or
weakening I am not sure”. (FG7 - F)

One response was that at least the existence of Islamophobia has made Muslims realise
there is such a thing as a distinct Muslim identity and this awareness in itself may help
to highlight and eventually combat Islamophobia. Overall respondents talked more
about perceptions and attitudes towards Islam than they cited actual incidents of
Islamophobia.

Increasingly attention has been given to media monitoring and response within Muslim
communities. Whereas some years ago there was a general awareness that the media
was frequently involved in misrepresenting Islamic issues, more recently Muslims have
moved towards taking whatever action they can to combat the problem and lessen the
impact. The young Muslims I interviewed however were not involved in any structured
or even informal organisation (or indeed as individuals) which dealt with media
monitoring and response. They were conscious of the role of media and aware of
specific occurrences of anti-Muslim press but had not responded or approached the
media about this.

However pervasive the negative views about Muslims appeared to be and however
difficult the task of breaking down the stereotypes seemed, the young Muslims I
interviewed were optimistic about their ability to contribute to a more knowledgeable
society. They felt that sharing their knowledge of Islam and their enthusiasm for their
beliefs could have positive outcomes. Compared to their parents they saw themselves in
a stronger position to relay the message of Islam to the British people. This was due to
various factors including no language barriers, familiarity with British institutions,
shared schooling experiences and a generally more interactive existence with more non-
Muslims.
I had anticipated that ideas of cultural and media imperialism would feature in the debate with my respondents. Though I acknowledge no question addressed this issue directly, I thought respondents may allude to issues relating to the impact of dominating cultural forces which were in opposition to their own perspectives as Muslims. Any experiences of 'domination' or imperialism if they were articulated were not framed in the discourse on cultural imperialism but were seen more as the way they dealt with their everyday contact and interactions in a non-Muslim country. It would appear from their discussions and patterns of social activities that they had made a concerted effort to reduce the impact of non-Islamic culture on their lives, to the extent this was possible, by finding and indeed creating alternatives to mainstream culture and society. There was concern that many Muslims were moving away from their religion and it was acknowledged that living in a non-Muslim environment greatly influenced this process, but this was not described as a form of imperialism or a forceful process.

**Muslim Media**

As far as Muslim media was concerned, a few publications were mentioned and some general comments were made about them (for example, *Trends*, *The Invitation*, *Q-News* and *The Muslim News*). There was a general consensus that Muslim media had great potential to develop further, encompass more information and appeal to a larger number of people. What already existed was appreciated and it was seen as a positive way to initiate debate amongst Muslim communities which could also extend into mainstream society. One group of girls felt that Muslim media was a useful tool to discuss 'lighter' Islamic issues or to introduce someone to Islam but that it was a precursor to more serious literature dealing with issues in a more comprehensive manner. Most agreed that there needs to be more Muslim media and what exists currently needs more publicity. The purpose of setting up Muslim publications was seen to be to educate the Muslim community about Islamic issues as well as giving information about what was happening in the *umma* across the world. Another reason it was thought to have been set up was to counteract the negative portrayal of Islam and Muslims in the mainstream, Western media.
A point that was made by several interviewees was that although establishing an alternative to mainstream media for Muslim communities was a commendable act, actually participating in the mainstream media was vital.

“You have to confront the fact that media does portray this negative image, the question is what can you do about it? I think the main thing is basically to participate in the media, contribute to it to portray different images of Muslims, that we are not all like this or like that, basically show that we are just like any other group, that we’re not defined by these particular images”. (FG2 - M)

A dual approach was suggested in which Muslim media would continue to be developed but along side this inroads would have to be made into mainstream media so that the impact of a Muslim perspective would reach a greater audience.

“Its just started, I mean its just like in its infancy Muslim media now, you’ve got to give it time, hopefully in the next few years the way money is and communications and the Internet it will rise and expand tremendously... Muslim media itself is good but we need to get amongst the media there is, it would be pointless us fighting it out with the Western media, we need to reach the West in its entirety, the population of the West and educate them, that’s the best way of doing it instead of having a constant battle with the western media”. (FG2)

One young woman commented that because many of the Muslim publications were written by Muslims who were born and brought up in Britain it made it simpler to relate to issues they had reported on. Writers and editors were often second and third generation Muslims who were acquainted with the British lifestyle and could communicate with their audience in an effective way. Thus, the appeal to young Muslims will be much greater if people from their generation, who have had similar experiences, have similar aspirations and can relate to the problems and challenges they face, are the ones constructing a discourse on British Muslim life. Even the differences and problems between groups of Muslims can be debated in a language and manner appropriate to today’s climate. As the scepticism about mainstream media increases, the use of alternative sources, mainly Muslim media for young Muslims, will also increase.

The Internet was seen as an easily accessible way to learn about Islam, keep up to date with the news and views of Muslims around the world and express one’s own opinions (as setting up a website is fairly easy). The proliferation of websites was well known to
respondents but they did not always spend a long time on the internet and often went to a few chosen websites to obtain information. They did however recognise the important role that the internet and other such high technology media would play in the future.

SUMMARY

The topics presented in this analysis reflect the theoretical themes and issues discussed in the first two chapters of this study. Identity is the theme that relates to almost all of these topics and is pivotal to this research. Thus, constructions and expressions of Muslim identities are closely linked to these topics, such that for example, gender, social life, diaspora or media, all impact on identity. My objective in setting up questions to explore these topics has been to understand how it is these are influencing identity.

Global forces seem to have had particular implications for the world’s Muslim communities. Young British Muslims maintain an awareness of these implications and global media, communication and information technologies have enabled them to be better informed of the situations affecting Muslims worldwide. As a result my respondents were conscious of world politics but at the same time were equally concerned with issues involving Muslim Britons. Their political outlook has expanded somewhat compared to their parent’s generation to encompass more then just diaspora connections and the proliferation of politicised Muslim groups and movements has helped facilitate this wider interest.

They saw their role as proactive and positive in countering negative stereotypes of Islam and Muslims in the media. In terms of media, they seemed quite conscious of the impact of media (and cultural) discourses of British and Western societies. On the whole they perceived their own readings of media to be critical and thought that the impact of media and popular culture upon themselves was limited, even minimal. Though they acknowledged and were positive about aspects of British social, economic and educational systems, they were aware of the forces within these that conflicted with their own beliefs and practices.
Most of my respondents would most certainly place themselves amongst the group of Muslims in Britain who are aware of their religious obligations and are increasingly giving more importance to Islam in their lives. Furthermore they would also classify themselves as people who are conscientious of maintaining links with and taking the message of Islam to the rest of society. Their experiences and aspirations for Britain's Muslim communities will perhaps differ from their parents and this will no doubt be influenced by their ideas of Britishness, to which they associate differently from their parents. In fact discourses and debates about Britishness are probably followed more keenly by them compared to their parents. One reason for this could be that they are often seen as a generation which is 'caught between two cultures' and are having to show how they have balanced the 'South Asian' and 'British' cultures which they belong to. Rather than the often pessimistic outlook forecast by this theory, my respondents felt they were in a favourable position to bridge the gap between Muslim and non-Muslim societies. The assertive identification as 'British Muslims' appears to be one aspect of this bridging – affirming the mutual compatibility of being British and being Muslim. In addition to making connections with non-Muslims, they saw their role as extending to their own families and communities. Community issues for these younger Muslims are changing compared to some years ago as the definition of community itself changes, particularly because of new virtual communities. Whereas first generation South Asian Muslims may have been bound by certain sectarian, ethnic and ideological divisions, some of the Muslims in this study were conscious of transcending these barriers to achieve unity.

Negotiations and discussions about issues such as marriage, gender and education do not only affect the parent-child relationship of these young Muslims but they also connect with non-Muslim peers, colleagues and the general population. In the focus group interviews my respondents talked about how their awareness of the Islamic teachings on these social issues has started a process of learning or relearning for themselves and others. As they have obtained Islamic knowledge they have shared this with their parents and it has enabled them to enter into debate with those inquisitive about Islam. This has been of particular significance for women who have often drawn on Islam to modify their standing in terms of continuing education, choice of marriage partner and career development. This acquisition of knowledge is reflected in their
choice of social and cultural activities and ultimately in how they are identifying themselves and how they want others to perceive them.

It is probably useful to outline once again that this work is not representative of Muslims in Britain. The young Muslims interviewed are from a selected group of the population and are not associated with any particular school of thought or organisation. Whilst this work projects a fairly optimistic picture of young Muslims in Britain, their living and working, their attitudes towards non-Muslims and their aspirations, this does not characterise all Muslims. A lot of problems exist amongst Muslim communities, especially amongst the youth. These include drugs, crime, low educational achievements and unemployment, as well as being disproportionately represented in prisons (Birt, 2000). Muslims do however also suffer from discrimination. What this research has tried to examine are some of the processes taking place within the lives of selected individuals who identify themselves as Muslims. In examining different aspects of their lives an account has been given of the evolution of culture and religion amongst young British Muslims.
CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to develop knowledge of how young Muslims in Britain are interacting with the media and social environment. In doing so my objective was to understand how these interactions are influencing their concepts of who they are and how they identify themselves, not just in terms of defining their identity but also through their actions and affiliations. Furthermore, to understand what I anticipated would be one of the predominant media inputs into their lives, I examined Muslim media publications. In this concluding chapter I want to tie together the themes outlined in the theoretical framework with the data I have obtained. I will do this by answering the questions that have emerged from this material, including:

- How have family and community dynamics influenced what it means to be a young Muslim in Britain today? And conversely how are ideas of community changing because of the perceptions and behaviour of young Muslims themselves?
- What new ideas of gender and marriage are emerging amongst young British Muslims?
- What does it mean to be a young Muslim in Britain today? That is, how is identity ‘actively’ expressed?
- How is British Muslim identity being articulated and expressed?
- How is ‘space’ changing to reflect any new expressions of British Muslim identity?
- How is Muslim media influencing these expressions of identity?
- What is the significance of Islamic learning and knowledge acquisition on identity?
- What impact are globalising forces and diaspora connections having on young Muslims?

Similar to the themes presented in the theoretical chapter, the topics discussed in this chapter are inextricably linked. For example, ‘learning and knowledge’ is directly affected by media which itself is influenced by ‘globalisation and diaspora’ and community dynamics. Also, seeking knowledge is in fact part of ‘active identity’ but I
have approached the two themes separately because active identity involves more than just seeking knowledge. Therefore, whilst I have categorised themes according to the above broad questions, it should be borne in mind that there is significant overlap between themes and issues. This practical difficulty in presenting themes as mutually exclusive reflects the reality of the lives of young Muslims. In the same way it is problematic to distinguish clearly between one theme and another, it is difficult to pinpoint any particular influencing factor in terms of identity formation – a complex relationship between all the factors results in determining what it means to be a Muslim. The impact of any one factor on the identity of young Muslims (for example, family or media) can not be measured individually with accuracy.

At times I generalise about young Muslims in Britain or apply the results of this study to a group larger than the sample but this does not overlook the fact that my work is not meant to be representative. My sample was selected to reflect what I observed to be the increasing attachment to and practice of Islam amongst younger South Asian Muslims in Britain and as such it can be seen as a purposive sample. However, I have made these generalisations from my own observations of being part of a Muslim community that seem to confirm some aspects of my findings. Additionally, this does not mean I am unaware of the fact that the group ‘young Muslims’ comprises great diversity.

Family and Community

I had envisaged that family dynamics would be an important aspect of the lives of my respondents for several reasons. Firstly their age meant that family links would be strong (still unmarried and ‘living with’ their immediate family, even though many were temporarily away at university). The respondents who were not university students (working or college students) were living at home with their parents, therefore the family would be central to their lives and decision making. Another reason family relationships were of interest was because I wanted to investigate the extent to which conflict existed between parents and children. Thus, the question I asked ‘how useful is the theory of ‘caught between two cultures’ in explaining the lives of young British Muslims?’, needed to be examined using evidence from the fieldwork data. The main way I sought to do this was by focusing on the role of Islam in intergenerational
relationships. A third reason I thought intergenerational relationships in particular would be interesting to examine was because they would perhaps show how the concept of Britishness was changing from one generation of South Asian Muslims to the next.

Undoubtedly the family, especially parents, had an influence on how the young Muslims in my research behaved and what identifications they made. Although university students had for a number of years modified this influence because of their geographical distance (apart from those studying in their home city), they still maintained a connection with home and family. One of the clearest patterns that can be detected from the data collected in focus group interviews were respondents’ perceptions that their parents had a very strong association to culture, often at the expense of religion. Whereas they themselves made determined efforts to clarify which beliefs and practices were Islamic and which were simply cultural accretions (often non-Islamic), their parents seemed to give cultural practices a considerable degree of importance. Although this did not appear to be causing any outright conflict between parents and children, children were somewhat dismayed with their parents’ unwillingness to make the distinction between culture and religion. They themselves were reducing or marginalising the superfluous cultural activities that had become the norm in their families and in the community. An example of this was dress, whereby Muslim women in particular had modified their dress to be appropriate to their environment but in accordance to Islamic principles. This did not mean that South Asian dress was abandoned but that it had become just one possible form of Islamic dress amongst others. This reinforces what Dwyer (1998) found young Muslim girls to be doing, ‘resisting the dress code’, by subverting or resisting behavioural codes associated with different styles of dress. In fact, Dwyer’s respondents showed that wearing different clothes in different places often had no particular significance anyway. Again this was an example of how young Muslim women’s interpretation and practice of Islam differed from their parents.

Overall parents’ reactions to their children becoming more conscientious about religious obligations and Muslim identity were positive. In fact ‘Islam’ had opened up channels of communication through which to develop and enhance the parent-child relationship because it was something common to both generations. It may be that for parents afraid
of their children losing all connections with their culture, mother tongue and similar aspects of ethnic identity, a more assertive Muslimness (or increased religiosity) was seen as one way of valuing and maintaining these connections. What Islam actually meant to the young Muslims though was often quite different from their parents. My respondents wanted to make Islam the overarching factor in their lives such that it influenced every aspect of their behaviour. So apart from formal worship (for example, prayers, fasting), they wanted to subject their education, social life, marriage and other lifestyle factors to Islamic teachings. They thought their parents did not apply Islam in this way but rather emphasised it on particular occasions such as *Eid, Ramadan*, births and deaths and only during formal acts of worship.

That family life is important to my respondents was also evident through the data collected in the Activities Diaries. A considerable proportion of socialising and free time was spent with family or family friends. ‘Community activities’ were however not so apparent, apart from attending weddings and similar celebrations. So family was more of a focal point than community. This tells us something about the development of ‘community’ activities for younger Muslims. It probably reflects the fact that after initial years of learning the Qur’an or mother tongue classes at mosques or community centres, teenagers and youth do not have any established community structure in which to learn and socialise. It would not be accurate to generalise from my own limited data, but from observations of the Muslim community in Nottingham, I would say youth activities and facilities are fairly limited. Organisations such as the Karimia Institute have recognised this void for some years now and have made some progress in catering for youth in terms of learning and recreation, but more work needs to be done to provide a comprehensive infrastructure. Locality is important when examining the facilities available to youth and each city differs in its provision, such that some areas may be much better equipped than others. Many community based facilities are still situated in mosques, which provide basic teaching and welfare services but generally have not expanded to provide sports, recreation, homework clubs, social gathering and similar activities for teenagers and youngsters. This is may be one reason why young Muslims have developed new communities for themselves. Though they retain links with family/family friends, their circle of friends and peers extends beyond what might conventionally be understood as the community, that is, those sharing the immediate
locality and family networks (including the biraderi). Because many of my respondents were socialising in what I have called socio-educational environments, their community networks have expanded. This expansion includes geographical space, ethnicity and sectarian divisions. National and even international events have brought together different sets of people compared to the community of their parents. This contact is then often maintained through electronic media, turning ‘real’ communities into ‘virtual’ ones. Because this contact is international, the ‘community’ is no longer restricted to the immediate environment. Thus the mediated environment in which we live has produced new concepts of community. The more tangible aspects of local community; physical proximity, shared space and face-to-face interactions, have been replaced by conceptual proximity, that is, sharing of values and ideas regardless of geographical location. These are some of the trends that Mandaville (2001) cites in his work.

Respondents at university had created their own community on campus and their lack of contact with activities in their parents’ community was to be expected as they were away from here (though two male university students visited the mosque, these were presumably in the city in which they were studying). Friendship networks that developed from Islamic Societies at university operated independently of formally organised events through the university. The campus community was by its nature temporary and only if individual students decided to maintain contact with one another would it be continued. Nottingham University has a substantial population of overseas students, so in this case the community can be very different from the towns and cities home students are coming from.

In this way the sense of belonging to particular communities for young Muslims is changing. Home locality still exerts a strong influence on how the individual and groups perceive themselves and the experiences they have, but this is being disrupted or at least diluted by factors external to the local community. So though Nottingham and Leicester have specific community structures and experiences, the changing sense of belonging to more than just the family and neighbourhood network is introducing new dimensions into community life. Rejection of biraderi systems and closer affiliation with international movements of political Islam are two examples of how this traditional sense of belonging is being disrupted. Different interpretations and practices of Islam,
conflicting ideologies and foreign interest (and influence) through community projects/mosques, are all realigning previous demarcations of community. With young Muslims from particular groups stating explicitly their connections to the global umma, local community structures may be bypassed or undermined in favour of international associations. With increasing vigilance of Muslim communities following the Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Bill and post-September 11th suspicions, the autonomy of Muslims in Britain may be reduced and community structures may change.

One particular sentiment that came across from focus group interviews and the Muslim media survey was the desire to overcome mono-ethnic/racial groups. My respondents, and I would argue other young Muslims, are trying hard not to restrict themselves to ethnic, racial, sectarian or ideological boundaries constructed and upheld by earlier generations. In some ways they have been forced into more diverse communities of Muslims in the British (diaspora) context, so this has enabled diversity to a certain degree. However, in addition to this they are conscientious about racism amongst Muslims and want to combat this. The commonality they have (re)discovered through their religious beliefs is helping to overcome differences of race, ethnicity, ‘caste’ or biraderi. I would say young Muslims are increasingly critical of the biraderi system when they see it as unnecessarily hindering social practices such as marriage or at least restricting them in un-Islamic ways. That is not to say they do not succumb to pressure from parents and elders or even the wider community, but that it is something they are looking to modify wherever possible. Furthermore, the presence of converts to Islam is no doubt helping to alter the definition of community. The shifting boundaries of community and collective belonging are thus evident amongst Muslims in Britain. Once black or white people convert to Islam they are automatically included in the ‘we’ of the Muslim community and global umma, but whether they are as readily accepted by, for example, South Asian Muslims, is debatable. The respondents of my study were keen to demonstrate the diversity amongst their own Muslim circles, for example, one group noted the different national origins of the participants in the focus group interview and one woman mentioned how her work place (a Muslim school) represented a microcosm of the global umma. However, they were acutely aware of the problem of racism within

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44 See The Muslim News, No 113, 25 September 1998/4 Jumada al-Thani 1419, for Muslims’ concerns over the Bill.
Muslim communities. They tended to see this more as a problem amongst older or first generation Muslims because of their limited contact with Muslims from other racial or ethnic backgrounds, whereas they themselves had experienced the broader range of ethnic and racial groups amongst the British Muslim communities.

Whilst my own respondents did not manifest any tendency to do so, it is possible that some young Muslims are moving away from their local (parental) community because they see it as being less Islamically inclined than they would prefer it to be. They may shun 'cultural' practices to such a degree that they see the only way to keep their Islam 'pure' is by distancing themselves from the South Asian cultural accretions of Islam developed in local communities. This group of young Muslims may have distanced themselves from the South Asian element of their lives but others have moved away from both cultural and religious practices altogether.

It seems that a two-tier community structure is developing in Muslim communities in Britain. For first generation Muslims the links to their ethnic group are still very strong and community structures reflect this. However, for subsequent generations of Muslims, including my respondents, these ethnic links are not as strong. Because of this their friendship networks, that is their sense of community is different from their parents. In addition to the racially diverse nature of their Muslim friends they also have contact with non-Muslim peers and colleagues, though whether they would see them as constituting a community was not discussed. This does not mean young Muslims have completely abandoned their parents' circle of friends and community connections, but it does mean that as far as they are concerned their own community boundaries encompass a different range of people. In fact as Vertovec (1998) asserts, young Muslims are engaging in both 'community' and 'context' and these are mutually conditioning spheres rather than exclusive terrains that render Muslim youth 'between two cultures'.

In the first chapter I asked whether the idea of being 'caught between two cultures' was a useful theory to apply to the respondents of my study. I would say that the factor enabling a smooth transition from one generation to the next in this case is Islam and thus the dichotomous relationship often used to describe young South Asian Muslims
does not seem appropriate here. The young Muslims in my study have used Islam to bridge the ‘gap’ between their parents and themselves. The understandings, interpretations and practices of Islam have been different between generations but this has not stopped them from developing a dialogue with their parents with the objective of learning more about their religion.

Reaching a compromise on certain issues is still not easy, for example, where parents may prefer a child to marry a relative from the Indian subcontinent, but the child would prefer to marry someone from Britain. What I feel is taking place, rather than outright conflict, in similar to the description given by the interviewee in the Islam in Europe documentary clip, where she states she gradually persuaded her mother to break her engagement to a relative in Pakistan (see Appendix D for full transcript). Young Muslims are persuading their parents of the benefits of choosing a spouse with a similar inclination towards Islam and someone who has been brought up in the same society rather than choosing someone simply because they are related. Women in particular are using Islam as recourse for decision-making about factors such as marriage, education and career.

Marriage

The changing perceptions and practices of marriage within Muslim communities reflect the identity formation of young Muslims in Britain. The focus group interviews revealed that modifications are being made to how marriage partners are chosen, how weddings are conducted and what aspirations young people have of marriage. These adaptations are taking place after consultation and negotiation between parents and children. The Muslims in my research study thought that it was inevitable that marriage practices would undergo change and they acknowledged that most parents were becoming aware of this fact – whether they agreed with it or not. The more traditionally understood concept of arranged marriage (where parents of both prospective partners would perhaps propose the marriage and the children would normally be expected to consent) was not always an accurate description of the process taking place amongst Muslims in Britain today. The reality more often than not is that parents and children have negotiated what they feel would be an appropriate set of criteria for deciding on a marriage partner. So in some cases parents make suggestions and in some the child
introduces their choice of marriage partner to his or her parents. Because of the new and different circles in which young Muslims were studying, working and socialising, they were meeting potential partners in different ways from the traditional family and community introductions. This meant that the role of parents in the selection process was reduced to an extent. Matrimonial columns in Muslim publications (for example, Q-Introductions in *Q-News* and Matrimonials in *The Muslim News*) were another indication that the social and cultural mechanisms in place for arranging marriages in the Indian subcontinent could not always be transferred effectively to Britain but were modified somewhat or indeed new methods were being adopted.

Several respondents contested the issue of forced marriages, clarifying that an arranged marriage should not be equated with a forced marriage. These respondents were happy with the concept of arranged marriage as an Islamic method of introducing people to one another because they understood it as not involving any element of force or coercion. In fact they indicated that were it not for parents arranging marriages, finding a suitable spouse would be difficult. For most of the interviewees in this research, marriage was a responsibility they shared with their parents, which included finding a partner, arranging the wedding and helping out during married life. It depended on the relationship they had with their parents as to how much they could persuade them to accept their own values and aspirations about marriage, but in some cases it was a matter of insisting things were done the way young Muslims themselves wanted. These young Muslim respondents were not averse to certain aspects of their parents' culture, however, they seemed to be adopting a more assertive role in decision making for marriage. This stemmed mainly from their increasingly confident knowledge and practice of Islamic teachings but was also influenced by concepts of marriage in wider society.

These results are very much in line with Basit's (1997) study of adolescent British Muslim girls. Using her respondents views she demonstrated how arranged marriages are mutually negotiated and accepted between parents and girls, and that although the religious parameters of marrying remain (that is, marrying a Muslim), the model of arranged marriages in Britain is changing. In contrast to their teachers (who thought arranged marriages were oppressive and could not understand why parents were
involved in marriage choice), the girls themselves were happy with the concept of arranged marriage, with input from their parents and equally with participation and choice on their part (Basit, 1997). This misunderstanding on the part of non-Muslims was echoed by female respondents in my research who felt that ‘outsiders’ do not understand the system and by applying their own framework of marriage, love, feminism, freedom etc, automatically connect Asian (Muslim) arranged marriages to oppression and force. Basit’s respondents (both girls and their parents) demonstrated a very pragmatic approach to marriage, whereby the concern of both parents and children were considered. In addition the girls were satisfied with the process and trusted their parents to decide wisely for them. The respondents in my study were older than the girls in Basit’s study but reflected similar views about the positive aspects of arranged marriages. I would say that my respondents had greater autonomy in choosing their partner than these younger girls and were aware of the alternative of introducing someone themselves to their parents rather than have someone introduced to them by parents. Nevertheless, both sets of respondents looked at arranged marriages as a positive aspect of their religious and cultural tradition.

One of the major reasons marriage practices are changing is the changing nature of gender dynamics within Muslim communities. Assertiveness on the part of young Muslim women has particularly challenged the more rigid notions of a ‘proper’ marriage, and indeed even ‘proper’ behaviour for females. This assertiveness and confidence has developed from an understanding of rights and obligations concerning Muslim women.

Learning and Knowledge

Many of the points raised in the themes in this conclusion are determined by the ways in which young Muslims are acquiring religious knowledge and subsequently interpreting and practicing it. Much of Mandaville’s (2001) thesis about the new ways of learning and accessing information in diaspora communities is apparent amongst my own respondents. The great number of resources that can be accessed by Muslims to obtain information on Islamic teachings and issues has resulted in diverse interpretations of Islam. This has also been encouraged by the fact that recognised authority in the sphere
of learning is limited, that is, traditional scholars or *ulama* are not easily available in diaspora. My respondents confirmed the idea that learning was often self motivated and much of their knowledge was self-taught, with a few mentioning they attended formally structured classes. This appears to be another credible reason why articulations of Muslim identities are varied. People have acquired particular aspects of Islamic knowledge and this leads to emphasis on certain teachings/practices. Ideological differences even on campus are testimony to these differentiated readings of Islam.

The participants of my study were very conscious of the need to acquire knowledge in order to practice their faith correctly. In a way, similar to participants in Vertovec’s (1998) study who professed a strong Muslim identity regardless of levels of practice, the respondents in my research differed in their efforts to obtain Islamic knowledge, but all acknowledged its significance. A range existed in their learning patterns, such that a few regularly attended classes to seek knowledge and some read Muslim publications on an irregular basis. However, what is worth mentioning is that all of them perceived their own reading and learning to be a way of increasing their knowledge and practice of Islam and of establishing its role in their lives. An interesting question relating to this that Baktiari (2000) asks is whether Muslims are actually more knowledgeable about Islam even though they have access to greater amounts of information. Thus, in reality the situation is more complex than simply stating Islamic knowledge exists and is more accessible in a greater variety of forms, but it is a matter of examining *how* (if at all) this knowledge is being translated into the behaviour of Muslims. The internet in particular can be problematic in this regard, where a vast amount of information exists but regulation of all this information becomes difficult and its authenticity is often not easy to establish.

One thing that is clearly evident from my research is that young (second and third generation) Muslims are learning about Islam in ways very different from their parents. This is a fairly obvious point to make considering their environment – social, cultural, economic and educational – is very different from the Indian subcontinent. Nevertheless this difference is of consequence as it determines the type of ‘Muslim’ that is developing in Britain and will ultimately decide what direction Islam and British Muslim communities take. Being able to select and incorporate various aspects of
Islamic information in a diversity of combinations means that in practice Islam has come to be represented in a multiplicity of ways. I do not mean to overlook the fact that historically there has been exchange and cross fertilisation of ideas pertaining to Islam, but in contemporary diaspora in a rapidly globalising world, this has developed and intensified in many ways. Where once divisions along fairly simple sectarian lines may have existed, now there is a possibility of adopting aspects of Islam from different, even conflicting ideologies (Mandaville, 2001). The often-unstructured way of learning about Islam that is common amongst young Muslims in diaspora results in these diverse manifestations of Muslim-ness. Actively seeking knowledge through literature, electronic sources, events or more traditional styles of learning is a strong symbol of the assertion of Muslim identities. Thus, the emphasis placed on seeking knowledge in Islam manifests itself through this proactive attitude towards learning.

The process of learning has also developed perceptions of community. Young Muslims have formed new ‘communities of learning’ through organised or formal methods of obtaining knowledge. At university this is most obvious through weekly study circles (Qur’an, Arabic, *fiqh*) or lectures and other activities that promote learning. On a wider scale, youth organisations arrange seminars and conferences that have the same effect of creating communities of learning, mostly ‘real’ but also virtual.

In chapter One I asked ‘how does the media link into these patterns of learning?’ It is clear that the enriched media environment available to Muslims today is enhancing their capacities for learning about Islam. Almost every Muslim media publication is concerned with imparting some kind of Islamic knowledge to its readers. The specific outlook of this (children, families, academic, political etc) obviously varies from one publication to another but this illustrates the range of information that is available. For some of my respondents the presence of Muslim media was essential in providing them with Islamic knowledge. The easy access to and the informal style of many publications made attaining information more flexible than through structured learning. This Islamic knowledge was accompanied by coverage of national and international current affairs focusing on Muslim countries and Muslims. This aspect of information was seen as necessary by focus group interviewees and Muslim media survey respondents because they felt knowing about other Muslims was essential. Much of the focus of Muslim
media was perceived to be on international issues and respondents felt that it was equally as important to understand the issues affecting Muslim communities in Britain.

Though traditional sources of knowledge are not easily accessible to the average young Muslim in the UK, there is a desire to engage with these forms of learning and as stated, Muslim media is playing an important role in producing literature that may go some way in meeting this demand. Whilst not disrespecting the knowledge which imams from the Indian subcontinent have, I think their limited knowledge has been a source of disappointment to many young Muslims who want to learn more about Islam. In addition to this, what they do know has rarely been imparted using suitable methods. These I feel are the two main concerns that need to be addressed. The first involves a rigorous process of re-educating ourselves to be equipped with a comprehensive understanding of Islam. Apart from the classical sciences, what this knowledge has to encompass is contemporary issues, geopolitical debates, social trends, the needs and aspirations of young people in today’s society, what influences Muslims in secular society and similar issues. The second objective, perhaps easier to achieve, is to develop suitable teaching methodology. Extending beyond the need for a common language, these methodologies have to respect traditional ways of passing on knowledge as well as appreciate how to capture the attention of young people who will inevitably compare their learning of Islam with how they are taught in schools. Those responsible for teaching Islam in the community must acknowledge the social and technological changes taking place around them and then must enhance these technologies for the benefit of the umma. Mandaville (2001) notes that traditional institutions such as Al-Azhar in Egypt and Qom in Iran have embraced information technology to further develop their resource base and to appeal to the changing nature of learning by keeping up to date with the latest technology. Demand for knowledge which extends beyond the oft repeated principles of performing ablution and Islamic dress codes has existed for a long time amongst young Muslims. This is reflected in the popularity of shaykhs who have greater knowledge of the physical and spiritual aspects of life and are able to communicate this in an effective and inspirational style. These shaykhs have basically filled a void that had been left by unqualified teachers for Muslims in the diaspora. Some have the added appeal of being well versed in what it is like to live in a Western society and can see life from both perspectives being converts to Islam. Others are
scholars from the Middle East who have recognised the need for learning amongst Muslims living in diaspora and have made an effort to visit countries where substantial numbers of Muslims reside. Although catering primarily for Muslims, these ulama are also important for instructing new converts and as importantly non-Muslims. In contrast to people from South Asia, these ulama have first hand experience of Western societies and knowledge of Western philosophies. Thus, they can understand the complexities and challenges that confront Muslims today.

What Muslim communities need to focus on are skills, knowledge and centres of learning that are equipped to tackle such practical deliberations. And it is not just a matter of constructing buildings but of actually gathering resources, that is, people, who are trained in these sciences. The practice of constructing many mosques in one neighbourhood needs to be reconsidered. An infrastructure in which the mosque is just one feature must be created. This should include training and education in Islamic sciences, arts, media, social sciences, professional vocational courses and so on. These do exist in mainstream state schools, but certain subjects will not be taught there so attention has to be given to them in the supplementary sector. Such objectives have to be planned with proper consultation amongst the community. The necessity of five mosques in one area needs to be challenged if it is at the expense of other essential institutions. Unfortunately the desire to build separate mosques stems from the sectarian divisions considered earlier. If this is the reality then our long term aims of creating a Muslim civil society or Muslim public space will always be undermined by our own sectarian differences. The alternative is to set up a full range of organisations for each group within the community but common sense tells us that with limited resources, this does not seem a viable option. Acceptance of other schools of thought and interpretive frameworks can enable Muslims to learn and work side by side, maintaining the ideological differences but uniting on issues which require support from the whole community.

I am not advocating a ghettoisation of Muslim learning or living but considering a technique that would create well versed individuals in both Islamic knowledge and specialists in mainstream subjects. Until these are both supported Muslims will not be able to achieve the balance that will maintain their Islamic identity in a secular society.
In fact it has been the ghettoised content and methods of teaching previously endured by Muslims in Britain that has often lead to an insular and isolated experience as individuals and communities. What this would mean is a channelling of resources to produce scholars who can cross between both socio-cultural and religious constructs to enhance the lives of their own communities and Britons in general.

**Muslim Media – Assisting Knowledgeable Communities**

The research has clearly shown that Muslim media is a powerful resource for the development and articulation of British Muslim identities, both for individuals and communities. Combining the two data sets; (a) media interviews, and; (b) focus group interviews and the press survey, has enabled an understanding of production and consumption of Muslim media in Britain. The respondents shared many of the major objectives with the publication editors. These were - the dissemination of current affairs news about Islam and Muslims from an Islamic or Muslim perspective, a source of knowledge on Islamic teachings, an alternative to mainstream media, an expression of British Muslim identity and a platform for debate on economic, political, religious and socio-cultural issues.

The focus of this research has been on examining how media are helping to construct and enhance identities, that is, the relationship between media and identity. From the results of my study I would conclude that the two are closely linked in such a way that they influence each other strongly. Editors of Muslim media recognise the important role of their publications in determining the discourses on Muslimness and also their role as representatives of Muslim communities. These discourses are enabling Muslims to engage in debates about the position of their communities within Britain. The diversity within the media landscape allows different voices to be expressed and no one publication speaks on behalf of *all* Muslims. However, between them the Muslim media have set up a framework through which economic, political, social, cultural and religious issues can be debated. The objective of all editors interviewed had been to assist in creating better informed and more knowledgeable Muslim communities (though they also hoped non-Muslims would benefit from their work). They felt it was necessary to enable alternative discourses and sources of information on Islam and
Muslims because of the limited and frequently inaccurate nature of coverage in other media. Whilst they appreciated that Muslim media had come a long way in the past decade, developing and improving their own publications and Muslim media in general was also an objective they shared. One of the most obvious ways to do this was to encourage the involvement of young Muslims in media and to demonstrate that media offered a viable career. This was perhaps an area where a gap could be seen between editors and my respondents. Whilst editors were conscious of bringing youngsters into the media field, none of my respondents expressed an interest to be involved in media as a career. For those offering criticism, this would have been a proactive way in which to bridge the gap. In order for this to happen mere interest in Muslim media as consumers needs to be developed into active involvement, either voluntary or as a career.

The consumption of Muslim media has for some respondents signalled a clear rejection of mainstream media and demonstrates the need for alternative discourses about Islam and Muslims in Britain. By accessing Muslim media and information on Islam they assert their connection to religion more than any other aspect of their identity. This rejection includes challenging the accepted discourses on Muslims found in mainstream media, seen as negatively stereotyped, inaccurate or sensationalised. Wanting to know about world affairs through Muslim media rather than mainstream media shows the respondents' ability to exercise critical readings of media. The strong presence and power of media culture in society was recognised by many respondents and some were wary of accessing any form of media, though found it hard in practice to avoid such ubiquitous forms like advertising. This circumspection of media even included Muslim media which one set of focus group interviewees felt was a distraction from 'real' knowledge. This however, was a minority view and for most respondents the Muslim media served a central function in their acquisition of Islamic knowledge and development of their Muslim consciousness.

Whilst not all respondents avoided all forms of mainstream media, the emphasis on gaining 'serious' news, especially that pertaining to Muslims, was from Muslim media. Other popular programming was included in Activities Diaries but was seen as light entertainment of no real significance. They were not uncritical of Muslim media and
suggested ways in which it could be developed further to enhance its full potential. Much of this criticism was constructive in as much as it acknowledged the limited resources available to Muslim media in comparison with mainstream or other established media. For example, some interviewees and survey respondents felt there ought to be a better balance in reporting of national and international issues, where the former should receive as much if not more attention.

Use of the internet was not particularly extensive. Evidence from the Activities Diaries showed that a selected number of websites were visited on a regular basis, rather than random surfing for long periods of time. In fact use of the internet was surprisingly low, especially considering many respondents were university students, with only two respondents visiting more than 5 websites. This information presents a different picture from Mandaville’s (2001) and Bunt’s (2000) evidence that the internet is being widely used. During the focus groups interviewees acknowledged the importance of the internet for Muslims and felt it had great potential to be developed for Islamic dawah and bringing Muslim communities together. So although their own use did not reflect this they were aware of its potential. One of the consequences of the internet for Muslims noted by Baktiari (2000) was the development of virtual communities. Though as I stated evidence of extensive internet use was not found amongst my respondents, I suggest that consciousness of these virtual communities is still strong. What is significant is that a fair amount of our information is derived indirectly from media sources such that exchanges between people contain elements of information disseminated by media, including the internet. Therefore, the internet, along with other sources, has enabled Muslims to learn about each other and share concerns with one another.

Electronic mailing seemed to be more widely used, mainly for personal communication but also as a method of keeping up to date with news and current affairs (both on and off campus for university students). I make this assumption from general observations within the university setting, where the Islamic Society often notified members of events and issues using a mailing list. I also received emails from this list and in

45 Travel has also facilitated this knowledge considerably.
addition received individual emails from events notifying me of events, campaigns, current affairs, social gatherings and general Islamic teachings.

By extending the definition of media to include social events, exhibitions, conferences and similar activities outlined throughout this work, its function will become increasingly important. Not only will it serve to disseminate news and views but it will eventually make up a framework of cultural representation for Muslim communities. My own referencing of Muslim publications for this research, in particular Q-News and Muslim News, is an indication of the salience of Muslim media as an information source on issues relating to Muslim communities. I feel the growth and development of Muslim media gives British Muslims a considerable resource for research and information purposes, a space in which to debate pertinent issues and a platform from which to express their views.

Though the connection between the media and cultural habits of my respondents and their constructions of identity is certainly convincing, I want to remind the reader that the broader socio-cultural environment in which media is consumed should not be ignored in this analysis. Locality, family and community relationships, education, peer groups, personal taste and other factors discussed in this study also exert an influence not only on developments of identity but on the actual choice of media itself.

Muslim Britons – Diaspora and Globalisation

It was difficult to measure the strength of diaspora connections amongst my sample. Some had visited the Indian subcontinent, whereas others had never been and only had perceptions of life in their parents' hometowns and countries, though this did not necessarily mean that they had no contact with family in the subcontinent. There was a general awareness of the importance of connections with the subcontinent regardless of personal experience or even inclination to maintain contact. I predict that one of the main reasons that diaspora connections will diminish is because many young South Asians, like my respondents, will not marry from the Indian subcontinent. As one of the college students noted, if he gets married to someone from Pakistan, it will be easier to maintain the connection, but if he marries someone from Britain, the reasons for visiting
Pakistan and generally keeping in touch will be substantially reduced. The strength of connections were very much dependent on how closely the respondent’s family actually maintained links. If family visits were regular, interspersed with telephone calls and emails, then the sense of connection was strengthened. But where, as one respondent noted, most of her family were in Britain and she did not really speak Urdu very well, the link was inevitably weakened.

Concern for issues affecting Muslims in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh was still evident among my focus group interviewees and survey respondents. The interesting point to note was that concern was not limited to diaspora communities or the diaspora ‘home’. A strong sense of South Asian culture exists in Britain because of the high proportion of Muslims originating from there, but this did not eclipse the significance of Muslims in other parts of the world. Once again the media was pivotal in informing British Muslims about the state of Muslims worldwide and concern for the global umma was facilitated by extensive and up to date media coverage. This confirms the key role of media in diaspora examined by Sreberny (2000) and Husband (2002). The survey respondents in particular but also focus group participants reflected the findings of these studies as far as generational divisions were concerned. None of the young respondents mentioned ‘ethnic’ or diaspora media, such as The Jang or Nation, though older respondents in the survey mentioned some (see Appendix A). Eastern Eye was mentioned but this produced in the UK for the South Asian market here. Thus, the difference in media use amongst different generations of diaspora Muslims is evident from my research findings too.

Though participation in political groups (often Al-Muhajiroun and Hizb-u-Tahrir on campuses) was not evident amongst my respondents\textsuperscript{46}, they were aware of political issues affecting Muslims, particularly internationally. This awareness usually came about through the utilisation of media covering global issues and a heightened sense of belonging to a global umma was evident in the discussions and survey responses. This global vision had implications for the identity of young Muslim respondents as they felt they had a ‘connection’ with Muslims around the world, especially those who were suffering. A rapidly shrinking world and increasing media coverage of world events

\textsuperscript{46} Apart from one girl in Focus Group 4 who was involved with Hizb-u-Tahrir.
meant that young Muslims found it easy to identify with political causes and struggles in the Muslim world. Though this was facilitated by information and communication technologies, the desire for this arose from a sense of duty to keep informed about the global Muslim community. Living in diaspora has meant that young British Muslims have encountered different ideological perspectives and new interpretations of how to practice Islam. Moreover, globalising processes have introduced them to a wide variety of literature and knowledge from across the Muslim world (as well as Western media and academic discourses on Islam) and this has enabled them to discover alternative expressions of Islam to the South Asian version of Islam their parents practice.

Globalisation appears to be strengthening a sense of a global Muslim identity amongst my respondents. This was stated explicitly in survey responses to the question about whether media was increasing a sense of global umma, to which many people replied in the affirmative. It was stated that this was achieved mainly through acquiring knowledge of Muslims everywhere in the world and being able to relate to the problems faced by others in the community. So the global-local dynamics of identity were working in such a way that a sense of belonging (and relating to) Muslims in Britain existed whilst there was also a connection with the community around the world. This sentiment was supported by interviewees in the focus group discussions.

It is occasionally suggested that Muslims in Britain may suffer from a sense of dual or conflicting loyalty because of their connection with the global umma as well as their status as British citizens. People are acutely aware of the potential for this conflict during international crises such as the Gulf war or the invasion of Afghanistan. Much of this questioning about whether Muslims can be good British citizens – questioning from both non-Muslims as well as Muslims – has required Muslims to enter the debate about Britishness. A supposed conflict between loyalty to Islam and to Britain is the main reason these questions are posed, particularly when foreign policy issues are involved. A survey conducted by The Muslim News following the September 11th attacks on the WTC highlighted the fact that British Muslims were ‘comfortable with being British but not with British foreign policy’ (Sheriff, 2001). It asked questions on the reaction to the attack in New York with 36% saying they thought the attack was a moral outrage and 52% responded to the news with a combination of sadness and understanding. The
notion of understanding here is not to be confused with condoning, but points to the
argument of commentators such as Robert Fisk that the attacks were "not mindless and
without a sense of cause, however misguided" (Sheriff, 2001. p12). Seventy nine
percent said they disagreed with the bombing of Afghanistan and felt there should have
been a better way to bring Osama Bin Laden to justice, following a fair trial. Sheriff
comments that "it is clear from the survey, which is at best a 'temperature gauging poll'\nthat most Muslims are comfortable with their citizenship but, like many in the
mainstream community, there is a strong element of dissent on the government's
conduct of international affairs and this dissent is clearly informed by a perception of
the reality of double standards" (Sheriff, 2001. p 12). Respondents to The Muslim News
survey said they would support tough action against Osama Bin Laden if there had been
similar action against perpetrators of atrocities in Kashmir, Palestine and Bosnia. These
views are often a source of conflict as they are seen to undermine the national
government policy on foreign affairs.

A similar survey was carried out by Q-News. Of 1,312 people surveyed 29% thought
the war against Afghanistan was in fact a war against Islam and Muslims, 44% thought
it was an attempt to impose an America-friendly government in Afghanistan and 18%
thought both statements were true (Q-News, 2001a). Seventy eight percent of those
surveyed thought the food drops on Afghanistan were part of a propaganda war rather
than a genuine humanitarian effort and there seemed to be a general cynicism about the
aims and effectiveness of the war. This was echoed in a series of interviews with three
young Muslim men who talked about whether they would go to fight in Afghanistan,
whether they thought Osama Bin Laden was responsible and how they felt this situation
affected them as Muslims (Q-News, 2001b). Although the men interviewed did not
support the attack and sympathised with the victims' families they thought the reaction
was unjust and that the underlying motives were related to oil resources in the region as
well as action against Muslims. It is these issues which are often presented in a
simplistic way concluding that being Muslim and British are incompatible. However, a
closer examination of the concerns expressed by Muslims shows that these same
concerns are also shared by non-Muslims citizens and need to be debated in an
appropriate manner.
Overall though, the impact of globalisation on Muslim identity is complex. Hall’s (1996) list of possible consequences for cultural identity (examined in chapter One) may be used to analyse the Muslim identities of my respondents. He applies these consequences specifically to their impact on national identities and states that a) they are eroding because of the homogenisation of globalisation, b) there is a strengthening of particularistic or local identities as a result of resistance to globalisation or, c) new identities of hybridity are being created. I would argue the first and the last of these apply to the respondents in my research. The first is taking place for at least two reasons. Firstly, amongst certain Muslim groups there has been a concerted effort to reject all forms of nationalism or nationalistic sentiment. Though political groups such as Al-Muhajiroun and Hizb-u-Tahrir are more vocal advocates of this idea, many other activities are consciously promoting the idea of a global Muslim umma that transcends national boundaries. These boundaries are seen as artificial and alien to Islam and indeed a legacy of colonialism in Muslim lands.

However, this description does not fit neatly into Hall’s first consequence. I feel that it combines aspects of the first and the second consequences to achieve a different result. National identities are not being eroded as a result of the cultural homogenisation of globalisation which he cites but to be more accurate are perhaps eroding because of globalising forces of their own. Therefore one type of globalisation (Muslim or even Islamic) is taking place simultaneously by resisting another (a secular global-postmodern). This process is what Ameli (2002) refers to as ‘reverse globalization’. So whilst the strengthening is not of local identities as such, it is as a result of globalisation nonetheless. Hence the growth and assertiveness of Muslim identities are at once in opposition to globalisation (secular) but at the same time are being assisted by the structures of these same globalising forces.

Another reason that national identities (and connections with diaspora) may be declining amongst second and third generation Muslims in Britain is that as the first generation to have migrated here passes away, the immediate connections will inevitably weaken. Rather than ‘bilateral’ ties to their parents’ country of origin, diaspora may link to other countries around the world, including in the West and it may be kinship ties rather than national sentiments which link people together. For example,
this could be illustrated by members of a Pakistani family who are dispersed in the UK, Kenya and America, with only a small proportion of their family in Pakistan. For first generation Pakistanis kinship and marital ties were inevitably directed towards Pakistan, but now marrying a relative in another part of the world is changing the direction of this connection. The young Muslims I interviewed appear to be are replacing nationalistic attitudes with Islamic values. Through increased knowledge of global issues they are relating to other Muslims worldwide and crossing national boundaries.

Like many other factors, the impact of globalisation on Britain’s Muslims is expressly dependent upon their locality. So responses to cultural homogenisation and other impacts of globalisation will vary according to the communities and structures in which they are received. Nottingham and Leicester will differ from London or Bradford, and also from smaller towns such as Rochdale or Oldham. The nature of the Muslim communities is very different throughout Britain and in certain towns there is a limited ethnic mix compared to bigger cities where there are Muslims from all over the world. Therefore responses to change brought about by globalisation may be welcomed in some places but resisted in others.

Hall’s third possible consequence is the emergence of new hybrid identities. This is also apparent amongst my respondents (as well as other young Muslims I assume) from their use of the term ‘British-Muslim’. The Muslim element of this identity was asserted quite proudly and forcefully, but the British aspect was often accepted passively – as a matter of fact or accident of birth. This mirrors what Ameli (2002) found in his research where his respondents considered themselves as citizens of Britain but did not harbour any great affinity to Britain as their natural homeland. Rather, emphasis was placed on the religious component of identity. However, my respondents did not underestimate having ‘British’ in their identity. They were aware of its strength in the world (for travel) but also recognised the key role they as British Muslims could play in determining the future of Muslims around the world. Hence there was an appreciation of the privileged position of being a British Muslim (citizenship rights, access to education, standard of living), particularly when they compared to the situation in other European countries. There was also a firm belief that being Muslim in Britain had influenced the kind of Muslim they were today. The education system, socio-economic,
cultural environment and public discourses (for example on politics, secularism and feminism) have all affected young Muslims in Britain. Perhaps challenging mainstream discourses on Islam and Muslims and to a degree resistance to being the 'other' in Britain have also impacted on the development of a specific Muslimness in the British context. Ansari (2000) argued that Muslim identity in Britain was being constructed against negative perceptions and that "it is evolving as an identity of 'unbelieving' in a 'culture of resistance' and in contest with hegemonic British identity. Alienated from their society and excluded from opportunity, many young Muslims have found a valuable resource in religion to forge an alternative identification in the British context to give purpose and meaning to their lives" (p 95). For my respondents however, although there was an awareness of difference between white British cultural identities and their own, it did not appear to manifest itself in any hostile or negative way. Social life was often a factor cited to emphasis identity as difference or 'otherness'. There was a clear idea that 'we' were Muslims and that 'they' were not, but the development of their increasingly religious identity was a process that they had internalised rather than projected against the 'other'. So identity as difference was present amongst my respondents but because of factors such as their education and socio-economic status, I would not categorise them with Ansari's alienated or excluded sector of the young Muslim population in the UK. The assertiveness of their religious identity stemmed from a positive and proactive identification with Islam rather than one in opposition or rebellion against external forces.

Self-definitions of identity normally excluded ethnicity but ethnic origin and influence from South Asian culture was not marginalised. It was just that when defining themselves they prioritised Muslim, then British and then perhaps stated the undeniable fact of their ethnic origin. Similar to their emphasis on Muslim identity in the global context, these hybrid identities also focused on the religious component. By doing so I would suggest that even within this localised hybrid (British-Muslim) a sense of reaching out and connecting with other international Muslim communities is present.

For the majority of the young Muslims I interviewed the debate about being British and Muslim was of some interest, though not always a cause for great concern. Establishing a British Muslim identity did involve dealing with conflicts, particularly when Islamic
teachings contradicted social norms, but negotiating this conflict has been of prime concern to both old and young alike. *Fiqh* for minorities, a regular feature in the pages of Muslim media, demonstrates the resources being channelled into resolving some of these issues.

However, by entering into the debate, young British Muslims are challenging the notion of what it is to be British and they are displacing conventional ideas of community amongst elder generations of Muslims. The associations that they are developing for themselves and through which they want to be recognised, are transcending the traditional notions of family and community networks. This process has no doubt been helped by the global reach that Muslims around the world now benefit from, not least because of advances in communication technologies. Identification with like minded people is not bound by geographical location but is dependent more on whether communication exists between different groups. Therefore, I would say the tension between different identifications is not apparent, in fact a stronger sense of a global Muslim identity is developing at the same time as an increasing sense of British Muslimness.

A distinct imagery accompanies the manifestations of this British Muslim identity and this reinforces the idea of the presence of a ‘British Islam’. Examples of these were cited in the study, such as a white Muslim woman wearing a Union Jack *hijab* or the publicity postcard for ArRum’s ‘Best of British Islam’ festival. In an environment where marketing and image is of great value, these icons can be a visual reminder to society that Muslims are increasingly confident of their Britishness. These images form part of a wider infrastructure which has emerged to cater for increasingly self-confident identifications that Muslim Britons are making with Islam.

**Being Muslim**

Muslim identity in Britain is being articulated in a variety of ways and certain developments in the communities have helped to facilitate these. The establishment of Muslim media, the creation and development of local and national community organisations and the presence of Muslims in influential positions (for example the
House of Commons and the House of Lords) are all indications of the new spaces being occupied by Muslims.

The question I investigated was ‘what does it mean to be a Muslim?’ What are the boundaries within which one moves to define oneself as such? As these boundaries can potentially move, so too can the association with being a Muslim and doing Muslim things. This type of sentiment manifests itself in people identifying themselves as Muslims and saying ‘but I am not practising’. From an individual’s perspective then any checklist criteria imposed on them by others becomes irrelevant. If they introduce themselves as Muslims and classify themselves to be so, their self-definition is what matters when defining their identity. Theological criteria no doubt has an impact on whether some groups of Muslims would classify others as such or as outside of the fold of Islam. Different ways of practising Islam may lead to misunderstanding within the community about who is ‘properly’ Muslim and who is not and sometimes limited knowledge about different schools of thought within orthodox Islam has also given rise to misunderstanding amongst Muslims.

If we recognise that identity is a fluid concept, indeed a process that does not reach any conclusive outcome but is constantly in flux, then Muslim identity too can be analysed in this way. The types of social practices that I have presented in this study are one of the most prominent manifestations of a Muslim identity amongst young Muslims. Living as the ‘other’ in a predominantly non-Muslim society has resulted in new ways of expressing difference, in this case religious difference. This difference is expressed not only through personal practices such as dress but through organised activities articulating new meanings of what it means to be Muslim. Thus, consumption of alternative community and religious media, participation in ‘Islamic’ social and educational events and affiliation with global Muslim causes, are all ways in which second and subsequent generations of Muslims in Britain demonstrate what for them it is to be Muslim.

Though they are in a non-Muslim society, or perhaps because they are in a non-Muslim society, young Muslims felt that an extra effort needed to be made to be recognised as Muslims, for example, through dress. Perhaps also because my respondents and young Muslims in general have shared their schooling and employment with non-Muslims to a
greater degree than their parents, they feel the need to make a distinction between themselves and non-Muslims. This should not be read in a negative way, but I am suggesting that factors such as racism, questioning one’s own identity and pride in one’s culture and religion may be factors prompting this drawing of boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

Being a Muslim means trying to live by finding a balance between the diverse commitments which compete for a person’s time, resources and attention. There are elements of private life that a Muslim can have almost full control over because the home environment is free from many external influences, therefore practicing Islam in the private sphere is considerably easier. The public sphere though places many restrictions on the practice of Islam. By restrictions I do not mean explicit rules disallowing the profession and practice of religion, though these do exist, Britain is still far more tolerant than other European countries. What I do mean is that structures, institutions and the value system of British secular living can pose dilemmas for Muslims. It is because of such practical considerations that there is a dire need for learned ulama to exercise the skills of ijtihad, elucidating judgements from the Qur’an and sunna to establish how Muslims can live within the parameters of Islam and British law whilst developing themselves as a faith community.

The debate over whether identity is an essential concept or whether it is socially constructed was outlined in chapter One. From the information I have gathered about young British Muslims in this study, I would suggest that a religious ‘core’ of identity exists around which other identifications can be situated. Jacobson (1998) suggests that although ‘essential identities’ may not be perceived as appropriate in theoretical debate, in practice social actors may feel there is an essential element to their identity. This is how I would describe my respondents’ idea of their identity. This core then constitutes the fixed element of identity, which Hall (1996) argues is being increasingly interrupted, and multiple subject positions allow a person to make identifications with different aspects of their identity at different times and places. Khan (1999) summarises this as follows:

“While all other forms of identity are constructed, self-identity is essential. Thus, when a person claims to be an Indian-American-Sunni-Hanafi-Muslim,
the person claims to owe allegiance to multiple identities. This person may also choose to be only Indian, only an American, or only a Muslim. Indeed, under various circumstances the person may consciously choose to emphasize one identity over another. Nevertheless, whatever identity the person may choose to identify with at any given time, his or self-knowledge remains unchanged. Thus, regardless of what the person chooses to introduce him or herself as, the person’s ‘self-identity’, the ‘I’ that speaks to the I is the same. All other identities are really strategic, contextual and contingent. They are dependent on the ‘other’ in contrast to whom the self is defined” (p 3).

Khan sees that there is a divinely constructed and a socially constructed identity, the latter of which offers many possibilities in a postmodern world whereas the former only has one true self. In examining cultural identities, Hall (1996) showed that fragmented and diverse constituents are replacing the traditionally understood concept of identity, which was stable and fixed. However, I would suggest that for my respondents, and for those making strong identifications with their religion, a fixed core or essential aspect of their identity is retained regardless of the unpredictable society in which they live. Fundamental beliefs, derived from texts, form the basis of this core. Samad (1998) argues that by giving identity “non-essentialist qualities it becomes possible to deconstruct the process that leads to the emergence of a British Muslim identification” (p 72). He sees identity as a malleable construction because its various constituents – religion, ethnicity, tradition, custom and nationalism – are imagined and re-imagined in a constant historical process. I would argue however, that even though the (re)discovery or (re)assertion of religious identity may be influenced by external social factors, it is seen as constituting an essential aspect of identity for young Muslims. This idea is perhaps complemented by the Islamic concept of fitra – or natural disposition (to submit to God). Ameli (2002) also notes that the fundamental principles of faith have remained largely unaltered which is evidence of the persistence of inner faith as a key determinant of identity.

Using Ramadan’s (1999) classification of Muslims in Europe, I would place my respondents in the ‘middle path’ between being Muslim without Islam and Muslim in Europe out of Europe. Clearly they are not Muslims without Islam, because they recognise the essential position of religion in formation of identity and in their daily lives. Also they are not isolated from Europe (or Britain) as they are aware both of its

47 For Ramadan (1999) the essence of the Muslim personality is the saying of the shahada.
48 See chapter One, page 15.
impact on determining who they are and because they are willing to engage in the institutions and with the people of those societies. Respondents with greater levels of religiosity (or more practicing) may limit the interaction they have with British or European society (such as media) but this reflected their desire to maintain beliefs and practices that may not be accepted in mainstream society. Obviously different levels of religiosity resulted in variations in behaviour. Nevertheless all respondents seemed to be engaging in what Ramadan calls the four-fold dimension of identity; the core of faith existed; an discernible trend of reading and understanding their religion; an element of dawah (through debate and example), and; quite noticeably, action and participation as a manifestation of this identity.

Active Identity

Many of the issues discussed in ‘Being Muslim’ relate directly to the idea of an identity expressed through actions – an active identity. Affiliations with religion or with particular groups often have practical manifestations, such as dress, attending meetings or refraining from certain actions. I feel that for those I interviewed this was a very important aspect of their wanting to associate (and wanting others to associate them with) Islam, that is, being Muslim. Islam not only provided a framework for spiritual development and a code of conduct for behaviour, but also provided a strong basis for identity. Their religion enabled young Muslims to anchor themselves in a permanent and stable identity and their actions revolved around this core focus of their identity. This substantiates what Modood et al (1997), Jacobson (1998) and Vertovec (1998) found in their studies; that Islam was fundamental in defining the identities of young Muslims in Britain.

The emphasis on the religious aspect of their identity meant my respondents wanted to reflect this in their actions; what they did and did not do, their associations and their consumption of media. Thus even their social and cultural activities were focused on gaining knowledge because they recognised its importance in helping them to better identify themselves with their faith. By this I do not mean that learning is reduced to social activities, on the contrary a great deal of emphasis was placed on the seriousness and obligation of gaining knowledge. What I do mean however is that much of the informal contact within groups of young Muslims is linked to religious development.
(such as spiritual development, getting together to recite religious songs, *dhikr* and similar things) and the events and classes that Muslims attend sometimes have a social 'spin-off' to them. Where there are no organised events as such Muslims have started their own classes and study circles or sessions in their own homes or at university. All this is true of my respondents and I would say it reflects on a wider cohort of Muslims with similar interests. Active identification with Islam, or put another way, expressions of being Muslim, depended considerably on locality. For example, the organisations for young Muslims that exist in Nottingham or Leicester are different from London, Manchester or Glasgow. Both City Circle and ArRum, described in chapter Five, came into existence and function in London because of its different dynamics compared to smaller cities in Britain, which do not have the same demographic structure and an array of other factors that are exclusive to the capital. In this way, the resources available to young Muslims in their locality determines the way they are developing their community structures and identities.

"Local context, and not just the fact of living in Britain, has much to do with the development of young Muslims' cultural identities. Incidents of racism (anti-Muslim as well as anti-'immigrant'), employment and education opportunities, leisure activities, and other key areas of young Muslims' lives are determined by aspects of local context, and any attempt to understand their needs and desires must take into account this fact. Similarly, facets of 'community' – including kinship patterns, the nature and history of Muslim associations, and leadership contests – also strongly affect ways in which young Muslims see themselves and react to their parents and others of their parents generation. This too is a largely local phenomenon all too often overlooked in attempts to understand young Muslims throughout Britain" (Vertovec, 1998, p 100-1).

Apart from the universities in Nottingham and Leicester around which a fair amount of activity took place, the main avenues for participation in Islamic events are community based youth associations49. I presume that the proportion of university students that partake in community based associations is fairly low as they are often away from their local communities and become integrated into university life. Therefore it is more often than not the study circles arranged by students themselves and similar meetings that provide a means for gathering. I would say this from the data obtained in the focus group interviews, Activities Diaries and from personal observations of the Nottingham

49 Many of these are listed in the *Muslim Directory* (2001-2).
community and from life on Leicester university campus. Community based projects are vital for the life of Muslim communities but the age and situation of the respondents I interviewed who were at university were somewhat isolated from this. Some college students and working young Muslims from Nottingham were aware of certain community associations but did not profess to participate in any. The university Islamic Societies were quite specialised and focused areas of activity compared to the community. Their provisions included a prayer room, learning opportunities, celebration of religious festivals and representation in the Student Union. Whether graduates sustained this momentum and range of activities after they left university is probably unlikely because working life is not conducive to the timetabling, arrangement and participation in study circles, sports events, lectures, social events and exhibitions (including Islamic Awareness Week) that Islamic Societies provide.

Affiliation to groups or movements was not evident amongst my research participants but I suggest for those who do have affiliations this is a strong way in which to articulate identity. This is especially so when group membership entails certain modes of behaviour, for example, members of the Tablighi Jamaat would travel to Dewsbury on a regular basis to attend gatherings and perhaps even travel abroad for periods of time for *dawah*. Other groups which concentrate on the propagation of Islam to the general public, such as the Islamic Propagation Centre for International (IPCI) or Hizb-u-Tahrir, often hold *dawah* stalls in city centres and would require participation from members and volunteers to maintain these. Hence, behaviour patterns are often modified to prioritise these activities.

It is clear that for the Muslims in my study (and those described as participating in the above activities), identifying with Islam and asserting their Muslim identity is not a passive but an active process. Though their sole objective in taking part in these activities is not to declare their Muslim-ness, a certain pride is taken in being part of a larger group of Muslims. Like the evidence from numerous other studies (including Basit, 1997, Jacobson, 1998 and Samad, 1998), the religiosity question in my Activities Diaries showed that being a conscientious or practicing Muslim was seen as a desirable attribute, regardless of levels of personal adherence to Islamic teachings.
I want to mention here media consumption as an integral part of identifying with Islam, though I have looked at Muslim media above. As involvement in social, cultural and educational events has developed to reflect Muslims’ awareness of their religion, so too has media consumption. All three data sources (focus groups, Activities Diaries and survey) showed that though mainstream media is used, a substantial proportion of the media consumed by my respondents is Muslim media. The association between media consumption and cultural identities as examined in Gillespie's (1995) work, is also clear in my study. Those especially conscious of their Islamic principles were particularly conscious of their intake of media. This meant ensuring they only consumed media that was beneficial to their religious knowledge and avoiding all other media, as far as possible. A trend Gillespie found was that media content was used to stimulate discussion amongst her respondents and this was also true for my respondents, in particular discussing the portrayal of Islam and Muslims in mainstream media (especially the portrayal of Muslim women). They perceived their own readings of the media to be critical and were generally cynical about what they termed (but did not define) ‘Western’ media.

The Muslim media was one of the main channels through which events and activities received publicity. It also disseminated follow-up information and conference reports, which were useful for those unable to attend and provided a sense of connection to the event itself. By advertising things liked books, tapes and videos, Muslim media were promoting an Islamic or Muslim culture to their readers. These cultural products offered an alternative to mainstream or other non-Islamic material and developed what Ramadan (1999) defines as ‘European Islamic culture’. He feels that Muslims face two possible choices as far as culture is concerned; either to totally forbid oneself any access to popular European culture, which would be “tantamount to switching off television sets and radios, throwing away newspapers and magazines, and avoiding cinemas, theatres and exhibitions” (p 199). Or, the more realistic option, by employing a critical sense of limitation, would be to create an alternative culture. This means identifying aspects of European culture that are not in opposition to Muslim ethics and substituting those that are with Islamic alternatives. Thus, music, singing, drawing, photography, visual and performing arts and other forms of cultural expression can be developed from within an Islamic framework. Ramadan (1999) acknowledges that this process is
underway, particularly with music and songs. Although this often borrows from the well known genres of music, he feels that it will eventually create a genre of its own. Looking at the programme for ArRum’s festival ‘Best of British Islam’, confirms the idea that Muslims have made progress in creating this European Islamic culture (British Islamic in this case).

These processes are indicative of how Muslims are actively identifying with their religion. Identity is not an abstract concept but actually manifests itself in the actions people partake in. Using this idea enables us to understand the active identity of young Muslims apparent through their participation in lectures, talks, camps and similar events with an Islamic focus. By doing so not only are they developing their own sense of what it means to be a Muslim, but they are interacting with like minded people and creating new concepts of Muslim communities.

How is space changing to reflect these new identities or identifications? Apart from the physical features that have changed in the British landscape to reflect the presence of Muslims, such as mosques, a number of other subtle changes indicate the development of Muslim community structures. In the case of younger Muslims, I have cited two such examples, ArRum and City Circle. At another level, the organisation of group events such as international conferences at which hundreds of Muslims congregate can be seen in various cities across the UK. The better publicised, and perhaps controversial, of these have been marches arranged by Al-Muhajiroun in Trafalgar Square in London. Many of the events that young Muslims are organising and participating in which I have described in this research, signal a move away from the traditional community/mosque based activities into new spaces. Whilst the university is a well established example of this space, Muslims are obtaining access to places which have previously not been occupied by their parents and grandparents. These include major conference centres and arenas, countryside retreats for camps, locations for residential courses and up-market London venues. The Muslim Directory is another example of how the establishment of Muslim communities in Britain is being articulated in a practical way. First published in 1994, the Muslim Directory is “an essential guide of services and businesses for the Muslim community” and between January and December 2000 it circulated over 100, 000 copies across the UK. The fact that such a publication was needed and that
someone had the foresight to collate the information contained in it, tells us of the
community structures that have established over the years. The recognition of a need to
produce a medium through which to promote commercial ventures as well as social,
welfare and charitable organisations has resulted in such a publication. So not only is
the Directory itself an interesting example of information (indeed media) being
produced amongst Muslims in Britain, but it actually contains an almost comprehensive
list of other Muslim organisations. The publisher's note at the beginning of the
Directory is written in English, Arabic, Urdu, Bengali, Hindi and Turkish, which
signifies the diversity of British Muslims, though the list is not exhaustive. The director
of the publication stated, "the Directory is becoming an institution that Muslims now
expect year-in, year-out". It can be difficult to articulate or measure the presence of a
specific identity, in this case British Muslim identity. Instead, it is often easier to
examine phenomena in society that point to its existence. Therefore, these
developments can be seen as an indication of the growth of the European Islamic
culture mentioned above.

Limitations and Further Research

Some of the modifications and weaknesses of the study were examined in the
Methodology (chapter Three). Here I want to summarise them and offer suggestions for
further research. The first shortcoming was failing to include quite important questions
into the survey and focus group interviews. These included questions on ethnicity and
internet use. Gathering data on ethnicity would have enhanced the overall picture of the
use of media by Muslims, particularly as the category of 'Muslims' is so diverse in
terms of ethnicity. This could have facilitated an interesting comparison between focus
group respondents who were South Asian Muslims and Muslims of different ethnic
origin in the survey. A question explicitly asking young Muslims about their
perceptions of non-Muslims would also have helped elaborate on ideas of 'otherness'
and daily interactions with wider society. So whilst a little information emerged on
how young Muslims thought non-Muslims perceived them, the counter perceptions
would have developed a fuller understanding of this relationship.

For a summary of an email interview with the Muslim Directory see Appendix J.
The study was intended to be qualitative and as such getting large numbers of participants was not considered the primary objective. Rather it was more important to identify particular trends and gain insights into the lives of the selected group of respondents through in-depth discussions. Though a survey was administered, the number of questionnaires distributed was relatively small and again the objective was to provide insight into the opinions of some readers instead of a comprehensive portrait of publication readerships. Thus the combination of methods produced various data which supplemented each other and together developed a better understanding of the research subject.

Further research can be developed examining these issues, particularly because the events of September 2001 have considerably changed the situation and relationships of Muslims in Britain (and in the West generally). The concepts of Muslim identity, Britishness and belonging have all gained relevance following these events. The re-emerging significance of these can be explored in further research which will build on our understanding of the lives of Muslims in Britain.

**SUMMARY**

British Muslim identities have been firmly established for several years now. From the initial catalyst of events of 1989, they have grown and developed to represent diverse aspects of the Muslim communities in Britain. A strong assertion of British Muslimness is especially evident amongst young (second and subsequent generation) Muslims.

A major factor contributing to the development of Muslim identities in Britain has been the Muslim media. My research has shown that the conventional definition of Muslim media should extend beyond publications (mainly newspapers, magazines and journals) to include new electronic media (email and internet as well as older television and radio), books, literature and audio-visual material. Additionally Muslim media must now include 'cultural expression' (such as the arts), social interactions and educational activities. The function of almost all of these media has been to develop discourses on being Muslim in contemporary Britain and thereby provide a means of enhancing British Muslim identity. The findings of this research have shown that young Muslims'
identities are closely linked to Muslim media and this is reflected in their activities. The main driving force for their active identification with Islam has been their increasing acquisition of religious knowledge. Learning about and practicing Islam has come to occupy a central component of their lives and they have developed a social and educational infrastructure to facilitate this. Distinguishing between culture and religion has been one of the foundations for this quest for knowledge and has lead to the increasingly assertive Muslim identity that is apparent amongst my respondents. As this work has shown, the enduring and formidable nature of religion provides young people with the stability which more transitory aspects of culture have not been able to do, particularly in a rapidly changing society.

Young Muslims are finding new spaces in which to express their Muslimness, sometimes having moved away from community structures established by their parents. Contact with the global Muslim umma, as well as other global processes, has had consequences for local community dynamics for Muslims in Britain. This global-local linkage has resulted in shared concerns for Muslims worldwide, including campaigns and charity appeals, as well as new patterns of learning about and practicing Islam. It has also meant that young British Muslims are identifying with movements or ideologies from abroad. Thus, the 'community' of Muslims in Britain has expanded beyond the local mosque structures (though there is still some way to go before establishing an efficiently functioning Muslim 'civil' society).

Locality has been crucial to my examination of the lives and identities of young Muslims. By locality I mean that family and community dynamics still determine the development of these young Muslims, even though they may be living in an era of globalisation. The impact of globalisation is dependent upon the local experiences and structures which these young Muslims are a part of. In addition links with the diaspora home, though declining to some extent, mean that South Asian cultural norms and practices are still an important component in their decision-making processes. Practices such as marriage and gender dynamics are good examples reflecting the combination of Muslim, South Asian and British values to create new ways of being 'British Muslim'.

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This research aims to make a contribution to the understanding of the lives of young British Muslims, specifically the construction of their identities with regard to their socio-cultural activities and media consumption. I have done this by examining topics which relate to the broader social, cultural, educational and religious framework within which they live and by illustrating how they negotiate identity in their everyday interactions.
GLOSSARY

Aqida – belief
Biraderi – kinship network or ties
Dawah – invitation to Islam or propagation
Dhikr – remembrance (of Allah)
Dupatta – scarf worn with shalwar kameez
Eid – celebration after Ramadan or Hajj
Fiqh – jurisprudence
Hajj – the pilgrimage to Mecca
Hadith – sayings and practices of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (saw)
Halal – permissible
Haram – prohibited
Hijab – headscarf
Imam – religious teacher
Insha’Allah – God willing
Ilm al-akhlaq – knowledge about manners and conduct
Khilafah – ruling system
Namaaz – Urdu word for ritual prayer
Niqab – face veil
Qur’an – the Holy Book of Islam
Ramadan – the Islamic month of fasting
Salat – ritual prayer
Saw – abbreviation - ‘may Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him’
Sawm – fasting
Seerah – life of the Holy Prophet (saw)
Shalwar kameez – loose tunic and trousers worn by women in the Indian sub-continent
Shaykh – religiously trained scholar
Sharia – Islamic law
Sura – chapter or division in the Qur’an
Tafseer – exegesis of the Qur’an
Tajwid/tajweed – the science of reciting the Qur’an
Zakat – The obligatory annual tax on wealth required by the Qur’an.
### Appendix A - Publications and Websites cited in Muslim Media Survey

#### MUSLIM MEDIA

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#### Websites

- murabiton.org
- themodernreligion.com
- islamiq.com

#### Other Media

- Eastern Eye
- Prospect
- NSS (?)
- ACCA (student mag)

#### E-Mail Lists

- YM (daily reminders)
- Ahad
- IRC
- CAIR*

*Meeting Point is the magazine of the ‘New Muslims Project’ at the Islamic Foundation. IPCI - Islamic Propagation Centre International. MWBR - Muslim World Book Review. BMMS - British Muslims Monthly Survey. CAIR - Council for American Islamic Relations. RS - Royal Society. TES - Times Educational Supplement. M-F - Indicates the number of males and females citing each publication.
Appendix B - Focus Group Interview Schedule

Excerpt from *Islam in Europe* (CNN Documentary) shown (see Appendix D for transcript)
How do you relate to any of the issues covered in this clip?
[general opening question]

What is the role and influence of your family on how you think about yourself/how you behave?
Do you think of your culture in a different way from your parents?
How do you see your generation of Muslims thinking about Islam?
How different is this from your parents/grandparents?
[Family and community issues. Intergenerational relationships and role of culture]

How would you say your social life is different from non-Muslims?
Which factors/things would you say signify your being a Muslim?
What does it mean to be a Muslim/young Muslim/Muslim student?
How have you thought about how you define yourself?
[Social life, questions on identity, Muslim-ness]

How do you think you are influenced as a result of your connection with India, Pakistan, Bangladesh etc? Specifics of locality.
How do you feel about issues (economic, cultural, ecological etc) which affect the Muslim *ummah* globally?
What are the main issues in your opinion which face Muslims in today’s society, specifically in Britain?
[Diaspora, locality, global community, issues affecting Muslims]

How has the practice/experience of marriage changed for Muslims in Britain?
How has Islam enabled you to develop concepts of gender/gender issues?
Articulating a new identity for Muslim women?
How would you describe Britishness and what does this mean for a future in Britain which has a substantial Muslim population?
Do you tend to see yourself or present yourself differently in different circumstances? [Gender, marriage, multiple identifications, identity constructed against an other, Britishness]

What is your opinion of media representations of Islam and Muslims and media in general?
What perceptions do you think Muslims and non-Muslims have as a result of media images? [General media representations]

Which Muslim (and other alternative) media are you aware of and what are you opinions of these?
What role do you think Muslim (alternative) media plays in Muslim communities?
What do you think were the reasons for setting up these alternative Muslim publications?
How do you see new types of media, especially the Internet, being used by Muslims?
How do you think Muslims use media differently from non-Muslims [or differences between different groups of Muslims]? [Muslim media, community media, role of media in forming new identities, new concepts of community]

How do you think the media (and images of Muslims) helps you think about yourself and others? [Media, perceptions and identity]

Of all the factors which influence you (individual and community), how important is the media? [Media compared to other factors]

Is there anything you would like to say about Islamophobia?
Do you think it has weakened or strengthened Muslim identity in any way?
Appendix C – Details of Focus Group and Press Interviews

Focus Group Interviews

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NU – Nottingham University, LU – Leicester University

Set up/planned but not conducted.
24 May 2000. Leicester University Islamic Society Girls. Only one girl turned up.
29 May 2000. De Montfort University Boys. Mix up with dates, facilitator went back home.

Muslim Press Interviews

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Appendix D – Transcript of CNN Documentary Clip – *Islam in Europe*

Narrator/Interviewer – N

First Interviewee – 1
Second Interviewee – 2
Third Interviewee – 3

*N Welcome back, reconciling Islam with Western culture is a difficult task for many second generation Muslims. In her own words, one young woman tells of her struggle to find an identity for herself.*

1 I was born in Pakistan and came to England in 1977 when I was one year old and we lived in a council estate in Brixton. At school I experienced a lot of racism and I always felt I was different, didn’t fit in. My childhood memories were .. are not very.. they’re not very happy. School was a difficult time, it was a time of balancing different cultures, I’d be at school and I’d be one person, I’d come home, I’d be a different person. I wasn’t sure who I really was, was my real self the person I was at school or was it the person I was at home? So it was a struggle really and I think at that time I thought that being a Muslim was part of the problem because religion was about dos and don’ts.

*Scene from interviewee’s university graduation ceremony.*

1 Becoming a more practicing Muslim was a gradual process and I think it was a natural process that I was at university and being taught to go and find out more and to question things. One of the things that has come out of university is to stand for what you believe in and I thought I’d be a hypocrite if after getting this degree I come out and just conform because university is not really about conforming, its about establishing your principles, finding yourself and standing by what you believe.

*Scene shows interviewee walking on stage to receive degree but not shaking hands with university representative.*

1 As a Muslim woman you are not allowed to have physical contact with a man who is not related to you, I know some women do, at situations like this it can be quite embarrassing not to.

*Back at interviewee’s home.*

1 If I was living in Pakistan I think I’d have no reason to wear a headscarf because everyone doesn’t, why would I ever be questioning my identity, I’d have a stable sense of being Pakistani, being Muslim, that’s it. Because I’m in Britain, the questioning is constant. I was actually engaged, I had this crazy engagement to some distant cousin in Pakistan and I was brought up knowing, feeling that I was going to get married to this person, there was no question about it, it was just going to happen. My sister had had an arranged marriage, she want happy and I thought well why do I want to go through that. I didn’t do anything drastic, I didn’t wake up one morning and say ‘mum I don’t want this engagement, this marriage to go ahead’. I worked on it slowly, kept telling her, eventually after many years the message got through and now I think my mother feels
it's definitely the right thing that I didn't go ahead with that marriage. Picking up on marriage is just one of the many things that the Western media does to try and reinforce this idea of Muslim women being oppressed, marriage is just one of many things. They think any aspect of a woman's life, if she chooses to be a housewife its because she’s being oppressed by her religion, if she chooses to wear modest clothes its because she’s being oppressed by her religion, its not. They don’t see that people like me have made decisions, conscious decisions to wear the headscarf, I am intellectually convinced, spiritually convinced of the truth of my religion and this headscarf is a manifestation of that.

N Well to further discuss the problems of Muslim women in Europe I am joined by Arzu Merali of the Islamic Human Rights Commission and Sarah Sheriff of the Muslim Women’s Helpline. Arzu what kind of problems do the women who get in touch with you have?

2 There’s a variety of problems but basically the root of the majority of them is that they face an awful lot of discrimination in their everyday life.

N Such as?

2 For example in education, prevention of wearing Islamic dress, which is the more visible sign of discrimination that we have seen in Europe but also very subtle things in employment, questions of faith regardless of the way women dress or how committed they are to their religious beliefs. We have recently seen a case where a Bosnian child was illegally adopted in the UK and was actually held to be better off having an English cultural upbringing rather than a Bosnian one despite all sorts of allegations of neglect on the English side.

N Sarah is that similar to the kind of problems that you encounter?

3 Discrimination is one aspect of the problems presented to the Helpline but really the problems we are confronting are problems created from within the community, ignorance of Islamic teachings and use of Islamic teachings to justify really marginalisation of Muslim women from the public life of the community and even denial of rights and choices in everyday matters such as marriage.

N Do you feel discriminated against in your job within your community for what it is you’re trying to do, bring women together?

3 Things have improved because the social problems have increased to such an extent that I think there is recognition in the leadership now that women have to be entrusted with the responsibility of confronting those issues but certainly the Helpline met with a lot of resistance in the early years, allegations of being feminist and undermining the family etc.

N Arzu with the work that you do, how can you further the cause of Muslim women in Europe?

2 Its difficult. There’s only so much any organisation can do, what we are faced with is deafness on the part of governments across to actually tackle the issue of Islamophobia.
Britain recently woke up to the issue of institutional racism, recently we have lobbied a member of the House of Lords to ask the Home Secretary to look into institutional Islamophobia...

*...how would clarify that, Islamophobia?*

2 Islamophobia is if you like the best analogy would be to something like anti-Semitism, persecution or demonisation of a community based on a perception of their inferiority because they are in this case Muslim.

*And do you think the media needs to be educated more in terms of how they treat Islam and Muslims?*

3 For me what's interesting is not just the commission on Islamophobia but, I am sure Arzu would agree, the omission as well. There are many positive examples of Muslim women achieving quite a lot in society, getting public roles etc but this is all ignored. The constant hammering away at the oppression of women, stereotyping women as oppressed, it doesn't really help and it confirms negative imaging that exists.

2 I was just going to say it's very disheartening for many Muslim activists, especially Muslim women who feel on the one hand they do so much and yet everybody is cast under this umbrella of being oppressed etc etc when women *per se* in Europe face problems and yes they might manifest themselves in different ways according to different communities but let's be honest we're all struggling for an ultimate end of a better situation.

*Arzu and Sarah, thank you very much indeed.*

2 & 3 Thank you.

*Well that's Inside Europe for this week, I am Finoumna Sweeney in London, we'll be back at the same time next week.*
Appendix E – Activities Diary

**Viewing Diary**

1. In an average week which of the following media do you use (including mainstream and Muslim media)? For each example you can recall please specify the names of newspapers, programmes, websites etc. which you use. In the comments section mention the reasons you use this media, likes/dislikes and any other relevant comments and opinions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Type</th>
<th>Specify Name</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(give programme names and channels)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(give programme name/station)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Magazines/Journals</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Literature</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Do you have a favourite/regular Website(s)?)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. In an average week approximately how many hours of television do you watch? Please circle.

- Less than 10 hours
- 10-20
- 20-30
- 30-40
- More than 40

**Cultural Activities Diary**

This section asks about general participation.

3. Do you ever attend any seminars/lectures/talks? If so, what kind and why? (Including any study circles, gatherings, discussion groups etc).
4. What type of social or cultural events do you participate in, for example, meeting friends, family gatherings, attending outside events, etc?

5. Are you a member of any organisation, either in a formal capacity or as a volunteer?

6. How religious would you say you are? You can define and describe this in any way you like.

7. How important is the role the media plays in your life compared to other social and cultural factors?

8. Any other comments about social and cultural activities and associations or affiliations which you feel are important in your life and which help you to define and think about yourself?

Can you give details about the following?

Age: 
Sex: 

Education (what are you studying/have you studied):

Occupation:

Locality (what is your home town/city):

Ethnic Origin:

Nationality:

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP

Please use space overleaf for additional comments or continuing answers. If you would like to know more about the research, make further contributions or contact me for any other reason please email me at stm6@le.ac.uk.
Appendix F – Muslim Press Survey Questionnaire

As part of my doctoral research I am examining the views of young Muslims with regards to their media consumption. A particular focus in my fieldwork is to gather information about the use of and opinions about alternative Muslim media. I would be grateful if you could spare 10 minutes to complete this questionnaire and return it to STM, FREEPOST MID23825, NOTTINGHAM, NG7 1BR. The questionnaire has been distributed randomly through the publication’s subscription list and is strictly confidential (no name or address is required). If you would like to know more about the research project, please mention this or email me at stm6@le.ac.uk.

How long have you subscribed to this publication and how did you come to know about it?

__________________________________________________________________________

What are your reasons for subscribing/reading it?

__________________________________________________________________________

Do you read or subscribe to any other Muslim media (can be other publications, such as journals, email lists, etc)? If so, which ones and what are your opinions of these?

__________________________________________________________________________

Do you read any mainstream media (e.g. The Times, Daily Mail, New Scientist etc)? What are the main differences between these and Muslim media?

__________________________________________________________________________

How has the Muslim media developed your sense of belonging to a British Muslim community or global ummah?

__________________________________________________________________________

How do you think Muslim media has helped you to think about your Muslim identity?

__________________________________________________________________________

Compared to other factors, how much influence do you feel media has on you?

__________________________________________________________________________

How has this publication and Muslim media in general given a voice to the Muslims of Britain?

__________________________________________________________________________

What impact will Muslim media have on the participation of Muslims in British society?

__________________________________________________________________________

What impact will Muslim media have on the non-Muslim community of Britain?

__________________________________________________________________________

Any other comments?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Occupation</th>
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<tr>
<th>Education</th>
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Thank you for your time. [M or Q or C or T – to refer to publication survey was sent to].
Appendix G – Muslim Press Interview Schedule

Can you tell me briefly about your organisation/publication?
What were your initial ideas/aims for setting up this media project? What did you hope to achieve?
Why did you feel there was a need for this type of media?
What encouragement or discouragement did you get from the Muslim community?
Who do you think is your main audience/readership?
Have you ever conducted a reader survey?
In your perception, is your readership using alternative Muslim media to supplement mainstream media (i.e. fill a gap) or using just this as an information source in its entirety?

How would you say media has changed over the past 10 years (or since 1989)?
How do you think the mainstream media portrays Islam and Muslims? [if this has not already been covered above]
What do you think is the relationship between mainstream and alternative/Muslim media?
Which mainstream media do you find useful/prefer and which are not?
How do you feel Muslims are dealing with the media?
What are the different readings and use of media within the Muslim population (e.g. between men and women, different generations etc)?
Are more Muslims participating in media issues or choosing media as a profession?

In what ways, in your opinion, has the Muslim community itself changed?
How would you say the identities of Muslims in Britain have emerged over the past ten years?
How do you think the growth of Muslim media has affected/influenced these developments? [Contribution to a knowledgeable society?]
What do you feel the alternative discourses presented by your publication are and what have these meant for the articulation of a Muslim identity? Is Muslim media creating space for new Muslim identities?
How do you see the new types of media, especially the Internet, being used by Muslims?

Do you think that alternative/Muslim media will have an impact on the overall perceptions of non-Muslims about Islam and Muslims?
Of all the influences in society, how powerful do you think the Muslim media is in shaping the identity of young Muslims in Britain?

Any specific comments on particular programmes/productions (such as ‘My Son The Fanatic’, Goodness Gracious Me, East is East etc). Difference between television and newspaper journalism.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name/Title</th>
<th>Caption/Organisation</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Articles</th>
<th>Funding</th>
<th>Ann Sub</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Q-News</td>
<td>The Muslim Magazine</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td><a href="http://www.q-news.com">www.q-news.com</a></td>
<td>Young, profs, Muslims</td>
<td>Sub &amp; Ad</td>
<td>£24/12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trends</td>
<td>The magazine of the Young Muslims UK. Britain’s Biggest Muslim Youth Magazine.</td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="http://www.trendsmag.co.uk">www.trendsmag.co.uk</a></td>
<td>Young Muslims, students</td>
<td>Sub.</td>
<td>£9/6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact International</td>
<td></td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>‘Serious’ news magazine</td>
<td>Nov 01. War on terrorism, world news, economy/business, reviews.</td>
<td>Sub &amp; Ad</td>
<td>£24/12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Invitation</td>
<td>The Muslim Family Magazine</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td></td>
<td>Young families</td>
<td>Sub &amp; Ad</td>
<td>£8.75/6</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Islamica</td>
<td>The Journal of the Islamic Society of LSE (Muslim Academic Trust).</td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="http://www.lse.ac.uk/clubs/islamic/islamica">www.lse.ac.uk/clubs/islamic/islamica</a></td>
<td>Students, researchers, academics</td>
<td>Subs.</td>
<td>£10/2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reality</td>
<td>Young Muslim Organisation UK &amp; Muslimaat UK</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td></td>
<td>Muslim students</td>
<td>Subs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Khilafah (Magazine of Hzab-u-Tahir)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="http://www.khilafah.com">www.khilafah.com</a></td>
<td>Mainly youth</td>
<td>Subs.</td>
<td>£1.50</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ibn Ul Waqt</td>
<td>A unique magazine that understand the issues facing the ummah and focuses on the solution.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nov 00. Palestine, US, Egyptian eclema.</td>
<td>Subs.</td>
<td>£6/4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Majubah</td>
<td>Magazine for Muslim Women</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>Subs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Young Believers</td>
<td>The First Muslim Magazine for Children (Home &amp; Classroom resource for 5-11 yrs)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>International politics and academic reviews.</td>
<td>Free?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Fountain</td>
<td>Popular Educational and Scientific Magazine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Subs.</td>
<td>£15/6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Revival</td>
<td>Official Newsletter of Muslim Youth League (UK)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>Subs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Homeland</td>
<td>A Journal dedicated to Islamic Development in Britain and the World</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>Subs.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflect</td>
<td>The Islamic magazine for ‘Thinking Young Muslims’</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>Subs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Insight</td>
<td>Merger between Reality and Middlepath</td>
<td>~2000</td>
<td></td>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>Subs.</td>
<td>£7/6</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Riyadhul Jannah</td>
<td>Gardens of Paradise. Enlighten yourself to the Truth and Strengthen your Iman</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>Subs.</td>
<td>£14/12</td>
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* Data is not complete. Funding refers to sources of funding, for example, subscriptions, advertising, sponsorship, donations. Annual subscription is UK rate and number of issues annually.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<th>Selected Speakers/Topics/Activities</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Ticket</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23 April</td>
<td>A New Age in an Old World</td>
<td>Muslim Community of Cardiff/Assn Muslim Profs</td>
<td>Hamza Yusuf (USA), A H Murad (UK), Shaykh Yakubi (Syria), Abdullah Adhami, Siraj Wihaj</td>
<td>Cardiff</td>
<td>£10</td>
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<tr>
<td>22 July</td>
<td>Modern Traditions: British Muslim Women in H E</td>
<td>Assn of Muslim Researchers</td>
<td>Fauzia Ahmed</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>£3/£5</td>
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<tr>
<td>27-30 July</td>
<td>Inner Dimensions of a Muslim Student</td>
<td>FOSIS, ACM (camp)</td>
<td>Shaykh Suhail Hasan, A Tamimi, Nihad Awad (CAIR – USA)</td>
<td>Nottingham</td>
<td>£15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 August</td>
<td>Expolslamia – Is the Soul Compliant?</td>
<td>YMO UK, Muslimaat, Islamic Forum Europe</td>
<td>S* Idrees Ali (USA), S A H Quick (Canada), S A Ibn al Judni (Iraq), Habibur Rahman (UK)</td>
<td>Wembley CC, London</td>
<td>£7 (£10 at door)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-13 Aug</td>
<td>Islam Transcending 2000 (IT2K)</td>
<td>YM (UK)</td>
<td>S T Zayedan (Kuwait), I Suhaib Webb &amp; I Anwar Aulaqi (USA), Shabbir Ally (Canada), Yakub Zaki (UK)</td>
<td>Worcester</td>
<td>£25-35</td>
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<tr>
<td>31/7-25/8</td>
<td>3rd Intensive Summer Course</td>
<td>Dar al Mustafa</td>
<td>S Moshen Al-Najjar (Egypt/UK), S M S Al-Nus (Syria), S Tijani (Tunisia/UK), Arabic, tajwid, agida, fish, hadith.</td>
<td>Nottinghamshire</td>
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<td>26-27 August</td>
<td>Sufism and <em>Sunnah</em> in the Modern World</td>
<td>Jam’i’at Ilyaa Minhaju al-Sunnah</td>
<td>S Salim al-Amary (UAE) and S Mandy Muhmmad (USA). Remembrance, spirituality, marriage, according to Qur’an and <em>sunnah</em>.</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>£10</td>
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<tr>
<td>27 August</td>
<td>How to Re-establish the <em>Khilafah</em>. The Method of Muhammad (saw)</td>
<td>HT</td>
<td>Abu Abdullah (USA), Imam Waheed (UK), A Hameed (Kenya), Muslim Nawaz (Pak)</td>
<td>Birmingham</td>
<td>£3</td>
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<tr>
<td>1-11 Nov</td>
<td>Muslims in a Brave New World</td>
<td>FOSIS (Human Appeal Int)</td>
<td>S Abdullah Idris (USA)</td>
<td>National Tour</td>
<td>Varies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* S at the beginning of a name indicates Shaykh. I indicates imam.
Appendix J – Summary of Email Interview with Muslim Directory

I asked the Editor about the aims and objectives of setting up the publication, responses from the Muslim communities, problems they face and general issues about Muslim identity.

The initial idea for the publication was to help the Muslim community network, grow and utilise its own resources to become stronger economically (a detailed list of Aims and Objectives is included in the Directory – p 6 of the current 2001-2 edition). Other religious communities had similar directories and it was thought that as the Muslim community is the largest non-Christian group in the UK, a source of information pertaining to its institutions and resources was needed. This would also help promote businesses that would enable the Muslim communities to have a stronger financial base in the UK.

The response to the publication was positive and though it was limited to the English speaking Muslim community, there was a feeling that it was becoming an institution in its own right. However, financial support for the Directory was often limited and the editor felt that more investment needed to be made into Muslim media in general in Britain. It had recognised the important role of media, not least for dawah, but now had to make a financial commitment to developing it. This is why he thought that Muslim communities in the UK were developing slowly as far as media was concerned. A broader infrastructure, not just mosques, of social and recreational activities was needed to cater for the growing Muslim population, though this might perhaps change the idea of community itself.

He felt that the Muslim communities were settled in the UK and as generations went by they were demanding their rights as citizens. For many younger Muslims the UK was home.
BRITISH MUSLIMS

2 million souls
1,200 mosques
72 jamaats
69 schools
7 Mayors
4 Parliamentarians

One magazine.
Q-News. Get the halal picture.

Q-News.
The future is halal.

BRITAIN'S LEADING MUSLIM MAGAZINE

"The average Q-News reader is a young British Muslim graduate in a professional occupation for whom English is a first language and critical engagement with the style and values of the Western world is taken for granted."

(The Independent, 31 October 2000)

call 020 8903 0819

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http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/reu/frcdmrgs.pdf

*Muslim dolls tackle 'wanton' Barbie*, March 5 2002
http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/middle_east/newsid_1856000/1856558.stm