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The tragedy of Islamism in Britain: a fetishism for politics

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The tragedy of Islamism in Britain

A fetishism for politics

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the University of Westminster for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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*To A ,H, L, M, N, X, Y:
terror suspects and terror victims.*

To terrorised minds and repressed voices.

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A small note on websites

The existence of the Internet makes a researcher's work relatively easy on the one hand and extremely frustrating on the other. Easy, because so many parties and individuals maintain websites that often feature information from leaflets and booklets that make it possible for anyone anywhere to peruse them. Frustrating, because, as is the nature of things, some websites and/or some features on those sites tend to disappear or are 'forcibly' removed. This is the case with a few of the sites listed here. However, I should like to emphasise that none of this affects the overall study in question.

List of Abbreviations

HT Hizbu ut' Tahrir

IHRC Islamic Human Rights Commission

MAB Muslim Association of Britain

MB Muslim Brotherhood

MCB Muslim Council of Britain

MPAC Muslim Public Affairs Committee

GLOSSARY

adat - principle of custom in fiqh

arkana al Islam - the five pillars of Islam

urf - principle of customary use

amir - leader

Dar al Harb - 'house of war'(i.e. non-Islamic enemy territory)

Dar al Iman - abode of faith

dawah - missionary action or call

fard - obligation according to Shari'ah

fatwa - a juridical verdict upon an issue

fiqh - Islamic jurisprudence

hadith - narration of the Prophet (and sometimes the Sahabah)

hajj - the pilgrimage to Mecca that Muslims have to perform at least once in their lives

halal -allowed, permissible

haram - forbidden

hijab - Islamic headscarf

ijma -The consensus of the scholars in Islamic jurisprudence

ijtihad - the individual legal opinion of a scholars who - starting from previous laws and past events - exercises an independent judgement

imam- prayer leader or head of a community or state

jihad - struggle

khalifah - Caliph

khilafah - Caliphate, Islamic state

qiyas - analogy

ray - principle of opinion in fiqh

ramadan - the month of the fast and the holiest month of the Islamic calendar

shari'ah - Islamic law

shura - consultation

sirah - biography and stories related to the Prophet and part of the sunna

sunnah - the narrated tradition of the actions and sayings of the Prophet. It is composed of sirahs and hadiths

sawm - the word means fasting (the most important fast for Muslims is that of the Ramadan month)

ulema - plural of '*imam*'

ummah - the community of all Muslims and believers in one God

vilayet i Faqih - Guardianship of the Jurist; Khomeini's theory of Islamic government

wulaa - governors

zakat - it means both 'purification' and 'growth' and refers to the amount of money that all adults Muslims, who are financially able, have to pay to support specific categories of people, who may also be non-Muslims

ABSTRACT

This dissertation critically argues that the *dominant* representation of the *dominated* groups can mirror its way into the self-representation of those groups. Moreover, a *fetishism* for politics (i.e., a repression and denial of engagement in the political arena) *deflects* the interaction between the dominant and the dominated groups (in this case, the UK Government and Islamist parties in the UK) and ultimately disempowers them both.

This research is an analysis of the discourses and practices of a large number of Islamist parties in the UK over a period of nearly 20 years (1989-2007); a period when they gained public attention during the debates over multiculturalism and the supposed threats to security from the rise of radical Islam.

By 'Islamist parties', I mean political groups who place their Muslim identity at the centre of their political practices and who see their political future in Islam. Such political groups are not just Muslims, but Islamists. In asserting this, I argue against the commonplace culturalist-orientalist approach that denies and rejects any 'political' in relation to Islamists. As part of a dominant discourse, this culturalist-orientalist approach consists of a binary view whereby Islam is either a matter of private professed belief or a matter of a terrorist disruption into the Western democratic systems.

In response to this stark dichotomy, I adopt a constructionist theoretical approach that sees 'cultures' and 'religions' as political acts within the terms of a power-relationship. Practically, I approach the issue based on two years of fieldwork amongst the British Islamists.

I have interviewed a large number of Islamists from different parties. For practical and epistemological reasons, I divide them into two groups: the Participationists and the Rejectionists. Participationists are those who are willing to take part in British political life, for instance, by taking part in elections, while the Rejectionists are those who reject the British political system as illegitimate and plan to subvert it.

The participationist parties act politically but show a strong reticence in adopting any political label themselves. The explanation for this lies in their fetishism for politics. Taking a collaborative and non-confrontational approach, they choose to remain in the category of

the 'faith-groups'. Ultimately, this delegitimizes their Islamist quest because it mirrors the dominant culturalist-orientalist discourse that depoliticizes and disempowers them.

The rejectionist groups are those with a confrontational approach toward the dominant discourse; they promote an Islamic system as the alternative. They declare that their struggle is aimed at instituting a 'Khilafah' so that the 'Political' is at the service of the 'Spiritual'. My findings indicate that, paradoxically, the exact reverse is true. Their efforts promote a 'secularization' of Islam; this is denied (repressed) by the Islamists themselves, and exorcized by the dominant discourse under the label of religious fundamentalism.

The 'fetishism' for politics from both the *dominant* and the *dominated* distorts their interaction, and is ultimately responsible, both for the political 'failure' of Islamist parties, and for the string of past and future terrorist attacks. The novelty of my approach has been to analyze the hiatus between the two parties -- the political stalemate and the security threat -- through the convex mirror of repression and exorcism; politics, as discoursed and practiced through the emotional, the visceral, and the de-sacralization of the secular and the religious at the same time.

The novelty also lies in providing a new ethnography of a political actor -- the British Islamist -- whose politics has been underemphasized, and who has been much maligned and commented upon from a dominant culturalist-orientalist framework. The new ethnography acknowledges the agency of British Islamists as political actors and argues that they should be represented and recognized as such by the dominant discourse and by the Government. The Manichean representation of these political actors (British Islamists) as either faith groups or terrorists, debilitates the very democratic process and reproduces a recurrent security threat.

INTRODUCTION

Since the events of September 11, it has often been declared that a new era has dawned. Certainly, 'Islam' and the 'Muslim world' have become the focus of increased attention. The fact that Muslims across the globe have not uniformly praised the actions by Al-Qaeda but also denounced them, shows that expressions like the 'global Muslim community' are inaccurate and misleading. Moreover, this also problematizes the commonly held belief that there is an unchanging essence to Islam that underpins the lives of Muslims.

Likewise, the London bombings of 7th July 2005 stirred up anxieties, concerns and questions. This was the worst ever terrorists attack on mainland Britain and the most devastating bombing in London since the Second World War. Nonetheless, this event was less traumatic for Britons than 9-11 for Americans (Verkaik 2010). Partly, this was because the scale was smaller, and partly, because 30 years of IRA terrorism had diluted the shock factor for the British (McRoy 2006, 11). The most startling revelation was that the bombers were UK citizens, and with one exception, British-born. Inevitably, the first question that arose was related to the reasons that led young British Muslims to kill themselves and others.

This thesis attempts to reformulate that question by opening up new lines of enquiry on Islamism and Islamists in Britain, and by providing a different account of the events that are commonly referred to as examples of 'Islamic fundamentalism'. My account is different in a few ways. First and foremost, I tell this story outside the demonology of fundamentalism and within the archaeology and genealogy (Foucault 1969, 1977) of Islamism in Britain. That is to say, this is a field- investigation carried out by collecting first-hand material and data; a political 'experience' (Butler and Scott 1992, 32) within British Islamists' discourses and discursive practices. This involved tracing, sharing and analysing the different Islamist practices, the conflicting representations, and the disparate practices of resistance to the dominant representations (El Zein 1977, 57). The aim is to understand and examine the possible factors affecting the relationship between the British Islamist parties and the UK Government. Lack of communication and interaction in this relationship leads to misunderstandings that result in political hiatus and security threats. Finally, my thesis will seek to identify and analyze these broken dialogues by using the vocabulary of a 'fetishist' desire for politics that is nurtured by both parties: the dominant (UK Government) and the dominated (British Islamist parties). Paradoxically, such repressed

longing connects them on the level of the self-representation and the representation of the 'Other', but divides them on the level of interaction and of political dialogue, causing tragic outcomes.

My dissertation is not simply focused on British Islamism and Islamists but it is also an attempt to inhabit their experience, by trying to work through and unsettle stereotypes; by not scavenging upon ready-made categories of understanding (Marranci 2008, 3).

I have always treasured what Wittgenstein (1968, 21) enunciated once, that one does not start from theory, but that theory emerges in how one works through a series of puzzles and hurdles; theory comes along in intellectual activity rather than precede it.

This seems a highly risky and potentially anti-intellectual strategy for me to adopt. It is also contrary to the advice that most of my fellow PhD students receive. I was allowed the courage to pursue what I thought were urgent questions without first having to postulate a hypothesis or review the academic state of the subject (Modood 2005, 3). So, I decided to engage with what was happening in the realm of so-called British Islamism, by commencing the fieldwork and by 'displacing' and 're-using' subversively most of the assumptions, frameworks, and theories on Islamism.

As a topic, Islamism has been brought to public attention in Britain by events like 9-11 and, principally, 7-7. It has been closely monitored, investigated, researched by different experts within various fields including academia, policy-making and media (Trepagnier 2006, 5).

In order to explain the two terror attacks, a plethora of hypotheses were conceived and the 'War on terror' was advocated as the strategic response to those criminal actions (Asad 2006, 8; Mcghee 2005, 4; Varisco 2005, 9; Verkaik 2010). Likewise, several disparate questions were raised with regard to the nature of Islamist movements and the origin of their 'rage' against the West (Fallaci 2001, 6; Zakaria 2001). Awkwardly enough, I found myself unable to give an answer to most of them. The first plausible explanation that crossed my mind was that I did not have enough information and data to understand the reasons for such events. It was only later that I started questioning the questions *themselves*.

My research began to take shape when I realized that perhaps the current lines of enquiry were not the main ones to be investigated; they seemed either irrelevant or, at the very least, misleading.

It became clear to me that the events that were labelled -- hastily and disingenuously (mostly by the media and policy-makers) -- as examples of Islamic 'fundamentalism' or,

more dangerously, of Islamic 'terrorism', were already an explanation of what they were meant to be enquiring about (Varisco 2005, 10).

It is in this specific context that my research activity commenced, by posing questions such as: what is the archaeology (Foucault 1969) and mostly the *genealogy* (Foucault 1977) of Islamism in Britain?; what is the nature of the relation between Islamism and Islam, as a faith professed and practiced by a Muslim minority in a non-Muslim environment?; is it possible to speak of different ways of articulating Islamism in Britain?; how is the relation between Islam and Islamism *lived* and represented through the discourses and practices of British Islamists?; what is the suturing point, if any, among the variety of Islamist agendas? Is there any space for an Islamist politics, a space which is not administered or conceded by the dominant discourse as an 'absolution' after proving good credentials?; above all, what is the reason, the perverse dynamic, that, on the one hand, stops Islamist parties from being 'politically' relevant without being disruptive, and on the other, stops the Government from engaging with them, except by depoliticising them as religious groups or by witch-hunting them as terrorists? This perverse dynamic finally leads both to the Islamists' political 'failure' and to the persistence of a security threat. I argue that the answers to these questions lie in a 'fetishism' for politics that is nurtured by both sides, the dominant and the dominated, the British Government and the Islamist parties.

Furthermore, my study is an attempt to comprehend discourses, practices, discursive practices *voiced*, dialogued and inhabited by the political actors themselves, without resorting to culturalist explanations and to orientalist frameworks of understanding, as these are politically disabling and disingenuously ostracizing (Marranci 2008, 9). My dissertation does not speak of Islamic terrorism but of politics and of political actors. It focuses on the relationships of power and on the production of meanings and meaningful practices within those relationships. It is also a study of discourses and practices of resistance and subversion against some power structures. It analyses projects and ideas aimed at charting and changing those hegemonic structures and discourses. This also means that I intend to show the distinctive weakness of the assumption that every political movement, which articulates itself through the vocabulary of religion, is fundamentalist and potentially terrorist; to counter the disingenuous argument that the political practices and discourses of the political agents are genetically *determined* by their culture (Gellner 1981,

68), represented as a monolith, an unchanged and a-historical (as de-historicized) *super-entity*.

THE METHODOLOGY USED

Above, I have outlined the main research questions that got me started and helped me to stay focused throughout the entire research process (Oakley 2000, 17).

As mentioned earlier, the method I decided to adopt in order to investigate them might seem somewhat risky or anti-intellectual. I did not start from the theory or from a survey of the existing literature, but from the fieldwork (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 8), thus favouring an approach that would let theory emerge from the analysis of the data: the grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin 1990, 6).

A grounded theory is inductively derived from the study of the phenomena it represents (ibid., 11). That is to say, it is discovered, developed and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis pertaining to the phenomena under observation (ibid., 15). Therefore, data collection, analysis and theory stand in a reciprocal relationship to each other. I did not begin with a theory to then prove it. Rather, I commenced with an area of study and then allowed the emergence of what is relevant to it (ibid, 23).

The context of my research related to a minority group in Britain, the Muslims, and as the following pages will better clarify, those among them who see their political future in Islam: the Islamists.

For a period of two years (2005-2007), I was engaged in intense fieldwork with Islamist activists based in London and its outskirts. These activists were members of a wide range of Islamist parties, from the more moderate to the more radical.

My objective was to learn about their political discourses and practices *as* Islamists in the UK; to find out how their Islamism was discoursed and practiced within the relations of power with the UK government and, how it was performing and interacting with UK Government policies.

I began with a prepared list of relatively open-ended questions (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 11), to enable me to find out more about each interviewee: their background, education, employment status and mainly, the reasons why they had joined the Islamist parties under observation.

Sometimes the interviews turned into a 'conversation'; in some cases, other party members were present and contributed to the discussions. At other times, especially when I was interviewing party leaders, the interviews tended to stay quite formal.

By and large, the party members were quite forthcoming about the shared goals of the Islamist agenda in the UK and in the rest of the world and about their own motivations for joining the Islamist struggle and call.

What emerged from those encounters was the party members' strong sense of 'pride' and superiority in their contribution to propagating the Islamist message and in implementing its political agenda; they made it clear to me that doing this was the only right way of bringing about a change 'in world politics, in terms of justice and development'.

There were also some practical difficulties involved in the project, related both to my 'status' as a woman (Oakley 2000, 16) and as a non-Muslim, inquiring about their idea of the 'political' (Mouffe 2005, 9). It is important to stress that all my interviewees were male-subjects: not because I selected them as such, but because all these parties are formed exclusively by men.

It is also worth remembering that these interviews were carried out in a period when Islamism and Islamists had come under attack (Marranci 2008, 64), accused of being terrorists and fundamentalists, enemies of the West (Asad 2006, 9). Therefore, my interviewees were very suspicious at the beginning about my real purposes for conducting the research. It took a little time to win their trust, to be allowed to take part in their meetings and then to approach them for an interview. Once the trust was granted, my interviewees became more articulate and willing to talk profusely about Islamism in general, their own reasons for joining the specific Islamist party, the benefits of embracing Islamism in Britain and of implementing whole or part of the Islamist predicament (discourse) into practice. I was fully aware from the beginning that the interviewees were partly telling me what they perceived I wanted to hear (based upon their representation of me as a Western non-Muslim woman), and partly, giving me the official party line.

I was also fully aware that there was no definite 'truth' to be reached (Abu-Lughoud 1989, 300) or discovered and perhaps, also, that my interviewees did not want to share with me what they believed was their 'truth' (ibid., 301). As mentioned earlier, sometimes the interviews turned into conversations, specifically with the younger members (under-aged), who did not want to be quoted in the first place. On ethical and moral grounds, I do not refer to them in my research and I do not report our conversations. Nevertheless, I have learned and understood a lot from those experiences. Primarily, I have grasped and

retained something of the complexity of their situation: the overlapping levels of identities, which, as young boys born and bred in the UK, they have to cope with. They have decided to embrace Islamism as their political 'ideology' (Metcalf 1996, 55), yet they profess an Islam very different from that of their fathers and grandfathers, which was still of a diasporic kind and which they consider traditional, in the sense of being obsolete (Haddad 2002, 38). Still, these young Islamists go to school, have fun with their friends and school-mates, who might be from a different religious, cultural or political background and might look at them suspiciously, sometimes because of their political beliefs. Equally, these young Islamists I spoke to and spent some time with, might work in a grocery shop to earn extra cash, where they need to sell wines and alcohol and, as other young boys of their age, might enjoy reading some men's magazines like GQ, all of which could hardly be considered 'Islamic' or related to the core of 'Islamist' discourse.

These specific elements, the collection and recollection of these observations, which might seem somewhat irrelevant, probably 'anti-academic' or even petty, were extremely precious 'eye-openers' for conducting my research. They helped me understand the processual and 'work-in-progress' character of their Islamist discourse and practices (Marranci 2006, 34). These Islamist discourses and practices were not 'articulated' and practiced in a vacuum: they were primarily lived and experienced in a country that had no Muslim background (UK), and which my interviewees could 'feel' and represent to themselves, as a country where they are a minority (Metcalf 1996, 17-20).

All this convinced me greatly of the inaccuracy and flaws in every approach and theoretical framework that represents Islam and Islamism as a monolithic block, unchanged and unchangeable, incapable of changing and mostly unable of being discoursed and practiced as a political discourse (Del Valle 1997, 33; Fallaci 2001, 63; Gellner 1981, 36; Huntington 1997, 14; Kramer 1996, 45; Lewis and Schnapper 1994, 79; Philips 2006, 22), which is still somehow related to Islam, but it is practiced and divulged within a power relationship. That is to say a fully-fledged political programme (Varisco 2005, 4) and not a private professed belief, which we call Islam. What I was enquiring about and starting to better understand were political movements with political goals and plans for the future: the spiritual side of it was of secondary relevance for my inquiry (Marranci 2006, 11).

The role of the researcher: the experience within

As mentioned earlier, the collection of data in my fieldwork involved some complications related to my status both as a researcher and as a woman, as non-Muslim and (in view of my interviewees) Western (Oakley 2000, 55).

The first question I had to face was the role of the researcher within the domain of her/his own research (Bowen 2007, 55). To put it another way, power-relations and politics do not simply exist as an area of research enquiry; they exist and have a relevant role in the research process too (Damasio 2000, 3). In terms of her/his own project, the researcher has traditionally been represented as a powerful figure (Butler and Scott 1992, 35), as one who exercises control over what happens and how it happens, whereas, the 'subjects' of her/his own research are represented as partially 'agency-free' elements that can exert very little influence over the process (Damasio 2002, 116). More specifically, the whole process is not inscribed and represented as a power-relationship. My response to this approach has been to place myself as a part of the 'experience', within a relation of 'inter-subjectivity' (Damasio 2000, 145). This approach focuses critical attention not only on the 'findings, as in the empiricist tradition, nor on textuality, as in some post-modern approaches, but on the theory and politics of the representation of the *other* and on the meaning of research for the researched' (ibid., 146).

The problem for me arose in terms of how to document the experience of the others, how to offer the 'evidence' of experience? I have been, and am still, struggling with claims such as: what could be truer than a subject's own account of what she/he has lived through? It is this kind of appeal to experience as un-contestable evidence and as origin of explanation, that has questioned my own research and jeopardized my effort and trust in writing a 'history/histories of difference' (Gilsenan 1982, 5). The issue for someone conducting fieldwork should not revolve around taking as self-evident the identities of those whose experience is being documented, thereby naturalizing their differences (Daniel 1993, 28; Varisco 2005, 5). Put another way, when experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, inescapably the vision of the individual subject (be it the subject whose experience is being accounted for, or the researcher who makes the account) becomes the bedrock of evidence upon which explanation is built. The risk involved in this is that experience subtly becomes a sort of undisputed authority of knowledge (El Zein 1977, 252) rather than a way in itself of exploring how difference is established, how it operates, how and in which way it gives flesh to the subjects: a language, a grammar for

their discourses, and a history (Essed 1991, 57; Trepagnier 2006, 89). My concern, mainly, is that a notion and a deployment of the 'evidence' of experience like this one, simply reproduces rather than contests given ideological systems, which assume that facts speak for themselves (El Zein 1977, 32). In the specific case of this study, the representation of the Islamist discourses and practices produced by the culturalist orientalist approach (analysed in the next chapter) rests on a 'natural' difference (ibid., 32) between religion and political practices and discourses, between Islam (Islamism is not even taken into consideration) and an enlightened-secularized form of politics (Varisco 2005, 19).

It is certainly not enough just to give a voice to those political actors who are affected and marginalized by these dichotomized understandings of politics. The project of making experience 'visible' cannot neglect the analysis of how this ideological system works, the process of its category-building, the premises upon which those categories rest and how they operate with notions of subjects, origin and cause (ibid., 27). There is a need to follow and understand the historical processes, that through discourses, position subjects and produce their experiences. It is like saying that it is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience (Crosby 1992, 131). Experience then becomes not the origin, the foundation of our explanation, but what we want to explain. In so doing, all the explanatory categories usually taken for granted start to be questioned, opened and broken down to their discursive, contested origin; experience itself is definitely one of them (ibid., 132).

My main concern, when I embarked upon my fieldwork with Islamist activists, was that experience is not the linchpin or *axiom* of our explanation but what we want and we need to explain first (Geertz 1973, 25). This kind of approach does not undermine politics by denying the existence of the subjects, but it interrogates the process of their creation and it attempts to chart the power relations and struggles, which imbue and mobilize them (Damasio 2000, 30). By so doing, it powerfully refigures *history*, the experience itself and the role of the researcher. It is a process of *historicizing* that implies the critical scrutiny of all foundational categories used to represent and analyse experience, otherness and other's experiences, where the researcher always stands out as an *a-priori* (Trepagnier 2006, 68).

To wit, the role of the researcher cannot be considered as a 'given' any longer and it is never a sort of 'deus ex machina'¹, rather it needs to be carefully enquired and thus 'uprooted'.

The researcher is, in fact, both the object of the enquiry and the investigator him or herself. Personally, I started conducting my fieldwork with the Islamist party members by raising questions about whether it matters for the history that researchers (including myself) write, that they are men, women, white, black, straight, gay, believers, atheist or agnostic; I found, instead, that all too often the authority of the subject of knowledge is established by the elimination of everything concerning the speaker (De Certeau 1986, 218). The question of where the researcher is situated, who he or she is, how he or she is defined in relation to others, what the political effects of his or her history may be, never really enter the discussion. I considered it essential, while conducting my research, to raise a few important questions: questions about discourse, difference and subjectivity, as well as about what counts as experience and *who* gets to make that determination (Oakley 2000, 69). Doing this would enable us to *historicize* experience and to reflect critically on the history we write. Instead of denying or being blind to the fact that knowledge and experience exist within a power-relationship and are indeed political (Damasio 2002, 114), it would help us to see that, as researchers, we need to stop acting as an *a-priori* 'ourselves' and as a sort of foundational category of understanding and knowledge. This would imply taking all categories of analysis as contextual, contested and contingent (Essed 1991, 32); this would also lead us to ask how categories of representation and analysis -- such as class, gender, race, identity, subjectivity, experience, culture -- achieve their foundational status? What does it mean for a researcher to analyse the reality in terms of those categories; for individuals to think of themselves in these terms? Dominick La Capra has argued that there is a 'transferential' relationship between an historian and the past, a researcher and his/her topic of investigation (La Capra 1987, 68). This means that there is a relationship between the power of the historian's analytical frame and the events that are the object of his/her study. To historicize both sides means denying the fixity and the transcendence of anything that appears to operate as a foundation, and

¹ In the tradition of Greek tragedy, the deus ex machina was an unexpected divine intervention, which resolved an intricate case, that was otherwise hopeless. Nowadays, the term is used to indicate an improbable twist in the plot of a story, which is used by the author in order to work his or her way out from a difficult situation. The main characteristic of a 'deus ex machina' is its lack of relation or consequential logic to the main plot of the story: it is a totally extraneous element. What I mean here by using this rhetorical expression is that the researcher is never detached and 'external' or extraneous to the topic she/he is writing about. The researcher is in the 'plot' and this cannot be denied or concealed any longer, in fact it needs to be exposed and analysed.

turning attention to the history of the foundational concepts themselves, to their genealogy. For a researcher conducting fieldwork, this also implies considering experience as already an interpretation and in constant need of an interpretation. What counts as experience is never self-evident or straightforward; it is always contested and therefore political (El Zein 1977, 57). This kind of approach considers experience as what we need to explain, it interrogates the processes of the creation and suppression of subjects; it also re-figures history and the role of an historian and/or of a researcher (Abu Lughoud 1989, 299); it recognizes his/her stake in the production of knowledge; it is also aware of the fact that categories, and specifically identity categories, are never merely descriptive but always normative and, as such, exclusionary. This does not mean we stop using them, or reject all of them, but that we deconstruct and question them, use them subversively, remove them from a context where they have been deployed as taken-for-granted and unquestioned. This approach also aims to interrogate the formative and exclusionary power of discourse in the construction of differences and identities, by asking whether specific deployments of discourses for specific purposes determine the very notions used (Damasio 2002, 110). In Gayatri Spivak's terms, the issue consists in trying to understand the operations of the complex and changing discursive processes by which identities are ascribed, resisted or embraced and which processes themselves are un-remarked, indeed they achieve their effect because they are not noticed (Spivak 1987, 241). In other words, to be able to do this, there is the need of framing identities and mainly their emergence, as historical events in need of explanation (Marranci 2008, 49). This also means not assuming that the appearance of a new identity is some sort of positivist social fact; it is not inevitable or determined, always there waiting to be expressed, not something that will always exist in the form that it was given in a particular political movement or at a particular historical moment. As Stuart Hall explains 'black has never just been there either...It too is a narrative, a story with a history. Something constructed, told and spoken, not simply found' (Hall 1987, 45). Evidently, this means that we 'historicize' the experience of the 'black' identity and of blackness.

Overall, this endeavour strives to open up new ways of thinking about change and for enquiring about what ought to be changed. It requires us to expose and unsettle the silent power, the silent genealogy of some discourses of erasure, exclusion and re-configuration, which foreclose political spaces and disenable political actors: in this case, the functioning of a culturalist-orientalist approach toward Islamism (Marranci 2008, 61), which needs to be continuously questioned, challenged and unsettled.

To conclude, I want to stress that the choice of the methodology summarised here came about both as a reflection on past research experiences and as a project, on how to start charting thoughts of change and how to think about subverting relations of power that exist at different levels, discursively, 'epistemologically' and, obviously, in political practice.

With my disciplinary background, I am sceptical of approaches in which analysis stands in some kind of theoretical (ideological) opposition to the social discourses and practices one is analysing. Furthermore, I have always been suspicious of theories that claim to know and to 'truly' re-present what people really mean, before even listening to what people actually say, doing so implies the indignity of speaking on someone else's behalf (Price 2002, 5).

Another way of making the point here is that I have tried to achieve an understanding of the topic of my research -- namely, the discourses and practice of Islamists in the UK within their relations of power -- that is firmly anchored in the comprehension of the political actors themselves (Banton 2001, 173-194; Elian 1978, 68; Bordieu 1990, 48). The enquiry that I have embarked upon aspires to find an understanding of the events and conceptualize them accurately, but 'all this intellectual activity only makes sense if it illuminates the perceptions of actors', for, there is no social structure independent of the understanding of agents (Goffman 1974, 56). That is to say, the approach I have followed is eclectic and syncretic. In synthesis, I have tried to open up, break down and subvert foundational categories, in order to use them again, as de-constructed and displaced; this also allowed me to chart and expose the previous operations of power, otherwise gone unchecked (Grillo 2003, 170).

These methodological considerations have also led me to realise that British Islamists do not live in a vacuum but that they inhabit and share a specific context (the UK), and so, they can neither be seen as a uniform part of a monolithic, universal 'Islamic world' (Gellner 1981, 36), nor can they be overlooked. This does not need to be investigated just in terms of numbers and by means of a quantitative analysis, but mainly in terms of lived experiences and through a qualitative investigation (Marranci 2008, 3). It involves considering, analyzing and sharing the experience within the discourses and the practices of a Muslim minority living in the West, and more specifically, Muslims living in Britain, who inhabit, share and represent Islam as their political identity: Islamists.

At last, a final reminder is needed -- if there is a methodological error, it is not made by those who decide to meet and spend time with the Islamists before analysing Islamist

discourses and practices, but mostly, by those, who for so long thought that they could avoid such an effort.

The interaction within the fieldwork

There remains something that needs discussion in relation to my status as a non-Muslim woman researcher, interviewing Islamists (all my interviewees were men), and it brings me to a topic that is very relevant to the process of gathering firsthand data: equality. As I have previously emphasised, I argue that the researcher and the so-called researched are both, equally, active parts of the 'experience'. It is very often assumed (Gatrell 2006, 241) that research should be conducted on the basis of equality. The first objection that can be raised against this proposition is that equality cannot exist where one individual has chosen to research a situation which she/he may not have personally experienced (ibid., 255). And what do we mean by equality? I believe that this assumption sounds slightly unrealistic, because the experience of the interview in itself, and by and large of the fieldwork, is a process in the making, where both actors (researcher and researched) are players within the terms and the prolific 'boundaries' of a power relationship; where practices of representation and self-representation have a pivotal role in the dynamics, strategies and developments of such relationship, and where final results and outcomes are not determined apriori: they all stand as possible, potential endings (Damasio 2000, 56). As mentioned before, there was no theory I wanted to prove (Strauss and Corbin 1990, 23) by commencing my fieldwork; rather, I was open-minded and ready to embark on the process of researching and understanding the making of political discourses and practices (Grillo 2003, 158). However, one observation has to be conveyed here. While I did not retain as relevant or implement-able the notion of equality, I considered it important that everyone involved in the process of research should have an equal entitlement to certain standard of treatment. However, although this is desirable, several different contingencies managed to 'disrupt' my meetings with the participants; this means that they often happened under quite stressed conditions.

In this case, I found the suggestions of feminist methodology researchers (Abu Lughod 1993, 112) useful in tackling the dilemma of how to conduct the practicalities of the relationships between the researchers and the researched. They recommend unstructured or semi-structured interviewing. Open-ended interview research, notes Reinharz,

'produces non-standardized information that allows the researcher to make full use of differences among people' (1992, 16). In this framework, one of the objectives of the feminist interviewing technique is to build a more sympathetic relationship between the researcher and the people who are sharing their stories. It is then receptive to unexpected patterns and stresses the importance of listening and respect.

There is also another question of what I would call the underlying motives, both of the researcher and of the participants, and specifically, what it is usually defined as 'the researcher's desire to achieve a degree of detachment' (ibid., 18-19).

Personally, I do not believe that such attainment of a scientific detachment is plausible or realistic, neither do I consider it desirable; in my fieldwork, other skills were very helpful -- instinct, experience and the careful attention to the smallest details and elements, from the expressed ones to the just alluded, from the unsaid to the tabooed, from the way the bodies, as in the body language, were variously seeking distance and proximity from the *other*.

The sociologist Ann Oakley proposed a new model of research based on a 'feminist ethic of commitment and egalitarianism in contrast with the scientific ethic of detachment and role differentiation between researcher and subject' (2000, 27). This approach explains very well the difference between empathy and objectification. If one adopts a feminist interviewing technique, it allows a degree of creativity, not in the sense of 'making things up' but rather in the sense that one is broadening the field to include every subject-actor of the experience of the fieldwork: the 'researcher' as well as the so-called 'researched' (incidentally, terms I would avoid, as they indicate a relation of 'domination', which goes against my own argument on the shared, dynamic and procedural experience of the fieldwork).

This brings me to discuss another relevant topic for my fieldwork: the sensitivity of the research. A sensitive topic has been defined as 'one which potentially poses for those involved a substantial threat, the emergence of which renders problematic the collection, holding and/or dissemination of research data' (Lee, Renzetti 1990, 512). There is no doubt that exploring the political in relation to groups which are under continuous attack or suspicion of being terrorist and fundamentalist is a sensitive issue. Furthermore, some of my interviewees were under house arrest on the accusation of being terror suspects and I had to be cleared from the Home Office to be allowed to visit them, agreeing to be labelled as an 'associate to terror suspects'. Some other groups I conducted field work with, were

banned and forced to go underground at the same time that I was interviewing and meeting them. Some others I did my fieldwork with, were under the constant threat of being banned and police and armed forces were always patrolling the area where they held talks. I was well aware of the difficulties and the possible shortcomings involved in conducting research on a sensitive topic. That meant that the individuals I wanted to meet and interview could have been unwilling to talk about their political stands, agenda, experiences and their pasts. So I definitely considered whether it was fair to subject my interviewees to any kind of emotional harm. Besides, I could not disregard other more immediate concerns. Some of the party members spoke to me only on condition of anonymity and I was, and I am still, under legal obligation not to reveal the identities and the contents of my conversations with the terror suspects I was cleared to visit.

In addition, I had to consider the potential dangers and threats posed to my own safety by being 'close' to a set of 'public enemies' in the eyes of the public forces and the then Labour Government. However, after much consideration, I still retained the importance and worthiness of embarking on this research, while bearing in mind the risks I could have faced, the suspicious treatment I could have been subjected to, from the 'Dominant' and the 'Dominated', from the UK government and from the Islamist themselves.

The interview process

As outlined before, the method I employed for my field-research was qualitative and interactive and depended on the intensive, sometimes informal discussions rather than the gathering of statistical information. Guidelines for the interview process were relatively broad and open. I was seeking to find out about my interviewees' background, their biographical data, when, how and why they decided to embrace Islamism and what Islamism meant for them and as a political agenda.

I decided to express and state clearly at the outset, the objectives and the reasons for conducting my research, just to eliminate any suspicion that I was a secret agent working for MI5, as my interviewees sensed or sometimes thought.

In my encounters, it was necessary and fundamental to consider the difference between an interview and a conversation. While a conversation may at least be regarded as social interaction, an interview is a much more formal and structured affair and both my interviewees and I were aware of those differences; this did not imply any deficiency in the

relevance or 'seriousness' of the data and information collected, but just a difference in our interactions and subjectivities at work.

Mapping the research and starting the fieldwork

The first step in the research process was to individuate and select the Islamist parties with whom I wanted to conduct fieldwork. I decided to include, and tried to approach, the vastest range of them, from the more moderate to the more radical, by trying to interview not just the party leaders or representatives of the parties' committees, but also the regular members and followers, from the youngest to the eldest, with some specific ethical concerns in relation to the under-aged.

The method I used to gather information was a combination of semi-structured interviewing and informal conversations (when the situation required the latter approach, as in the case of minors and the terror suspects under house arrest).

The set of questions for individuals was designed to establish their background, education, profession, their relations to Islam as a lived religion (what I would define in the next pages as *religiosity*), how they would define Islamism (how and if this was different from Islam), the reasons behind their choice of embracing Islamism and what were the benefits of implementing the Islamist message in world politics.

In the case of the party leaders, as the following pages will show, I asked specific questions about the party's relations to the UK government and its anti-terror policies, the relation with the UK democratic systems and its political arena, and to what extent they felt marginalised and/or (un)willing to participate in the British political system. This then led me to divide them into two groups: the participationists and the rejectionists.

In relation to the first group, I met and exchanged conversations with members of parties as the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC), the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), Muslim Public Affairs Committee (MPAC). Unfortunately, and rather surprisingly, only one representative of these parties -- from the IHRC -- agreed to be formally interviewed and quoted. Members from the other parties were easy to approach but reluctant to concede a proper interview. Hence, they asked me that they remain anonymous and that I not disclose the contents of what then became an informal conversation and exchange of ideas.

Nevertheless, these encounters were very fruitful as I could get a proper and richer insight into the different parties' dynamics. More specifically, I gained a pertinent understanding of their 'Janus-faced' relations with the UK Government, in terms of their practices and discourses within that power relationship. I will offer in chapter 5 an examination and an interpretation of this kind of 'missing first hand data'. Paradoxically, the lack of those formal interviews and the subjects' reticence in talking about their notion of the 'political' have provided me with a very subtle comprehension of their attitude towards the dominant (the UK Government), something I will later term as their 'fetishism' for politics.

In relation to the second group, I met, held conversations, and conducted formal interviews with the members of Hizbu-ut-Tahrir (HT), Al-Ghurabaa and the Saved Sect. The fieldwork with members of these parties, grouped as rejectionists since they refuse to take part in the British political life, has followed an opposite path.

At the beginning, it was quite difficult to approach them as, at that time, they were under the continuous threat of being banned and two of them had actually been banned, while I was conducting my fieldwork with them. Therefore, to obtain their trust, I had to gradually 'get close' to them, by first attending more than a couple of meetings, demos and workshops. Then, when they could recognize my face as a 'familiar, trustable one', I could invite them to give an interview. The process was slow and time-consuming, but finally I obtained various formal interviews from the party leaders, members of the party official committees and the party members.

Among them, I had also the opportunity of spending some time and exchanging informal conversations with the young ones, all under-aged. Some of the conversations cannot be quoted and reported for ethical reasons but the collection of the material turned out to be extremely rich and relevant for my research, to the extent that it offered a deeper and more variegated picture of the context I was investigating: a UK where the Islamists feel themselves to be a minority, in terms of numbers, but also mostly in terms of self-representation.

When I commenced my fieldwork, my purpose was to access as broad a cross-section of party members as possible -- from the youngest to the eldest, from the well-educated to the less-educated, from the ones in paid employment to the unemployed or those living on benefits, from the second and third generation immigrants to the converted or not belonging to any 'Muslim' cultural background, from the Islamists free to practice and discourse their Islamism to the ones under the threat of being banned, from the politically banned to the ones under house arrests for political and security reasons. Most of my

interviews took place in London (north, south, east and west, mostly suburban areas) and its outskirts (Luton).

As outlined above, I was received by my interviewees and the 'subjects' of my study in different ways. A certain form of detachment and 'officialism' combined with a certain unwillingness to talk too much, from the more moderate parties. Suspicion, sometimes fear and unwelcoming remarks from the more radical parties, whose trust I had to gain after several attendances at their meetings as a non-participant observer (but once that trust was gained, they were very precious and relevant participants in the research). The most welcoming and kind people who were open to talking profusely were those under house arrest, whom I approached and frequented for reasons of 'human' comfort, driven by my personal desire and efforts to help them overcome the Kafkasque and inhuman conditions they were forced into. In such cases, our conversations were very broad and open-ended, with no specific time slot to respect and/or questions to be followed. To a certain extent, this resembled the oral history techniques (Charlton 2007, 5).

By and large, and above all, I always tried to ensure that both the interview process and my conversations with all the individuals whom I approached, had the fluidity to encourage a degree of freedom and ease at talking, but also I was able to steer the conversation by focussing on particular topics such as Islamism in the UK. In most cases, my interviewees tended to link their own experience of Islamism to the broader cause of Islamism in the world. This, I believe, originated from the fact that I was a stranger, they did not know my background and they felt a sort of 'obligation' to educate and convince me about their cause, political message and plight.

Most of the interviews took between one and two hours; a few lasted less than one hour and the longest lasted for almost five hours. They took place in different venues: where the party members used to meet, or in their headquarters, in community centres, sometimes in the individual's house, and on other occasions in a coffee house. I was able to interview some of them more than once, especially when something relevant happened, such as the individual leaving the party or the party being banned. My visits to the people under house arrests happened with a weekly frequency stretched over a period of eighteen months. However, a majority of the interviews were based on a single meeting. In almost all cases, I spoke to one individual at a time; however there were a few meetings with groups of party members. Needless to remark that the mode of interaction (whether in a group setting or on their own) and the location of the meeting had some effect on the shape of the interview.

Behind the research process and directing it was the fundamental question of what was the individual party members' political experience and practice as an Islamist in the UK, and how the then-occurring events of the London bombings and the consequent anti-terrorism measures adopted by the UK government had affected that experience, and their ability to participate. Whether they explained this in terms of allegiance to their previous political stance, and rescue from wrong belief, or, if they consequently saw the UK anti-terror policies as human/civil rights violation, political oppression, fascism or Islamophobia, I wanted to glean the precise nature, origin, genealogy, discourse and practice of their Islamism as confronting the dominant political discourse and practice. I wanted to understand their agenda and plans within that relationship of power and their solutions regarding how to win that struggle or find an agreement on the more serious problems and conflicts affecting that relationship.

Issues raised by the research

There are some ethical considerations entailed in this research. Although there have been numerous studies on Political Islam and Islamism in the West, an investigation pertaining to the field of Islamists' discourses and practices facing the Dominant (the UK Government in my specific case), is a relatively unexplored area (Marranci 2008, 7).

By concentrating on the face-to-face encounters with the political actors themselves, my research reveals the complex genealogy of political discourse and practices (Islamism) developing in a country (the UK) outside the Islamic cultural matrix, where the political actors themselves feel part of a minority (Haddad 2002, 68). One important result emerging from the fieldwork was that their practices are fully political, in terms of party organization, structure and agenda and that their discourses are evolving within specific relationships of power, where the so-called 'religious' element is definitely of secondary importance (Marranci 2006, 35). As I will go on to state, Islam as a religion offers the *vernacular* to their political discourse, which is however performed within a power-relationship that is politics (Asad 2006, 5).

The experience of the fieldwork has been crucial to my understanding of the topic under examination: the power relationship between dominant and dominated, and the complex dynamics at work within this relationship of power.

However, there are conversations and data that I cannot disclose for several different reasons. Sometimes, the interviewees themselves asked not to be reported, quoted or referred. I have definitely honoured their wishes and, what is more, understanding the reasons behind such choices, allowed my analysis to offer a broader and comprehensive explanation of their notion of the political.

At other times, my interviewees were under-aged, therefore I was compelled by ethical and moral reasons not to report or quote our exchanges. In these specific cases, my understanding and collection of data was more 'visual' than worded or spoken, and I retained and considered precious what I could observe about their interaction with me and with their peers, be it just the body language (Varisco 2005, 3).

In yet other specific cases, I am placed under a legal obligation not to disclose data about my 'interviewees' as they were, and some of them still are, under bail orders.

I cherished these experiences with the interviewees, on a human, intellectual and scientific level. Finally, the experiences, which cannot all be referred to, offered me the key to comprehending the entire 'puzzle' of the relationship of power between Islamists in the UK and the UK government, by showing a clear, living, undisputable proof of the backlashes and dangers inherent in that relationship when it is affected by a fetishism for politics from both sides, the dominant and the dominated. The terror suspects under house arrest were, at the same time, suspects and victims of the same broken dialogues, deflected actions and, finally, of the same terror and terrorizing of minds.

Plan of the dissertation

This dissertation can be essentially divided into two parts: the **first part (Chapters 1-4)** reviews the culturalist and orientalist representations of Islamism, by examining the history of Islamism in Britain and analyzing the concepts relevant for the Islamist discourses and practices. The **second part (Chapters 5-6)** revolves around the practices and discourses of self-representation, offered by the political actors themselves, the objects of my fieldwork.

The **first chapter** reviews and analyzes the culturalist-orientalist approach toward Islam and Islamism and it suggests an alternative approach: the constructionist approach.

The **second chapter** examines the history of the Muslim presence in the UK and their minority status, it also introduces the concept of Islamism as a political discourse that

places Islam at the centre of political practice. The **third chapter** is an examination of the main sources of the Islamic beliefs (the *Qur'an*, the *Hadith*, and the *Shariaa*) to better understand how Islamism has evolved and how Islamists have variously given 'works' to the 'words' (Mawdudi 1982, 13) by performing discursive practices of 'meaning', and in so doing, created an Islamist discourse. This chapter also analyses the concepts of jihad and democracy; much sought-after topics since 9-11. It demonstrates that the understanding of such concepts -- within an Islamist discourse -- is contextual and definitely political, and that subsequent practice of such concepts is political too.

The **fourth chapter** analyses the history of Islamism in the UK through an examination of the main events since 1989 that have witnessed the emergence of Islamism and Islamists in the UK: the Rushdie affair, the Gulf War, the Bosnian crisis, 9-11, the invasion of Iraq and the 7-7 bombings.

The **fifth** and **sixth chapters** analyse and discuss the findings of two years of fieldwork among British Islamists. The fifth chapter analyses the parties grouped as **participationists** or those willing to take part in the British political life. The sixth chapter examines the parties grouped as **rejectionists** (McRoy 2006) or those who reject the British political system and plan to subvert it.

CHAPTER I

The theoretical framework

Today, after the political and social events that marked the beginning of a new millennium, there is an increased tension between the stereotyped representation of Islam and the no less stereotyped image of a civilizing West (Varisco 2005, 3). We must reconsider how we have approached the study of Islam and Muslims from political, sociological and anthropological perspectives.

Nonetheless, essentialism is still present as a philosophical belief and affects both the academic and popular discourse on Muslims (Marranci 2008, 6). This method could be called the fallacy of the 'Muslim mind theory' (ibid., 8). According to this fallacy, religion induces Muslims to believe, behave, act, think, argue and develop their identity as *Muslims* despite their disparate heritages, ethnicities, nationalities, experiences, gender and last but not least, minds. In other words, their belief in Islam makes them a sort of cloned CPU: different styles, different colours, same process (Damasio 2000, 56). Sometimes, this fallacy is the result of generalizations, some of which are difficult to avoid (Grillo 2003, 159). At other times, however, it is more ideological and the byproduct of a culturalist-orientalist approach (ibid., 161).

In this chapter, I review and criticize the culturalist-orientalist approach toward Islam and Islamism and I suggest an alternative approach: the constructionist approach.

My argument is that the culturalist-orientalist approach is politically disabling and disingenuously ostracizing; it deprives Islamist actors of agency and it forcibly removes them from the power struggle. In contrast, the constructionist approach develops from an understanding of 'culture' as a site of contesting representations. It re-affirms the articulation of 'cultural identity' as a political act in itself, within the terms, the dynamics, the struggles, the possibilities, and the unforeseeable strategies of a power-relationship; it therefore assumes and represents the agency, the discourses, and the practices of the agents as intrinsically political.

In this section, I also analyse some relevant concepts such as the practices of stereotyping, of racialized representations and the notion of fetishism within the practices of representation and self-representation.

The toolkit of the culturalist and orientalist approaches

The culturalist approach

The core assumption of the culturalist approach argues not only that culture *matters*, but that it is mainly a *matter* of culture (Barber 1996, 35; Fallaci 2001, 34; Huntington 1997, 89; Zakaria 2001). The principle is that culture exists in itself, it is transmitted unchanged from generation to generation and it is the ultimate explanatory model for any society. In relation to Islam, it holds the view that a perennial religion based culture (Del Valle 1997, 33; Fallaci 2001, 63; Gellner 1981, 36; Huntington 1997, 14; Kramer 1996, 45; Lewis and Schnapper 1994, 79; Philips 2006, 22; Pipes 1983, 56) is a relevant factor in explaining most of the characteristics (especially drawbacks, failures and dead-ends) of Muslim societies.

The first objection to this would be that if everything is explained away through culture imagined as a fixed, de-historicized block, then where does change come from? Has the social actors' agency been totally suppressed; reduced to silence and inactivity? Are they just bearers of cultural banners, while being stamped out from a whole, pervasive, integral super-entity called culture? Do they have any role?

They have been fundamentally deprived of agency, and instead, they have been given *transfixed* and *culturalist* identities (Hull 1997, 23), politically de-activated and de-legitimized, ostracized from the power relationship (Varisco 2005, 46). In such a framework of understanding, Islamism simply becomes synonymous with Islam as a totalizing and all-encompassing entity, a monolithic block without history (and/or histories), geographies and above all human agency (Lewis and Schnapper 1994, 23).

This framework is employed by some social scientists, historians, anthropologists (Benjamin Barber, Alexandre Del Valle, Ernest Gellner, Samuel Huntington, Martin Kramer, Bernard Lewis, Daniel Pipes, Franz Rosenthal, Richard Walzer, Fareed Zakaria, to name just a few), politicians, journalists (Anthony Browne, Oriana Fallaci, Melanie Philips), writers, and also common people in their roles as readers, consumers, citizens.² However, this approach is too present among some Muslims (El-Zein 1977, 233) for whom

² In Chapter 4, I offer the specific examples and analysis of the workings of the culturalist-orientalist approach in relation to Islamism, by reviewing the history of Islamism in the UK.

everything pertaining to Islam is, or should be, related to something in the *Qur'an*. This indicates a confusion between Islam as a religion and Muslim 'culture' (ibid., 255). As a religion, Islam includes the *Qur'an*, the *Sunna* and the commentaries of the ulama. Muslim or Islamic *culture* includes literature, traditions, science, social relationships, cuisine, historical and political paradigms, urban life and so on. A so-called culture is not an immanent, transcendent super-entity (Varisco 2005, 16): it is itself constituted and constantly construed through the inhabiting, sharing, contesting, resisting and representing performed by the social actors themselves as agents; it does not exist but in the process of formation (Hall and Du Gay 1996, 34). It is itself the process and not an accountable property or asset belonging to one or another, to you or to me, but to 'us', when 'WE' exist and 'WE' are represented as 'US' to each other (Damasio 2000, 45).

The culturalist approach tends to explain all the problems of Muslims in terms of Islam: the absence of democracy, terrorism, the status of women are all addressed by using the category of 'Islamic culture or religion' (Barber 1996, 3). I find it peculiar that after 9-11, the *Qur'an* became a sort of bestseller in the USA and Europe, presumably, as people tried to discover the 'Islamic' point of view about almost every aspect of life. My argument is that this is a very fruitless and uninteresting quest (Marranci 2006, 5) since a sacred book is by definition subjected to arguments and interpretations, and to *interpreters*. If there is still a debate about what the *Qur'an* really says, it means that nobody knows, or at least, that the people who think they know, disagree among themselves. Many reflections, which seem plain platitudes, suggest that the key question is not what the *Qur'an* really says but what Muslims say the *Qur'an* says (Roy 2004, 45), and finally (it might be stated) that the *Qur'an* and 'Islam' are what Muslims say that they are. My analysis is not focused on some theological corpus, essences, transcendental spirit or an imperfectly defined *Zeitgeist* (Herder 1769); my investigation is interested in discourses, discursive practices, practices of meaning, representations and self-representations, operations of erasure, exclusion and displacement, resistance to power within relationships of power as performed by Islamist actors in the UK (Daniel 1993, 24).

The main thrust of the culturalist approach consists of deleting from analysis the actual agents and explaining everything through a monolithic, de-historicized, de-contextualised, immanent block -- culture (Gellner 1981, 36; Huntington 1997, 14; Kramer 1996, 45; Lewis and Schnapper 1994, 79) -- which is deprived of agency, agents, time and places. The *other* is thus represented as passive, simply stamped out by his/her own cultural

heritage; this primarily implies that he/she is conceived and thus represented as incapable of changing (Gellner 1981, 56).

The Orientalist approach

The culturalist approach toward Islam, Islamism and Islamists finds a more radical or pejorative turn in the Orientalist approach. From being seen as passive and fundamentally inactive in terms of the culturalist approach, the Other becomes, in the Orientalist framework of understanding, inferior and politically unable, the incommensurable 'Other' (Del Valle 1997, 25; Philips 2006, 13; Zakaria 2001) -- the basis of this 'ineradicable' distinction consists in the 'superiority' of the West and the inferiority of 'Islam' (Said 1978, 45).

Combining the (culturalist and orientalist) two approaches, Islam gets represented as a totalizing entity that 'swallows' human agency, geographies and histories and is further caricatured on the basis of dyads and binary oppositions that end up reinforcing the discourse of the 'West and the Rest' (Huntington 1997; Pipes 1983; Philips 1996).

The Orientalist approach can be summarised by four main themes which provide an essentialising caricature of Islam: a) there is an absolute and systemic difference between the West and Islam; b) the representations of Islam are based on textual exegesis rather than on living realities; c) Islam is unchanging, uniform and incapable of describing itself; d) Islam has to be 'feared or mastered' (Sayyid 1997, 34). In particular, it is this last feature that offers a clear insight into the main characteristics and consequences of an agency-free, immanent and casuistic representation of Islam and Islamism given by the culturalist and orientalist approaches. Within a state of fear or within a relationship of domination (master-slave, for example), a basic dynamic is fundamentally missing: interaction between the elements of that relationship. To be more precise, the mere possibility of an interaction is excluded *a priori* (Varisco 2005, 90). As Foucault aptly states, slavery is not an example of a power-relationship (Foucault 1972). Here, the notion of power in terms of power-relationships, as the multiplicity of force relations, as the process which, transforms, strengthens, or even reverses them, as the net-like organizations through which power is exercised (Foucault 1976; 92-93) becomes extremely helpful. This conceptualisation of power highlights the shortcomings of the two aforementioned approaches and makes apparent the way in which they intrinsically erase the *other* as an agent, i.e., one who acts, and is capable of acting, independently, without any conditionality or any given guidelines

that he/she must follow perforce. The specificity of the power-relationship consists of two elements: that the *other* (the one over whom power is exercised) is recognized and maintained to the very end as a *subject who acts*; and, that faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions and possible inventions may open up (Foucault 1980). That is to say, subjects are faced with a field of possibilities in which several kinds of conduct, several ways of reacting and modes of behaviour are available.

The 'other' in the culturalist terms does not act, as he/she is deprived of agency, by being seen as a simple replica of a whole, uniform, integral unity called culture. However, this way of conceiving and re-presenting the *other* is taken to a more radical level by the Orientalist approach: the other is not simply represented as inactive (de-activated), he/she also needs to be fundamentally stopped from action as he/she is judged as unable or radically inferior (Del Valle 1996, 56; Kramer 1983, 68; Philips 2006, 113). The underlying assumption is that if she/he acts, he/she will make a mistake, that he/she will threaten or destroy all that is valuable. Thus, there is the need to prevent him/her from acting. One of the main tenets of a power-relationship is a permanent 'agonism' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 77), a relationship which is struggle and an incitement to struggle, a permanent provocation; that means a succession of actions and counter-actions without a predictable end in time, or a foreseeable conclusion in terms of the resulting positions of the agents. This whole dynamic of the power-relationship and its developments are removed from analysis and representation by the culturalist approach. More powerfully, they are ruled out by the orientalist one (El Zein 1977, 112).

As a consequence of these operations, the social actors (Islamists) are de-legitimized as political agents and they are instead represented -- under the operations of essentialising, erasure and exclusion -- and reduced to Muslim *genes* with an Islamic DNA (Damasio 2000, 58). This also tacitly implies -- according to the Orientalist approach -- that they are inferior as actors and in need of being 'educated'. Besides, their discourses and discursive formations are represented through stereotypes and foundational categories which constitute ready-made answers to the questions that they are supposed to enquire about (Varisco 2005, 67).

It is possible to agree that the operation of essentialising is sometimes epistemically unavoidable and maybe heuristically useful under other specific circumstances (Gilsenan 1990, 67), but my argument is that the particular operations of essentialising, erasure and exclusion performed by the culturalist and orientalist approaches towards Islamism and Islamists, obstruct the politics of a sensible, meaningful democracy (Butler 2004, 370) of a

kind advocated by my research. Therefore, I suggest an alternative to the flawed and disingenuously ostracizing culturalist and orientalist frameworks of understanding: the constructionist approach. On the one hand, this allows us to articulate a discourse about change, and on the other, to engage in a politics of opposition to the different forms of exclusion, repression and oppression that have gone uncharted.

The Constructionist approach

The constructionist approach, which is adopted as the theoretical framework of my thesis, develops from an understanding of 'culture' (whatever this expression might signify³) as a site of contesting representations (Hall 1997, 67). It reaffirms that the articulation of a 'cultural identity' is itself a political act within the terms, the dynamics, the struggles, the possibilities, and the unforeseeable strategies of a power-relationship; it therefore assumes and represents the agency, the discourses, the practices and the discursive practices of the agents as intrinsically political. That is to say, this approach allows us to see 'culture' in terms of relations of power and resistance, in contrast to the culturalist and orientalist approaches, that present it as a limbo of sedimented features, hereditary genes and irreducible differences, all of which are in need of being acknowledged, but only in terms of inferiority, so that they can then be ameliorated. Where there is power, there is resistance and this resistance is never in a position of exteriority to power (Foucault 2000, 111). It might be stated that one is always inside power-relationships and there is no way of escaping it.

In order to present and discuss the main characteristics of the constructionist approach, it is crucial to clarify the meaning of the term discourse. The use, and therefore the understanding, of the concept of discourse in this dissertation is very akin to the Foucauldian one. Foucault suggests that a discourse is a way of constituting and representing knowledge: a particular topic at a particular and defined historical moment (Foucault 1972; Hall 1992). Discourse is thus about the production of knowledge through language, but it is itself produced by a practice: discursive practice, which is the practice of

³ I agree with Raymond Williams, who rightly affirms that culture is one of the more complicated and obscure terms in the English vocabulary (Williams in Duncombe 2002: 36). I would also add that, to a certain extent, it has become an empty signifier, which can be used to signify almost everything and its opposite too. However -- paradoxically -- I find its use still relevant, especially in order to oppose the arguments put forward by the culturalist approach that I consider totally flawed and ill-conceived.

producing meaning. Discourses constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and the emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern. It is actually in the discourse that power and knowledge are joined together, so that discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power but also a hindrance and a point of resistance (Foucault 1980; Laclau-Mouffe 1990). Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces power but it also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. This leads me to introduce another element worth considering, a relation in need of being highlighted, namely, the linkage between knowledge, truth and power. The interesting and powerful nexus revealed by Foucault has been that power (rather than mere facts about reality) produces knowledge; this primarily means the power to make things true. Power and knowledge directly imply one other: there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute power relations (Foucault 1980b, 194, 196). In this context, truth is not some self-evident, concrete reality, always there waiting to be discovered but it is produced by virtue of multiple forms of constraint and it induces regular effects of power. There are, instead, *regimes* of truth, a general politics of truth, types of discourses which are accepted and made to function as being 'true', and it is these dominant disciplinary domains that focus and filter concerns about 'the Other'.

It is clear how these considerations radically change perspectives, since one starts raising a different question, such as 'how do discursive practices constitute truth claims?'. Do discourses create 'otherness'? One application of discourse theory is the way in which a whole group of people are categorized and discussed through the lens of discursive practices, this is helpful for my account and analysis of the discourses and practices of Islamist groups in the UK, within their relationships of power with the dominant discourse.

Another relevant concept that needs to be introduced, and which is also as an important practice, is *representation*. In this context, the operation of representation is crucial in the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between subjects, members of a society (Damasio 2002, 115). Here, the main focus is not actually on language *per se*, as in a sort of semiotic approach, but on the system of representation resulting from its employment and enactment: a more complex and dynamic structure, a matrix, which we call discourse. As mentioned above, in Foucault's terms, discourse is a way of representing knowledge through language, and therefore, of producing knowledge (ibid., 113). But since all social practices entail meanings and meanings shape and influence what we do (Damasio 2000, 68), all practices have a discursive aspect. Needless to

remark, this does not happen outside history; practices, discourses, knowledge are deeply historical and historicized (Spencer 2006, 24). To a certain extent, we might even state that they are stories with a history.

The first point to consider is that representations are not fixed and eternal, some positivist scientist's social fact, but that they are the products of history and they are contested themselves, imbricated in power-relationships as well. There are a number of books that attempt to trace the significance and the dynamics linked to the operations of representing and to the functions of representations. Stuart Hall (1997) has been influential here. He offers a scheme called the 'circuit of culture', where 'representation' is one position in a matrix, alongside processes of identity, production, consumption and regulation. This focus on the circulation of shared meanings and ideas has material consequences. For example, the racial thinking that led to ideas about eugenics, racial purity and paternalistic views of whites towards indigenous people, had consequences for millions of people under colonial rule in Australia, and right up to the 1970s, 'half-caste' children were removed from their Aboriginal families and adopted away to white families in a clear attempt to 'breed out' mixed individuals (Spencer 2007, 2). Similarly, images and notions of whiteness or blackness are also converted into items for consumption, television programmes, hair products and so on. What this makes explicit is that the underlying values and belief in a society are forms of representation themselves, that mediate our experience of the social world and constitute elements with which the individual identifies and understands him/herself.

This internal process could be considered as being affected by 'discourses' and 'discursive practices' that underpin our social and cultural life, and mediate between people and their relationship to society, as well as to their social identity. Put another way, it could be argued that discourse in Foucauldian terms constitutes the person's lived relation to the real; as an attempt to explain the forces that operate in producing human subjectivity and how individuals are summoned into place within discursive structures (Foucault 1982, 208-212).

The first consequence of this is that, instead of considering some 'true' reality beneath/behind representations, the analysis must identify the modalities of their functioning. In terms of culture, there is no room for a discourse on the authentic features of a culture but, rather, the focus ought to be on how those features get represented as authentic (Marranci 2008, 20), why that is so, and what power relations, discourses,

discursive formations and practices lie behind, inhabit and mobilize those representations (Evergeti 2006, 186).

Within this framework of understanding, there is the need to introduce two other concepts: subject and identity.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, subjects are constituted 'discursively', but there are conflicts among discursive systems. Subjects have agency, but they are not autonomous individuals, exercising free will, rather they are subjects 'whose agency is subject to conditions of existence, conditions of endowment of agents and conditions of exercise' (Foucault 1972, 95-96). Once again, there is the need to recall Foucault's conception of power, as a dynamic more than an entity, which is diffuse, everywhere, and exercised at innumerable points. As all discourses produce a discourse of resistance, so also the subject is engaged in a struggle, which is finally to define his/her *identity* (who is what) by resisting the Other's attempt at heterogenizing (making Other) his/her identity (ibid., 195).

According to the constructionist approach, identity is never a property but something that is relational and processual, politically and socially constructed (Hall and Du Gay, 1996, 79).

It is easy to understand how this notion constitutes a radical alternative to the culturalist-orientalist approach, which understands and represents identities by using an essentialist and essentialising method, where differences are stereotyped and taken as ontological and irreducible, till they finally become synonymous with inferiority and degeneracy. Within those two frameworks (culturalist and orientalist), differences are seen as self-evident, concrete and consistent; therefore they are seen to constitute a proper ground for theory. It is as if to say that my differences are given to me by my cultural heritage and my identity is encrypted in my DNA.

Conversely, the constructionist approach understands and represents identities as historical events in need of explanation. The appearance of a new identity is not inevitable or determined, not something that was always there waiting to be expressed and always exist in the form that it was given in a particular political movement or at a particular historical moment (Scott 1992, 32). Identities are discursive events, contested and resisted, and therefore they are inherently part of the power struggle and they are within the power-relationship: they are themselves political. In this context, the role of a researcher enquiring on this topic should consist in trying to understand the operations of the changing discursive processes by which identities are ascribed, resisted or embraced (Marranci 2008, 9) and locating which processes themselves are un-remarked, indeed, achieve their effect precisely because they are not noticed (Butler 1992, 19). As Stuart Hall

aply writes, 'black has never been just there either'. It has always been an unstable identity, physically culturally and politically' (Hall 1997, 56). It too is a narrative, a story, a history. Something constructed, told and spoken, not simply found.

These considerations conveyed here help me to highlight that there is an urgent need to focus on the process of identity production, on the 'discursive' nature of experience and on the politics of its construction. Treating the emergence of a new identity as a discursive event is not like adopting a form of linguistic determinism, or depriving a subject of agency. It is refusing a separation between experience and language and insisting instead on the productive quality of discourse (Laclau and Mouffe 1990, 123). Experience is what the researcher conducting the fieldwork inhabits and shares; what he/she needs to explain and not what he/she can use as a grounding raw material for his/her explanation.

This kind of approach also leads me to question and reflect more accurately on notions such as -- power and politics within practices of representation and self-representation; the role of the researcher or of any other student of human science conducting fieldwork; and writings on identity, politics and political movements.

These concepts, in fact, have been essential for conducting this present study on Islamist parties in the UK: for understanding their discursive formations, for giving an account of their discourses and practices by embarking on two years of ethnographic work amongst them. In contrast to the culturalist-orientalist approach towards the Islamists groups operating in the UK, my efforts have always been aimed at opening up new ways of thinking about change and for reflecting on what ought to be changed: for a more pluralistic system where the political space for fighting against forms of oppression and exclusion has no *apriori* determined limits; where such a space is not granted or conceded as a favour or conditional upon a test after proving good credentials (Mamdani 2004, 53).

The problem with the notion of power

The concept of power has always been very controversial: an interesting one to analyze and debate. In the last decade, there has been a remarkable increase in the analysis, and consequently, in the writing on it: Power, with a capital letter (Spencer 2007, 121). Essentially, the main aim has been to displace an essentialist and reified notion of the state and the principal effort has consisted of formulating an alternative, expanded conception of the 'political'. The central question has revolved around the way in which rule

is accomplished and whether rule is mainly based on interdictions. Quite clearly, this intellectual effort has been greatly influenced by Gramsci's notion of the state as 'political society and civil society', by Foucault's notion of power as a 'capillary form of existence' and by the feminist notion of the personal as political. As a result, the exercise of power has been explained through new signifying practices, *theorised* and represented as productive of meanings, truths and bodies; that is to say, 'power' as inherently entangled with the forms of being, doing and knowing. Meaning itself has become located in discursive practices; produced, contested and transformed in socio-historical actions rather than in a *sui generis* scheme of timeless categories (Evergeti 2006, 179). Gradually, 'power' has come to be analytically understood as crucial in the production of social identities; this is achieved by heavily relying upon a notion of hegemony, which is not an external relation between pre-constituted social agents but the 'very process of the discursive construction of those agents' (Laclau and Mouffe 1991, 100). Furthermore, such a notion of hegemony is quite useful as it allows the inclusion of dimensions of subjectivity such as gender, race, religion, and ethnicity (to name a few) into analyses of domination and subordination (Evergeti 2006, 183).

There is another important dimension, which is worth considering: time. In particular, a specific concern is directed towards history. Power and meaning are historically situated and the very notion of hegemony is based on the idea that it is produced, reproduced, challenged, contested, and negotiated in social action; hegemony itself is dynamic, a process always in progress (Damasio 2000, 6).

Moreover, if social action is mediated by a history, it is because the past has a political and discursive significance, and the relative signifying practices are themselves historical (Grillo 2003, 170). In other words, history, or say, 'memory' (as the way historical events are lived), meaning and power are internally related. In this way, hegemony can be perceived as historical and processual, and consequently, the attempt by dominant groups to impose their 'discursive regime' on the entire society (Grillo 2003, 171) can be seen as constantly subject to contestation and never fully achieved (Laclau and Mouffe 1991, 113). Then, spaces for practices of resistance and counter-hegemonic discourses become available. As Teresa de Laurentis brilliantly put it, there is 'always a tension of contradiction, multiplicity and heteronomy' between the represented discursive space of the positions made available by hegemonic discourses and the 'space off, the elsewhere, of those discourses', their forced marginality (De Laurentis 1990, 116). Such form of resistance mainly focuses on the constitution of subjectivities, despite the operation of

'alteration' ('heterogenization') carried out by hegemonic forces. The primary task of those counter-discourses consists of challenging the stories of the dominant -- which fix, naturalize and legitimate a hierarchicalized order of forms of identity and power (Daniel 1993, 121) -- by proposing an alternative vision to the official representations (the self-representation offered by the Islamist parties being the object of the present study).

These theoretical points highlighted above might sound slightly abstract and obscure but they are very helpful in analysing the discourses and practices of the British Islamist groups featured here, as they face or confront the dominant discourse and the UK Government on Islamic/Islamist issues.

Finally, as highlighted above, the practices of representation and self-representation, the object of this dissertation, are strictly entangled within power-relationships. They are inherently political. My dissertation argues that the notion of politics as centred on power-relations and interests, needs to be expanded to include the competition and struggle over the management of the discourses and the practices of symbols (Geertz 1973, 193-233). That is to say, politics as a struggle over people's imagination (Pekonen, 1989, 32). This also implies the necessity of considering and analysing relevant concepts -- essential for this study -- like stereotypes, the role of fantasy in the representation of the 'Other', and fetishism.

Power and the stereotyping practices of its subjects

Simply put, stereotyping fundamentally reduces phenomena and people to a few, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed and unchangeable in the name of Nature (Hall 1996, 37). Phenomena and people are basically individuated and represented as the 'Other'.

In his essay on stereotyping, Richard Dyer (1977) makes an important distinction between *typing* and *stereotyping*. He argues that without the use of types, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to make any sense of the world. According to this reasoning, we understand the world by placing individual objects, events, and people into general classificatory schemes. Thus, we decode the specific object we encounter, according to the wider category. In other words, we understand the particular in terms of its type. Alfred Schutz (1970) defines this process as typification, by indicating that 'typing' is essential to the production of meaning. Dyer argues that we continuously 'make sense' of things in terms

of some larger categories; we come to 'know' something about a person, by assigning him/her to the membership of different groups according to class, gender, age group, nationality and so on. In broad terms, then, a 'type is any simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped, and widely recognizable characterization in which a few traits are foregrounded and change or development is kept to a minimum' (Dyer 1977, 28). At this point, it is legitimate to ask what the difference is, then, between *typing* and *stereotyping*, and consequently between a type and a stereotype. The fundamental difference consists in the fact that stereotyping gets hold of the few characteristics about a person or an event and reduces everything to those few traits, by simplifying, exaggerating, inflating them, and by fixing them as unchangeable, as constituents of an imaginary DNA (Varisco 2005, 66).

Another essential element of the practice of stereotyping consists in a strategy of dividing and splitting. That means, by stereotyping, the 'normal', the 'accepted' and the 'acceptable' is separated from the abnormal and the unacceptable: everything which does not fit the 'normality standards', is expelled and therefore rejected for being different, Other. In this context, Dyer crucially argues that a system of stereotypes refers to what is within, and beyond, normalcy (ibid., 29).

This leads me to affirm that another distinctive feature of stereotyping is the practice of 'closure', 'exclusion', and 'rejection'. It is easy to understand how this leads to fixing the boundaries of mental geographies or maps illustrating the frontiers between insiders and outsiders, Us and Them (Grillo 2003, 169).

Mary Douglas (1966) brilliantly pointed out that whatever is out of place is considered as polluted, dangerous, taboo. Similarly, Julia Kristeva speaks of the expelled and the excluded groups as the 'abjected', an expression that both conserves the literal meaning of being 'thrown out' and indicates the feeling of being 'abhorred', as 'outcast' (Kristeva 1982, 68).

These latter observations are gradually shifting the discourse more towards the analysis of relationships of power and specifically, towards the inequality of power -- it is with these concerns in mind that I analyse the Islamist parties in the UK facing the UK Government and the culturalist-orientalist representations of them.

Dyer argues that power is usually directed against the subordinate or excluded group; one specific aspect of this power is *ethnocentrism*: 'the application of the norms of one's own culture, to that of others' (Brown 1965, 183). Likewise, Derrida -- very acutely -- argued that a binary opposition like Us/Them is never synonymous with a peaceful coexistence or

a relation of equals, but 'rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other or has the upper hand' (Derrida 1972, 41).

In this framework, it is not too difficult to see that the practice of stereotyping is very close to what Foucault defined as the 'Power/Knowledge' sort of game (Wikan 1999, 60). It ends up 'sorting out' and 'ordering' people according to a norm and it constructs the abnormal (excluded) as the Other. Dyer observes that the 'establishment of *normalcy* is one aspect of the habit of the ruling groups...so right is this world view for the ruling groups that they make it appear as natural and inevitable' (Dyer 1977, 30). Needless to remark that the goal of the ruling groups -- as mentioned above -- consists of establishing hegemony, as a form of power based on leadership by a group in many fields of activity at once, to the extent that its ascendancy commands widespread consent and appears natural and inevitable (ibid., 35).

My point is that the notion of power implied here is a very Foucauldian one, as adopted by the present dissertation. That is to say, a net-like, diffused concept of power also includes the *power* of representing and making intelligible someone or something, within a certain regime of representation, as well as, within the operation of producing and spreading knowledge. It is thus much clearer how stereotyping becomes an important element of the exercise of power and of its signifying practices within the power relationships of the Dominant and the Dominated (as these terms relate to the objects of the present study).

In this context, Edward Said's analysis of Orientalism constitutes a clear example of the functioning of such a type of discourse. Said argues that Orientalism was the discourse by which European culture was able to manage -- and even produce -- 'the Orient' politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, and scientifically during the post-Enlightenment period. Within the framework of Western hegemony over the Orient, there emerged a new object of knowledge, a 'complex Orient suitable for the study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, racial, linguistic, historical theses about mankind and the universe' (Said 1978, 7-8).

Here again, it becomes quite clear how Said's discussion of Orientalism is close to Foucault's argument on Power/Knowledge: a specific discourse produces, through different practices of representations, a form of typified, stereotyped, 'racialized' knowledge of the Other (Orientalism), deeply implicated in the operation of Power (imperialism) (Hall 1997, 79).

Together, the Foucauldian concept of power and the notion of hegemony -- as elaborated by Gramsci -- involve knowledge, representation, ideas, cultural leadership and authority, as well as economic constraint and physical coercion. The core of this Foucauldian-Gramscian argument is that power cannot be solely translated into force and coercion. Its way of operating is much more subtle and pervasive: it seduces, solicits, induces and wins consent. Likewise, it cannot be thought of in terms of one group having a monopoly on power, and simply radiating power downwards on a subordinate group. It includes, and it requires, the dominant and the dominated, within its circuit. As Homi Bhaba has keenly observed 'it is difficult to conceive subjectification as a placing within Orientalist or colonial discourses for the dominated subject without the dominant being strategically placed within it too' (Bhaba 1986, 158). Another important characteristic emerging from this understanding and conceptualization of power is that power does not only foreclose and constrain, but it is actually a productive force. It produces new discourses, new kinds of knowledge, new objects of knowledge, new representations and regimes of truth; it also moulds new practices and institutions. To a certain extent, power pervades everyday life. It circulates and it is never-ending: it is a force that continuously regenerates itself.

Notions of the 'circularity' and 'pervasiveness' of power emerge as being particularly relevant in connection with the practice of representation. The argument is that everyone (the powerful, the less powerful and the powerless) is entangled within power and participates in the circulation of power. That is to say, no one can stand outside its field of discourses, operations and practices; he/she becomes an essential part of the flux by moving and operating within it. An act of forcibly removing someone from this circle can just backfire: the outcome can paradoxically result in the disempowering of both parties. This perspective is particularly helpful in order to analyse the practices of representation and self-representation of the Islamist parties vis-a-vis the UK Government.

There is now a need to introduce and analyse another relevant concept in relation to the practices of representation: 'racialization'.

Racialized representations

An emblematic and fruitful way of explaining the circularity of power, the relations between representation and self-representation, and its possible racialization is to refer to how black masculinity is re-presented within a racialized regime of representation. This

example is very helpful for analysing both the representation of Islamist parties by a dominant culturalist-orientalist approach, and for analysing their practice of self-representation.

Mercer and Julien (1994) argue that the representation of black masculinity 'has been forged in and through the histories of slavery, colonialism and imperialism' (Mercer and Julien 1994, 137). They observe that during slavery, the white master often exercised his authority over the black male slave, by depriving him of all the attributes of responsibility, paternal and familial authority, and by treating him as a child. Infantilization could also be interpreted as a symbolic 'castration' of the black man, which is connected to the white man's fantasy about the excessive sexual appetite and prowess of the black men; aspects which they both feared and envied (*ibid.*, 138). According to Julien and Mercer, the circularity and ambivalence of power work in such a way that black men responded to this infantilization of their image, by adopting a sort of caricature that was a reverse of their hyper-masculine and super-sexual stereotype. Represented and stigmatized as 'childish', some black men reacted by 'wearing' a macho-aggressive masculine outlook. Paradoxically, this only served to confirm the fantasy among the whites man of their excessive sexual nature and their lack of control (Wallace 1979, 45).

Thus, those who are stereotyped become trapped by the same stereotype even as they try to oppose and resist, ultimately confirming it unconsciously. The point is that representation arguably seems to work at two different levels at the same time: a conscious and overt level, and an unconscious and repressed one. This implies that stereotypes refer as much to what is imagined in fantasy as to what is perceived as being 'real'. And what is visually produced by the practices of representation is only half the story. The other half -- the deeper meaning -- lies in what is not being said, but is being fantasized, what is implied but cannot be shown (Hall 1997, 263). So, it clearly emerges how stereotyping is deeply invested with hegemonic and discursive power, which operates through culture, production of knowledge, imagery, and representation. Furthermore, it is circular: it implicates the subjects of power as well those who are subjected to it. Interestingly enough, 'stereotyping' gradually takes shape as a practice based on fantasy and projection, with its paradoxical sides and its reverse 'mirroring' effects.

Said affirms that the 'general idea about who and what was an Oriental emerged according to a detailed logic governed...by a battery of desires, repressions, investments and projections' (Said 1978, 8). A legitimate question to ask would be about the role played by fantasy in the racialized representation of the Other. It would be useful to understand how

those fantasies are allowed to speak, how they are channellised in order to 'racialize' the Other and contribute to the stereotype. The answer could be sought by analysing the representational practice known as fetishism. Fetishism is a part of representation itself, to the extent that what is represented and shown can be grasped and understood only by referring to what cannot be seen and shown, but is implied, *referenced* and *alluded* to, and thus imagined and fleshed out. That is to say, there is the need to introduce the concept of *fetishism*, which is of paramount relevance for explaining the relationships of power between the Islamist parties in the UK and the UK Government; for understanding why the culturalist-orientalist representations of Islamism in the UK means their depoliticization; for explaining why -- paradoxically -- the Islamists' self-representation is depoliticizing and depoliticized as well.

Fetishism and fetishized representations

In anthropology, fetishism refers to the way in which the powerful spirit of a God can be transferred onto an object, which then becomes charged with the spiritual power of that for which it is a substitute. In psychoanalysis, fetishism is analysed as a 'substitute' for the absent phallus; meaning that the sexual drive is displaced onto some other part of the body (Mercer 1994, 53). In this case, it is the substitute that becomes 'eroticized', invested with sexual energy, power, and desire, which are 'mirrored' in the object before the eyes of the onlookers. Fetishism in representation borrows from all those meanings. It certainly involves displacement and a *transferential* relationship (La Capra 1987, 123). As Homi Bhabha superbly puts it, 'it is a non-repressive form of knowledge that allows for the possibility of simultaneously embracing two contradictory beliefs, one official and one archaic...one that allows the myth of origins and the other that articulates difference and division' (1986, 168). Fetishism also comprises a sort of reverse denial, implying that the powerful fascination, which is strongly felt, is both indulged and rejected.⁴

It is not too complicated, then, to affirm that fetishism is a sort of disguising strategy: for both representing and not-representing, for alluding to something that cannot be shown, as it is forbidden and tabooed. What is declared and commonly regarded as different,

⁴In his famous essay on 'Fetishism', Freud affirms that 'the fetish is the substitute for the woman's (the mother's) penis that the little boy once believed in and -- for reasons -- does not want to give up...Yes in his mind the woman has got a penis, in spite of everything; but the penis is no longer the same as it was before. Something else has taken its place, has been appointed as its substitute' (1977/1927, 353).

hideous, primitive and deformed is at the same time being obsessively enjoyed and lingered over because it is 'exotic' (Gilman 1985, 78). Fetishism also allows a sort of voyeurism; as Freud argued, there is often a sexual element in looking, an eroticization of the gaze. Looking is often driven by an unacknowledged search for illicit pleasure and a desire which cannot be fulfilled.

After having analysed the practices of stereotyping and representation, including in their racialized regimes, and having explored the concept of fetishism, there is a further important question that can be raised: Can the 'stereotyped' actually turn, displace and re-use, in a subversive way, the stereotypes that they have been stamped with?

The immediate answer to this question would be that this is theoretically possible, since meaning can never be finally fixed (Hall 1997, 270). Certainly, there are strenuous efforts to fix meanings, and stereotyping is also a strategy that aims to achieve this, but ultimately, meanings are *discursive* practices and, as such, they begin to slip, drift, or assume new directions. To put it another way, new meanings start to be grafted onto old ones. Bakhtin and Volosinov speak of a practice called trans-coding (Bakhtin 1981, 45): taking an existing meaning and re-appropriating it for new meanings. Hall affirms that since the 1960s, when questions of representation and politics acquired a centrality in the politics of anti-racist and other social movements, a number of different trans-coding strategies have been adopted. In particular, he singles out three of these: reversing the stereotype, substitution of negative images with positive ones, and contestation from within.

The point here is to try and understand how the practices of representation, the construction of a 'dominant' regime of representation, the fabrication of stereotypes, the strategies of 'fetishizing' and the possible counter-strategies adopted by the stereotyped (Grillo 2003, 168) can make sense of the discourses and practices of representation and self-representation in relation to the Islamist groups in Britain. How is it possible to speak of a mirroring effect between the practices of representation and self-representation? Is the 'self' of self-representation a 'self-fetishizing' device, that, as such, denies what it wants to allude to and desire obsessively?

The answers to this set of questions will be explored in the next chapters of this dissertation, through an analysis of the discourses and practices of representation and self-representation, of a large number of Islamists in the UK, with whom I have carried out two intense years of fieldwork.

CHAPTER II

The Muslim minority status

The present chapter looks at the history of the Muslim presence and their minority 'status' in the UK. It also considers the concept of Islamism which is often overlooked and denied in the culturalist-orientalist approach where it is collapsed into the notion of 'Muslim'. This chapter strongly advocates that in thinking upon this issue, we need to start from Muslims, rather than from Islam, and that we ought to focus upon the feeling of being Muslims living as a minority in western contexts.

This also means that we understand Islam as a map of discourses and practices of people who feel as Muslims, and we consider that some among them put Islam at the centre of their political practices and future (these latter being the Islamists).

The displacement of a minority

When I started reflecting upon the feeling of being a part of a minority, one specific consideration sprang up in my mind: *minority* is an issue not of demography and numbers, but of feelings of *alienation* from a dominant culture that is mostly perceived as hostile and extraneous; in this case it is also lived as 'secular'.

The vast majority of the Muslim population in the West consists of recent migrants. Patterns of migration, nevertheless, differ quite widely between the United States and Western Europe (Metcalf 1996, 12). The first generation of European Muslims were mostly working class, while those in the United States more often from the educated middle class. In Europe, most Muslims come from specific areas with historical ties to the host country (for example, North Africa in the case of France), while the United States has no colonial past with any Muslim country (Dassetto 1996, 56).

Mass migration to Western Europe began in the late 1950s, reached its peak around the 1970s, and never ceased, despite more restrictive legislation introduced after 1973 (which has been regularly tightened since then). For historical and geographical reasons, many immigrants were Muslims: North and sub-Saharan Africans in France and Belgium, South

Asians in Britain, and Turks in Germany, The Netherlands and German-speaking Switzerland.

At first, immigration involved mainly male industrial workers who intended to, and were supposed to, return to their homelands before retiring. No plans were put in place to deal with a long term Muslim presence in Europe. Around 1973, as a result of the oil crisis and the subsequent economic slowdown, most European countries decided to put an end to such immigration. Fearing they would be permanently banned from Europe if they returned to their countries of origin, most workers decided to stay and bring their families which benefitted from a policy of family reunions that was initiated to soften the human consequences of the immigration ban.

Millions of second generation Muslims have since been born in Europe. In some countries -- France for instance -- they were entitled to almost automatic citizenship upon reaching majority, while in others, they had to go through a specific and complex process of naturalization (Anwar 2005, 32).

There are no precise figures for the number of Muslims living in the USA or in Europe for two main reasons: first, the difficulty of defining who should be considered a Muslim and second, the reluctance of the European legal system to register race and religion in census and identity papers (Dassetto 1996, 23). The criterion of country of origin is no longer relevant as a means of determining the number of Muslims because most of them, at least in France and Britain, have a European citizenship. The statistics usually quoted in Europe vary from 8 million to 12 million, which is about the 2.5 % of the European Union population (Peach 2005, 24).

This also implies that Muslims are no longer 'foreigners'. But, the question here is what kind of integration has been achieved so far? Of my three attempted answers, two are negative: integration was achieved neither through a process of assimilation (as is often hoped-for in host countries) nor through the making of a multicultural society (as is often described) (Roy 2004, 67). It was achieved through the recasting of pristine identities into new variable sets of identity patterns (Daniel 1993, 78).

The argument here is that identities are less a given fact than an individual choice, and can change over time or in relation to social circumstances, and they also overlap with other identities (Modood 2005, 25). Although the concentration of Muslims in Europe is based on a mutual relationship between a specific European country and a corresponding geographical area (France-North Africa, Germany-Turkey, Britain-Indian subcontinent), the transnational nature of the Muslim population in Europe does play a role in the process of

European integration. More importantly for the purposes of this study, many Muslims organizations see the construction of the European Union as an opportunity to bypass their own ethnic and national cleavages, and to create something closer to what an *ummah* should be (Marranci 2008, 106). In this context, I argue that immigration has certainly been the demographic framework for 'Western Islam', but it emerges less and less as a relevant factor, when it comes to explaining and understanding the dynamics of the interaction between the 'West' and 'Islam', and so, for speaking of a Western Islam. My point here is that Islam in the West has been systematically researched through the lens of sociology of immigration and ethnic studies. Studies titled, for example, 'Pakistanis in England' (Dahya 1972) in the UK, or 'Cultural action amongst Maghrebian migrants in Europe' (Mdaghri 1975) in France, proliferated in an attempt to understand and explain how these migrants could integrate within their host societies. Such approaches were legitimate in terms of history but they overlook a crucial factor: the increasing dissimilarity between new forms of Islam in the West and the previous ones in the cultures of origin (Marranci 2008, 35). They also tend to underestimate a very important aspect -- which I consider essential for the analysis of British Islamism -- the concept of *religiosity*. Religiosity is not synonymous with religion. In my view, religion as a concept⁵ (Geertz 1993, 90) is not really epistemologically useful (El Zein 1977, 253), and it can end up essentializing Islam (*ibid.*, 254); therefore it will not be my focus. Religiosity is, instead, the way believers live and build their relationship with religion. These relationships are marked by emotions -- which as Damasio has suggested (1999 and 2000) are a reaction to stimuli -- that produce feelings. This process has a fundamental impact on how identities are formed (Marracci 2008, 7), and it has to be placed in the analytical space of the growing delinking between faith and the culture of origins, and right beside the changing nature of immigration, or more exactly, of 'migrations' (Roy 2004, 42).

Apart from economic immigration, there are new forms of immigration and mobility that are emerging in connection with the familiar phenomenon described as *globalization*. There is a phenomenon of a mobile population, usually educated, that plays a growing role in the affirmation of a de-territorialized Muslim community (Appadurai 1996, 67). Such a transnational dimension should not be thought of in terms of *diaspora*, because there is ever lessening reference or link to a country of origin, and it is very difficult to state which

⁵ Geertz, in his famous definition of religion, argued that religion is 'a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful persuasive and long lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic'. (Geertz 1993, 90).

patterns of integration or assimilation have been followed (Allen 2005, 53). New identities are moulded in hyphenated expressions or reconstructed identities: regional, ethnic or religious identities take precedence over citizenship and pristine nationalities, in accordance the choices made by the individual. Likewise, this dimension, that from now on I will define as 'de-territorialization' (Auge' 1996), also has a relevant impact on the production of Muslim discourses. What interests me is firstly, that resettled or displaced Muslims demonstrate the urge to define what Islam means for them, or to answer questions and pressures from the non-Muslim environment; and secondly, that Muslims in the West -- as some of my interviewees declared -- often enjoy a greater freedom of speech than those in Muslim countries.

This space, created by displacement and transnationalism, is the analytical *context* where my study takes place, and where my questions started being raised. What does *religiosity* imply in terms of the mutual recasting of identity between the non-Muslim dominant society and a Muslim community (Hoeber and Piscatori 1997, 68). How does this process unfold, and how has it been represented by the dominant discourse in the UK? What are the effects of those practices of representation for Muslims in general, and for Islamists in the UK in particular? The pages that follow comprise an attempt at analysing and answering these questions.

The history of the Muslim presence in the UK

Having stressed the importance of contingencies, shared practices, places, interactions and contexts in the formation of identities, there is the need to trace, very briefly, the history of Muslim migration to the UK, just to set the ground for our discussion.

At the end of the Second World War, when Britain was no longer able to hold onto its colonies, and when, in 1947, the Raj gave India the independence it wanted, the region was in turmoil with ten million people displaced and as many as a million dead. After the partition of the subcontinent, there was a Pakistan in two segments with India in between. It was widely held that Kashmir should have been part of the newly-formed Pakistan and that the alliance between the last British Viceroy Lord Mountbatten and the Kashmir-born Indian P.M Pandit Nehru had tilted the decision in favour of India. The two countries have gone to war three times over the Kashmir issue (Anwar and Baksh 2003, 112). In Britain meanwhile, manpower was needed for work in certain industrial sectors that were in

decline, in part because the employment conditions were no longer attractive to the existing workforce. The economic recession of the late 1950s, makes this the consistent format throughout however, eliminated the demand for labour, whether domestic or immigrant (Anwar 2005, 35).

Upon their first arrival in Britain the first generation of migrants tried much harder to replicate their traditional lifestyle; this can be gathered from their relative (and academically well-documented) isolation from the mainstream social, economic and cultural arenas (Seddon, Hussein and Malik 2004, 79).

By this time, the local communities and national institutions had already developed an overt hostility towards the 'ethnic' minorities (Peach 2005, 29). It was, increasingly, the case that South Asian Muslims were concentrated in the inner areas of older industrial towns and cities, living close to these working-class white indigenous inhabitants. The pattern was one in which immigrant labour in Britain, as in a number of other advanced Western European economies, originated in a once colonised land and filled the gaps in the lower echelons of the host society. South Asian Muslim immigrants were placed at the bottom of the labour market, disdained by the host society, and systematically 'ethnicised' and 'racialized' in the sphere of capitalist accumulation. These workers were recruited into these industrial sectors most in decline, and accordingly, their positions in society were located below the white working-class. This latter class was able to attain social mobility progressing from lumpen-proletariat to proletariat and from petty bourgeoisie to bourgeoisie (ibid., 35).

At the beginning of the 1960s, the number of immigrants entering Britain from South Asia was at its peak (Abbas 2005, 73). Towards the end of the 1960s, however, immigration from South Asia had all but ended. Both the high point in 1961-2 and the decline in 1968 were a result of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1962) and the Commonwealth Immigration Act (1968). The 1962 Act changed the pattern of South Asian immigration; rather than pioneer men, it was their wives, fiancées and children that arrived, with many South Asians from India and Pakistan seemingly rushing to beat the ban created by the Act. Amendments to the original 1962 act, which followed in 1968, led to wider restrictions on immigration from the New Commonwealth countries. On each occasion, the move was affected by the politicisation of ethnic minorities in Britain. As a consequence of changes to the legislation, the South Asian settlements became more permanent and family orientated. At the turn of the 1970s, Britain had a large number of distinct South Asian

Muslim communities living and working in different parts of the country; although these were largely restricted to inner city areas in de-industrialized zones.

However, if the major growth of the Muslim population dates from the post-war immigration of Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Indians to fill the labour shortage in London and the industrial cities of the Midlands, by contrast, the 1990s have witnessed an influx of refugees such as the European Muslims fleeing from Bosnia and Kosovo as well as from Afghanistan and Somalia.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the size of the Muslim population in the UK was the subject of controversy (Shaw 1988, Joly 1995, Anwar 1996, Modood 1997). This was due to a rise in the political importance of 'Islam' internationally and domestically, after the 1979 Iranian revolution, which led to an inflation of local estimates of numbers. Estimates in the early 1990s varied from a low of 900,000 (Peach 1997, 74) to a high of 3,000,000 as given by the Muslim Parliament (Siddiqui 1992, 3). The census of 2001 showed that Muslims were the second largest religion with a figure of 2.7 per cent. The census also showed that 68% of the Muslim population was of South Asian origin (Census 2001, ONS 2004).

Characteristically the British Muslim population is predominantly comprised of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian Muslims living in Britain. Yet, although South Asian groups represent Islam in Britain, there is a definite danger in essentialising Islam and arguing that South Asian characteristics are fully representative of Islam or of British Muslims. The Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in Britain may be almost entirely Muslim but Islam as a religion is not synonymous with an ethnos, it is pan-ethnic (Jacobson 1997, 67). There are Muslims in Britain of Arab, Albanian, Bosnian, Iranian, Nigerian, Somali, Turkish and many other groups of origin, whose characteristics and socio-economic profiles are very different from those of the South Asian groups.

The Muslim population is also characterised as having the youngest age structure of all the religious groups in England and Wales. One third of the Muslim population is aged 0-15 years compared to the average of 20% for the whole population. Less than 10% Muslims are aged 60 years or over compared to 18% for the population as a whole. Educationally, the Muslim population is relatively poorly qualified. The 2001 census showed that over 40% Muslims had no educational qualifications. The combination of a young age structure, poor educational qualifications, and the small proportion of the female population engaged in formal economic activity results in a high age-dependency ratio (25%). The Muslim population of Britain is also highly concentrated in a small number of large urban areas: London, the West Midlands, Greater Manchester and the West

Yorkshire Metropolitan County. Ten of the twenty local authorities with the largest totals and the highest proportions of Muslims in England and Wales are London boroughs. Tower Hamlets in the East End of London has the highest percentage of Muslims among all the local authorities in the UK and it is also the third largest in size. It is the centre of the Bangladeshi population in Britain and the borough contains nearly a quarter of the total Bangladeshi population of the UK. Pakistanis and Bangladeshis represent some of the poorest minority ethnic populations in Britain, with Bangladeshis being worse off than the Pakistanis (Peach 1999, 57). A majority from both groups originally have a peasant background: Pakistanis from the Punjab and Azad Kashmir; Bangladeshis from Sylhet in the north-east of the country. The 2001 census showed Bangladeshis and Pakistanis to be the most economically marginal of the minority ethnic groups in Britain. They have the highest percentage of those who have never worked or are long term unemployed among all the other ethnic groups; this represents the highest percentage of persons at home and the highest percentage with no educational qualifications.

Bangladeshi and Pakistani women also had the lowest economic participation rates of any ethnic minority group in Britain. The 2001 British census allows us to examine the situation of Muslims as such, rather than needing to use Pakistanis and Bangladeshis as surrogates. Data published so far combine male and female population and refer to England and Wales rather than to the United Kingdom, and so it endorses the view that, to a certain extent, Muslims as a whole occupy an underprivileged position (Ballard 1990, 57). The Muslim figures for those who have never worked or are long term unemployed were five times higher than that for the population as a whole; the reason seems to be the non-participation of Muslim women in the official labour force. The explanation commonly offered for the low female labour force participation rate of Muslim, (including Pakistanis and Bangladeshis) as compared to Indian women is that the traditional Islamic values of *pardah* and *izzet* prevent women from contact with men outside their immediate family. This again uses the assertion of 'cultural differences' to describe 'Asian' or Muslim identities as implacably alien or unassimilable.

In this regard, it has been argued that the South Asian British Muslims form a virtual underclass. Throughout the 1980s, of the nine non-white groups identified by the Labour Force Survey, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis suffered the highest rate of unemployment and had the lowest number of educational qualifications. They have been most adversely impacted by the immigration laws and rules, and with the worst housing, they have suffered the highest level of attacks on person and property.

The Muslim ‘minority’ effect

It is certainly a fact that the phenomenon of Muslim minorities is not in itself new; in the past too, there has been the presence of huge Muslim minorities living under non-Muslim rule. A sort of ‘globalization’ might have characterised other historical periods as well. In other words, the novelty of the two phenomena known as transnationalism and displacement should be investigated very carefully (Roy 2004, 67).

The first case of Muslim minorities living under non-Muslim rule was probably that of Muslims in Sicily in the 12th century, who were allowed to remain under Christian rule by a fatwa of Sheik al Mazari. Then came the Mudejares in Spain after the *Reconquista*, the Russian Tatars after the fall of Kazan, followed by the Ottoman Muslims conquered by Russians and Austrians. For instance, Rashid Rida issued a fatwa in 1909 allowing the Muslims of Bosnia Herzegovina to remain there after the Austro-Hungarian conquest. Also, Islam has been officially recognized by Russia since 1784, and by the Austro-Hungarian empire through the 1874 and 1912 laws that remain valid in present day Austria. Nevertheless, it is important to consider that it was the *forced military conquest*, which determined the minority status for Muslims; it was not the product of a voluntary decision (Roy 1996, 54). On the other hand, there are also many cases of Muslims living from the outset as minorities due to conversions or trade relations, such as in Black Africa or China (the Hui). Finally, I should remark that the bulk of Indian Muslims remained in India (as a minority) after the 1947 Partition and they have always been loyal to the secular Indian republic.

In light of all this, it seems legitimate to question whether there is something new about Muslims living with a minority status. An attempted answer would be that the novelty is not related to that status *per se* but to the relationship between ‘religion’ and ‘culture’, a relationship which the culturalist-orientalist representation of Islam and Muslims compresses into a dehistoricized, depoliticized, decontextualized dynamic (Asad 1993, 248)

Many of the minorities mentioned above could be associated with a given culture, language, and sometimes, with a territory (for example, the Tatars in Russia), even if they share language and culture with their non-Muslim neighbours (as for example, Bosnians and also Indian Muslims). To a certain extent, it is correct to state that some Muslims have

already experienced a sort of disconnect between religion and culture, but in general terms, Islam was definitely rooted in a given culture, whether specific to Muslims or shared with others (Azzam 1992,56). The difference in the case of the current wave of globalization is the lack of such 'entrenchment'. As highlighted here, it seems that the making of Muslim minorities is carried out more through a process of 'de-culturation' than of 'acculturation' (Appadurai 1996, 68). That is to say, none of the previous cultural markers are retained and identity is not perceived as a whole, but as fragmented, broken down into different levels (parochial, ethnic, national, and religious) which might also contradict each other. The outcome is that collective identities have to be recomposed or re-invented. This sort of disembodiment of religion from culture may run counter to centuries of practical experience (notwithstanding the insistence of some) Muslim theologians who have been adamant that Islam as a religion should not be identified with a specific culture, see Ahmed 1979, 67; this has always been more a theoretical approach than a real social experience).

The past forms of globalization experienced by Muslims were through travel, pilgrimage, or through the widespread role of Arabic and a common teaching curriculum. Arabic as a lingua franca existed mainly for a very restricted group of the learned, who could travel from Morocco to India to learn and teach in a network of comparable and homogeneous institutions. Although this was a phenomenon affecting a very limited group, it resembled a kind of pre-modern globalization, which attempted to revive a common Muslim culture through the medium of Arabic. Today the learned Muslim elite no longer circulate in a purely Arabo-Muslim context and English is as important as Arabic, if not more so, especially outside the Arabic-speaking world, which comprises only 20 percent of all Muslims (Eickelmann 1981, 89). Therefore, the first striking difference that emerges is that the earlier form of globalization did not borrow its linguistic and technical tools from another culture, as is the case nowadays. This constitutes what I call a *de-culturation* that is not the product of a violent military action or the result of an *external* imposition but it is the consequence of a chosen, deliberate displacement and a switch from 'pristine' cultures to a common but 'unmarked', disconnected and displaced Muslim identity (Asad 1993, 266; Esposito 1983, 45; Marranci 2008, 46).

The link between those reflections and my topic of research (British Islamism) is that this sort of 'disengagement' of Islam pushes Muslims to reflect upon the meaning of being a Muslim living as a minority; that is fundamentally what I call *religiosity*: a concept totally

ignored by the culturalist-orientalist approach that portrays 'agency-free' Muslims swallowed by a global entity called Islam (Lynch 1990, 33; Marranci 2008, 6).

In this context, it is often argued that because Islam is an all-encompassing religion addressing all aspects of individual and social life, it is impossible for true believers to live permanently under non-Muslim rule; the option would be to leave, or more precisely, to migrate to a truly Muslim land, Dar-ul-Islam (Qureshi 1979). It is easy to understand how such premises can stir up the debate on the compatibility of Islam with a Western system of values, and on its potentiality to adjust to democracy and secularization. In this regard, my questions are mainly two. Firstly, I question whether there is a dominant theoretical paradigm that applies to the case?, and secondly, even if there is, I question whether the practices and choices of today's Muslims are really shaped by such a paradigm? Likewise, to what extent is the issue of 'What does Islam say about...?' really relevant in order to explain and understand the discourses and practices of Muslims?

This brings me to another relevant topic: the use and exact employability of cultural and religious 'paradigms' in order to explain societal and political issues (Grillo 2003, 78). Do cultural and religious 'patterns' as such, ever matter as a key to understanding the current issues involving Muslims? More specifically, *who* gets to elaborate that paradigm or pattern, and then, who gets to make the decision of using and applying it? My argument, which will be developed in the following pages, is that the culturalist-orientalist approach replies in the affirmative to the first question, and eludes the second and the third one, thus bypassing the power-relations and power struggles implied within discourses and the practices of representation (Marranci 2008, 68).

My alternative approach involves answering in the negative to the first question and exploring, investigating, and challenging those power-relations and power struggles.

Reformulation of Islam

When I started reflecting upon the phenomenon of British Islamism and British Islamists, there was one main consideration that persuaded me to consider their 'minority status' as a relevant factor (apart from the need to revise a certain culturalist-orientalist way of representing the Muslim minority in the UK). It was this: given that religion is 'disengaged' from a cultural and social *matrix* (Daniel 1993, 112), it has to be thought over very

carefully. In other words, there is the need for a sort of personal effort and individual elaboration, not only for Muslims but also for non-Muslims.

Besides, another element also needed to be considered: the lack of social authority in the western context. This implies that every action has to be performed as a choice. For example, the Ramadan fasting is easier in a 'traditional' Muslim society than in the West, where working hours are not adapted and fast-breaking is not announced (Roy 2004, 57). As a British Muslim declared to me: 'Living in a non-Muslim society, Muslims have to be very careful of every step they take. They must be conscious of what they are doing at all times' (personal chat with Emdad Ramadan). In other words, what it means to be a believer must be expressed and stated explicitly and, continuously, reconfirmed. In this regard, Eickelmann and Piscatori (1996) have coined the relevant concept of 'objectification of Islam', meaning that to be able to define Islam becomes a pre-requisite for any practising believer, because Islam is no longer embedded in a culture and a social practice. Themes like 'what is Islam?', 'what does Islam say about this and that?' have become quite common today in relation to textbooks and sermons. This also shows a peculiar trend: Islam has turned into an 'object' that must be apprehended as such (Eickelmann-Piscatori 1996, 15). My approach in relation to this new development is to focus less on the actual answers and contents provided, and more on the processes they set in motion: the discourses and practices performed by the social actors, who share, contest, negotiate traditional and novel meanings as well. The 'objectification' of Islam clearly does not happen in a *vacuum*, but it does function as a sort of *osmotic* process; it is stimulated, articulated and 'provoked' by the non-Muslims, especially during periods of crisis (Marranci 2008, 41) when Muslims are summoned to answer questions such as, 'What does the *Qur'an* says on this and on that?'. So, there is a need to consider the dominant and the dominated discourses, practices of representation and self-representation, as interrelated and equally relevant for understanding the phenomena under observation.

Another important remark that should be made is that the disconnect with the cultures of origin, and the effort to objectify Islam, mean that the Muslim actor is in the process of creating a new and purified form of Islam, which is not linked to any society or culture.

In other words, it is an Islam *in vitro*, oblivious of its historical and cultural sedimentations. In this regard, the passage to the West offers a good opportunity to rethink an Islam rid of cultural and national peculiarities (Metcalf 1996, 113), something which goes along the lines of the above-mentioned processes of individualization and reconstruction of a

community on a 'purely' religious basis. Individualization results from the dissolution of previous social links. Some actors -- as a few of my interviewees have pointed out -- even consider immigration to be a positive factor, because detaching Muslims from Muslim cultures and pushing them to recast their identity in purely religious terms, helps to promote -- from their perspective -- a return to the true 'fundamentals' of Islam. The argument my dissertation makes is that, paradoxically, the exact opposite actually occurs: such movement helps in advancing innovations and novel developments; it leads to the 'atypical' scenario where the common defining factor for Muslims is a purified form of Islam, deprived of its cultural and historical roots.

Authors like Tariq Ramadan (1996), for example, go so far as to state that a Muslim enjoys a greater freedom to practice his or her religion in the West, than in most, if not all, Muslim countries. The same idea was promoted by someone like Abu Hamza, who, when asked if he favours migration from non-Muslim to Muslim lands, answered that his advice was to go into a Muslim environment, not to a Muslim country, since most of these are not Islamic states. In his words, the concept of a borderless Islam, without any national identification, can be even better implemented in the West, where Muslims can re-construct their Islamic identities by truthfully following the Islamic teachings (Supporters of Sharee'ah, 2000).

Hence, it is easy to understand that within a non-Muslim environment, the borders of such a Muslim community do not correspond to any geographical territory or area. They are constituted through discourses, discursive practices, and finally practices: they are a product of the mind first, more than a concrete territorial entity. At the same time, these borders are more unstable and transient, and therefore, they need to be constantly defended and reconfirmed. The point I am trying to make is that such a borderless (dislocated) form of Islam pushes towards a greater quest for definition and identification as achieved through the discursive practices of the believers, since 'Islam' is no longer embedded in 'territorial' cultures. Likewise, the same individual may employ various levels of conceptual references, jumping from the letter to the spirit of the scriptures and back again. This is also the reason why my research advocates the importance of analysing the discourses and practices of Muslim actors, and their operations of self-representation, without lingering over theological issues. Compromises, construction of attitudes, casual use of various levels of self-identity, ad hoc quotations from Hadith or the Qur'an: the range of attitudes is very wide and flexible (Burgat 2005, 68). While the study of available literature is useful to understand the sources, it does not exhaust the complexity of individual religious experiences and feelings. Furthermore, my study is an appeal to reflect

on years of anthropological and sociological studies, which, because they have focused on Muslims as products of Islam (Marranci 2008, 8), have overlooked the human beings who felt themselves to be Muslims.

Who are they? Who gets to define them?

In order to explain the implications of living as a Muslim minority in the West, it remains necessary to investigate the 'Muslims', before introducing the subjects of my research, the Islamists. This distinction is definitely important for the purposes of better understanding the differences between, someone who declares him/her-self as Muslim, and, someone else who places that Muslim identity at the centre of his/her political discourse and practices (i.e., to finally defuse any latent, mild form of the culturalist-orientalist approach that cannot discern any difference between the two terms and uses them interchangeably). Whom do we call a Muslim then? And more pertinently, do we need to define Islam to understand Muslims?

Most debates on Islam today, either jump from one to another definition or persist with one alone, disregarding the relevance of the different levels. However, as highlighted above, it is noteworthy that the question 'What is Islam?' is no longer debated only among analysts and 'outsiders'. Nowadays it is a cornerstone of discussion among an ever growing number of Muslims as well. This attitude consists of drawing a line within the Muslim world between what is Islamic and what is not (Bordieu 1994, 43). A 'Muslim' society, in the cultural and sociological sense, is not an 'Islamic' society *ipso facto* (that is, a society established on the principles of Islam). Therefore, the need to formulate what it means to be a Muslim, to define objectively what Islam is -- something I earlier referred to as the objectification of Islam -- becomes a logical consequence of the lack of social authority of religion (Eickelman-Piscatori 1996, 67). There is another important process relating to the status of a Muslim minority, that we must take into account: de-culturation that results from the crisis of the culture of origin yielding to re-constructed identities.

It is important to specify that I do not argue that the pristine cultures (of origin) were static and immune from external influence, nevertheless, they were re-constructed and lived by first generation immigrants as their own past; this is what most Western actors dealing with immigration usually call *tradition* (Lewis 1994, 32). References to tradition by community leaders in the West and/or politicians from the country of origin serve as a

means of maintaining the link between immigrants and the home country, which could also function as a political lever in the host country, and as a channel for funding in both directions. The interesting and unusual aspect in relation to 'Western Muslims' is that their relation with Muslim countries is no longer based on the concept of *diaspora*. I argue that the relevant link is no longer the *diasporic* one, but the one between immigrants and a new set of identities, mostly elaborated or provided by the host country itself (Asad 1993, 268). *Maghrebin* and *beur* in France are not terms to identify someone who is from a North African country. As terms, they explicitly refer to a different cluster of identity markers, which have been developed within the experience of being part of a set that has a minority status.⁶

Certainly, there are some groups, which retain a diasporic dimension longer than others, perhaps enhanced by marriages with a spouse from their village of origin. But among some groups of Muslims in Europe there is a specific trend toward a renewed, reinvented sort of Muslim identity, disengaged from pristine cultural links. The other interesting element is that among these same groups of Muslims there is always a quest for authenticity but this is not aimed at recovering or maintaining the pristine identity, rather it is about going beyond such culturally sedimented reality and reaching a pure ahistorical model of Islam. In a way, such effort represents a rejection of the culture of origin, and paradoxically, it works as a process of 'acculturation'. Some authors (Burgat 2005, 32) speak of a process of re-Islamisation to refer to this process of re-appropriation of Islam, purified of its cultural *scoriae*. This development is possible specifically because it is enacted in a non-Muslim cultural environment. I argue that this dynamic, which has been seen as a process of 're-Islamisation', is more the product of the fact that a Muslim identity, self-evident so long as it belonged to an engrained cultural legacy, has to express itself explicitly in a non-Muslim or Western context (Piscatori 1990, 46). The construction of a disengaged Islam is a way of experiencing Islam itself that is not linked to a given culture and it should nominally fit in with every culture (Bayart 2005, 58). More precisely, the issue is not only one of recasting an Islamic identity, but of reformulating it in very explicit and clear-cut terms. The point about resorting to an 'explicit' formulation is important, because it formally obliges one to make choices, by trying to disentangle what appears to be the different and often contradictory levels of practices and discourses; such a need is not felt urgently when a religion is already embedded in a given culture (Khan 1999, 82).

⁶ This contradicts Appadurai's argument about the need for migrant communities to establish 'diasporic links' with the countries of origin (1996, 57).

Especially in times of crisis and turmoil, Muslims feel compelled, or more likely, are explicitly asked to explain what it means to be a Muslim. Quite often the Western press publishes articles stating what Islam is or is not. Such talk weighs on the shoulders of every Muslim, rather than only on legitimate religious authorities, simply because there are not many established Muslim authorities in the West (Asad 1993, 268). In this manner, each Muslim is accountable for being a Muslim (Roy 2004, 56).

What is nowadays labelled a pervasive movement of *re-Islamisation* or Islamic revivalism is often explained in terms of identity protest. I do not argue that this kind of interpretation (Burgat 2005, 112) is misleading, but I suggest that the foremost task is to place it within the framework of reformulating a 'disengaged' Islam: as a specific urge for the individual, linked to a gap in the social authority. Explicit elaboration of Islam in this way also implies a projection into the future, a plan to realise the *ummah* beyond the heterogeneity of societies and cultures. It is easy to understand that this leads to the endeavour to define a universal Islam of a kind that can be valid in any cultural context. Of course, by definition, Islam is universal, but after the time of the prophet, it has always been incorporated into different cultures (Roy 2004,83). These cultures are seen by some Muslims as merely a product of history and as the result of many influences and idiosyncrasies; having thus altered the pristine message of Islam. Because of this, the new generation of Western-born Muslims do not want to be Pakistanis or Turks (Dassetto 1998, Roy 2004, 112); they aspire to, and represent themselves, as Muslims first. Therefore, it is evident how this quest for a 'pure' Islam could potentially signify the impoverishment or simplification of its content, which then needs to be explicit and delinked from an inherited *habitus* or traditional knowledge (Roy 2004, 34).

As mentioned earlier, my study focuses on Islamism and Islamists in the UK vis-a-vis a dominant power structure and discourse. With this in mind, I need to advance some more questions: what is the difference and the suturing point, if any, between Islam and Islamism? How is the relationship between Islam and Islamism lived, inhabited, discoursed and practiced by the Islamists themselves? How can it be analysed, discoursed and represented, without deploying the culturalist-orientalist framework of analysis, which is disempowering and politically ostracizing?

The next few pages are an attempt at answering these questions.

My research concerns British Islamists: the political activists who live and represent Islam as their political ideology, and who -- I argue -- are therefore bringing some innovations to a certain tradition themselves. Islamist parties are movements that, for more than a decade, and particularly during the last decade, have mounted different kinds of challenges against both the West and the regimes in place in the Middle East (Roy 1994, 28).

Needless to remark that by discussing the relationship between Islam and politics, I totally diverge from the culturalist-orientalist approach, which speaks of one Islam, eternal and timeless, and represents Muslim societies as a global cultural system (Huntington 1996). Such an approach also delegitimizes and depoliticizes the Islamist quests, either by confining them to the realm of the religious 'faith' groups, or by witch-hunting them as fundamentalists and terrorists. My principal aim is to offer an alternative framework of analysis, firstly by showing that there is a broad range of opinion among Muslim intellectuals as to the different political and social implications of the *Qur'anic* message. Western Orientalists, however, tend either to cut through the debate by deciding for the Muslims what the *Qur'an* means, or to accept the point of view of a particular Islamic school while ignoring all others (Mamdani 2004, 74).

I have decided to limit my inquiry to British Islamists and I am taking them at their word on Islam and Islamism, by considering the whole range of meanings, apparent contradictions and several levels of identity markers, adopted by these political actors themselves, who are the object of my analysis. To be more precise, Islamists are people who use Islamic metaphors and vocabulary to think through their political future (Sayyid 1997, 89); by doing so, they construct and 'discourse' through an Islamist discourse. Islamism is a political discourse and, as such, is akin to other political discourses, such as socialism or liberalism, for instance. My point is that no one would ever raise the question that those political discourses are not a uniform totality even while they include many varieties and different versions; knowing this, it is still possible and valid to speak of socialism and liberalism. Likewise, it should be possible to speak of different versions of Islamism, while still referring to Islamism. Islamism is a discourse that centres Islam within the political order. Islamism can range from the assertion of a Muslim subjectivity to a full-blooded attempt to reconstruct society on Islamic principles (Sayyid 1997, 32). This definition is similar to Oliver Roy's definition of Islamism. Roy also distinguishes between Islamism and what he calls 'neo-fundamentalists'. In his view, neo-fundamentalists are those whose aim

is to see the establishment of an Islamic order in terms of its privatization, in contrast to Islamists who see the establishment of an Islamic order necessitating intervention in public affairs, the capture of the state.

Like Roy, I see Islamism as a political project, but unlike Roy my notion of the political is not limited to projects which aim directly at seizing state power through a singular founding act (a revolution, for example). The political is the moment of the institution of the social (Laclau and Mouffe 1991, 54). It may range from the capture of the state apparatus by a dedicated vanguard to a more diffused strategy of intellectual moral reform of civil society as a precursor to acquire state power (Mamdani 2004, 79). Thus, within this broad definition of Islamism as a political project, there is room for very different strategies of Islamization. Similarly, I do not agree with authors (Mandaville, Mamdani, Esposito, Keppel, to name but a few) who distinguish between Political Islam and Islamism, on the basis that the former notion indicates movements simply aiming at reforming the society according to Islamic principles, but without planning the seizure of political power, and the latter indicates movements planning to institute an Islamic state. I consider both agendas as political, regardless of their actual or planned targets; I do not like speaking of 'Political' Islam mainly for the reason that it presents and stresses the concept of the 'Political' simply as an attribute, stemming from, or simply juxtaposed with a professed faith called Islam. To a certain extent, the political discourse is undoubtedly related to some core assumptions and tenets of Islam, but these are lived, mobilized and practiced in the realm of the political and of the power struggle; therefore, they are not just an appendix to Islam as the expression Political Islam might suggest. They are inhabited, represented, shared, discussed and disputed in varying contexts and thus their discursive nature and formations are different from a private professed belief. This is the reason why this thesis will adopt the term 'Islamism' instead of 'Political Islam'.

Having said that, it is clear that to reduce all the problems of the contemporary Muslim world to the effects of Islamic culture is a disingenuous argument and a tautology (Roy 2004, 114). It is akin to imposing the grid of a culturalist reading upon Muslims, by projecting as a reality whatever was predetermined by the grid, especially with regard to what can be called the 'Islamic political imagination' (Eickelman-Piscatori 1990, 47).

In relation to the fieldwork, my approach has consisted of taking generic statements -- such as, 'in Islam there is no separation between politics and religion because they are part of the political actors' imagination' (Daniel 1993, 46) -- seriously, but cautiously so as not to consider them directly explanatory.

Some historical coordinates for Islamism

Long before Islamism appeared in the twentieth century, Islamic reformers had felt that colonialism was the key challenge facing contemporary Muslims (Mamdani 2004, 45).

The question was posed quite strikingly by Jamal-al-Din-al-Afghani (1839-1897). When Ernest Renan published a piece on 'Islam and Science' in *Journal des Debats* (March 29, 1883), Al-Afghani responded in the same journal (May 18, 1883). Renan published a rejoinder the day after Al-Afghani's response, acknowledging that Al-Afghani had made a great impression on him. In his lecture, Renan had claimed that 'early Islam and the Arabs who professed it were hostile to the scientific and philosophic spirit, and that science and philosophy had only entered the Islamic world from non-Arab sources' (Keddie 1983, 87-89). Al-Afghani's retaliation challenged Renan's racist assumption (that the Arabs and/or Islam were hostile to science), and in its place argued a surprisingly modern case: that science, as philosophy, develops everywhere over time (*ibid.*, 95).

Al-Afghani had travelled widely outside his native Iran, from India in the east to France in the west, before he came to Egypt. His traditional *madrassah* education had included *fiqh* alongside *falsafa* (philosophy) and *irfan* (mysticism). His Indian experience both convinced Al-Afghani of the future importance of modern science and mathematics and exposed him to Britain's brutal repression of the 1857-58 anti-colonial revolt in India (Tibi 1988, 70). Whereas the early nineteenth century Islamic thinkers who embraced progress tended to be enamored with Western modernity and saw Britain and France as benign bearers of progress, Al-Afghani highlighted modernity's contradictory impact (*ibid.*, 79). On the one hand, Muslims needed modern science, which they would have to learn from Europe, but on the other, this very necessity was proof 'of our inferiority and decadence' for 'we civilize ourselves by imitating the Europeans' (Keddie 1983, 97). Al-Afghani had located the center of this historical dilemma in a society that had been subjected to colonialism: if being modern meant, above all, free rein for human creativity and originality, how could a colonial society modernize by imitation? (Mamdani 2004, 46).

There is also the link to colonialism and independence. Not surprisingly, forward-looking Islamic thinkers sought within the Islamic tradition, the sources of innovation, renewal and change. Even if both reformers and radicals spoke in the *vocabulary* of Islam, they turned to doctrine and history not just for continuity but also for renewal, and so they provided

different answers to the question of how to confront Western modernity and global dominance (Armstrong 2000, 45).

This process was completely different from the earlier development of Christian fundamentalism and political Christianity. Unlike Christianity, mainstream Islam has no institutionalised religious hierarchy; it has a religious clergy, but no single organized parallel to the hierarchy of the state (ibid., 45).

Whereas the development of a political Christianity in the United States was mainly the work of a 'fundamentalist' religious clergy -- such as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson -- the development of Islamism has owed more to the work of non-clerical political intellectuals such as Muhammad Iqbal and Mohammed Ali Jinnah in colonial India and Abdul A'la Mawdudi, Sayyid Qutb and Ali Shariati in post-colonial Pakistan, Egypt and Iran respectively. Unlike the fundamentalist clergy behind promoting political Christianity, the pioneers of Islamism were not the religious *ulama* but 'political' intellectuals with an exclusive worldly concern. It is for this reason that this thesis will not refer to 'Islamic fundamentalism' in relation to Islamism, though this term is most often used in post 9-11 America (Mamdani 2004, 47).

The split between religious *ulama* and political intellectuals was evident as early as the anti-colonial movement in India during the first half of the twentieth century. Their religious and political conservatism did not necessarily go hand in hand: it was the intellectuals, not the *ulama*, who pioneered the development of Islamist movements, ultimately championing the call for a separate homeland for Indian Muslims, namely Pakistan (Jalal 2001, 56).

Contrary to what might be expected, the conservative 'ulama' remained inside the secular Indian National Congress, whereas the modernist secular intellectuals called for an Islamic polity, at first autonomous, then independent (ibid., 75-78).

Whereas the *ulama* made a clear distinction between Islam as a cultural and political identity that Muslims may espouse, secular intellectuals came to insist that Islam was not just a religious or cultural identity; it had become a political identity (Mitchell 1969, 75). The Indian experience reveals that those who called for a 'nationalist politics' were not always progressive and those who championed religious political nationalism were not all reactionary (Armstrong 2000, 67). The two camps were not properly divided by the line between democracy and authoritarianism. The poet Muhammad Iqbal and the politician Mohammed Ali Jinnah, both spokespersons for the political rights of Muslims, were determinedly secular in orientation. Iqbal, who is considered to be the spiritual founder of Pakistan, was among the few Muslim intellectuals who rejoiced in 1922 when Turkey

abolished the Ottoman Khilafat, in effect severing any relationship between the state and religion. He called for the institutions of *ijtihad* (legal interpretation) to be modernized and democratized, he argued that the law should be interpreted by a body elected by the community of Muslims, the umma, and not the ulama. Jinnah, who is considered to be the political founder of Pakistan, was similarly determined that independent Pakistan must have a secular constitution, guaranteeing separation between the state and religion and due protection to the rights of minorities (Jalal 2001, 244-246).

The shift from reformist to a radical agenda in Islam is best understood in the context of the transition from colonialism to post-colonialism and can be highlighted by the history of a single mass organization: the society of Muslim Brothers in Egypt (Mamdani 2004, 48).

Beginning in 1930, Hasan-al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and Abul-Ala-Mawdudi the creator of the Indo-Pakistani Jamaat-I-Islami party (Bahadur 1978), introduced a new movement of thought that endeavoured to define Islam primarily as a political system in keeping with the major ideologies of the twentieth century. But they brought legitimacy to this new vision by focusing the theme of a return to the texts and to the original inspiration of the first community of believers. And so, I will refer to the contemporary movement that conceives of Islam as a political ideology as Islamism.

From the outset, Islam was divided into three geographic and cultural tendencies: the Sunni Arab Middle East, the Sunni Indian subcontinent and Irano-Arab Shi'ism. These groups are distinct both politically and geographically, which is why it is more appropriate to speak of an Islamist sphere of influence than of an international union. The largest organization is that of the Arab world's Muslim brotherhood (MB), which is vaguely dependent on their Egyptian leadership, but in reality organized on a national basis (Mitchell 1969, 89); several dissident and minority groups have also branched off from this common base. Next, there are the organizations on the Indian subcontinent (the various Jamaat-I-Islamis of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh), the Afghan Mujahidin (Hizbi-Islami, Jammat-I-Islami), and more recently the North African Islamists (the Algerian FIS, or Islamic salvation front; the Tunisian Nahda party) and the Islamic Renaissance party in the former Soviet Union. This bloc has recently tended to merge with other movements like the Saudi Wahabis and the Pakistani Ahl –I-Hadith (Mawdudi 1985, Euben 2000, Noor 2001, Schulze 2002).

The Islamist movement has developed over half a century, beginning more or less in 1940. Yet, concepts have evolved and historical circumstances have changed, and splits and differences have brought diversity. However, there is a sort of conceptual matrix and a

demographic base common to all the groups. Indeed, as much from a sociological as from an intellectual point of view, it can be said that these movements are products of the so-called 'modern world' (Kepel 1986, 78). The militants are rarely mullahs but off-springs of a modern educational system, and those who are university educated, are usually more scientific than literary.⁷ Islam is considered as much a religion as an 'ideology' (Bayart 2005, 60). Their political education comes from college and university campuses and not from religious schools (Euben 2002, 46; Mamdani 2004, 113). Much emphasis is placed on the organization, a pattern reminiscent both of Leninist type parties and of Sufi brotherhoods (Cole-Keddie 1986, 68). Likewise, the masses who follow the Islamists are not *traditional* or *traditionalists* either; they live in a world of movies, theatres, cafés, jeans, videos and sports. It is also striking to notice the Islamist adaptation to the modern urban setting, from the use of modern weapons and communications technology to the organization of large demonstrations. Therefore, far from being an irruption of an archaic, irrational phenomenon, the Islamist movement is strictly intertwined with two tendencies. The first is centred on the *sharia*, that is setting the reformer, the censor and the tribunal against corruption, against foreign influences, political opportunism and the forgetting of sacred texts. The other tendency is more recent and it has a slightly different connotation: it is that of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism, today it is subsumed under the label of anti-Westernism (Mortimer 1982, 68). The main targets are foreign banks and local governments accused of 'complicity' with the West (Mamdani 2004, 67). The interesting aspect is that there is a sort of continuity in the targets and also the participants: the same individuals who followed Nasser in the 1960s have turned into being Islamists today. It is not difficult to see the connection between Marxist groups and Islamists. Without question, the Shi'ites have provided the best bridge between the two Third world movements. Ali Shariati, for instance, an ideologist of the Shi'ite movement (Sivan 1985, 78), was a great reader of Franz Fanon.⁸ And of course, the Iranian revolution has best expressed the Third World continuity by embodying the North-South opposition in Islamist terms (ibid.,79). To a certain extent, there are also parallels between different kinds of guerrilla fighters and militants, especially in recent history. The 1950s and 1960s were years of communion: the

⁷ For an extensive and ethnographically based account and analysis of the social roots of Islam see the book by Gregory Starett *Putting Islam to work: Education, Politics and Religious transformation in Egypt* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1998) and Genevieve Abdo's *No God but God: Egypt and the Triumph of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁸ Specifically, Franz Fanon's works like *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove, 1965), *A dying Colonialism* (New York: Grove, 1967), *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove, 1967), *Toward the African Revolution* (New York: Grove, 1969).

Algerian guerrilla fighters and the Palestinian activists seemed to be the brothers of progressive Western militants. In the 1970s, a sort of divorce occurred when the Islamist militants were no longer understood by the Western militants (Mawdudi 1980, 24). In a way, in terms of their social origins and their relationship to knowledge, Islamist militants share several values with their Western counterparts. They have, in common, the cult of a return to the past, of authenticity and purity (the rebuilding of a traditional way of life in a context and by methods that presuppose that the tradition is obsolete), and the shift into terrorism for the most radical fringe (Asad 2006, 67). For the most sectarian, it could be said that the *hegira* is akin to a return to the countryside. Nevertheless, whereas the Marxist guerrillas were peasant, the Islamists were 'urban' and thus sociologically more 'modern' (Schulze 2002, 197). The parallels between Islamism and third world movements also extend to their decomposition and the shift of the most radical sectors into terrorism, this latter being a product of the 1970s and not an Islamic invention⁹ (Esposito 1983, 79; Armstrong 2000, 55). However, there is a main distinction that needs to be made. The Third World Marxist vulgate allowed some to understand the Baader-Meinhof Gang or the Red Brigades but not the Hizbullah (Roy 1996, 42). That is to say, unlike Marxism, Islamism and Islamists cannot reach beyond certain culturalist and orientalist representations (Mamdani 2004, 39).

The debate on Islamism within a 'modern' political system

Comparisons do not prove much. It is certainly engaging for a scholar to demonstrate the historicity, contextuality and 'modernity'¹⁰ of the Islamist movements but, paradoxically, it goes against some Islamists' own arguments. Put other way, according to this group, there is only one way of being Islamist. But this vision of Islam and Islamism as possessing a single essence is -- as shown above -- not unique to the Islamists, since it is present both among 'traditionalist' ulamas and Western orientalists, who are, in turn, adopting Max Weber's reading of Islam as a culture, a civilization, and a closed system (Rodinson 1974; Weber 1976).

⁹ For an extensive analysis of the phenomenon see Paul Berman's *Terror and Liberalism* (London: Norton, 2003).

¹⁰ For an interesting discussion on the 'modernity' of the Islamist movements, see Martin Bright 'On the Trail of Osama Bin Laden', *The Guardian* 11 May 2003.

Needless to say, even though they speak in terms of a global timeless system, the Islamists and Orientalists do not agree on what constitutes the essence of Islam and of being Islamist.

On the other hand, as argued before, the culturalist-orientalist approach consists of defining a timeless 'Islamic culture' (Gellner 1981, 45), a conceptual framework that structures both political life and urban architecture, the thought of the ulamas and of their detractors, and which results in the non-emergence of capitalism (Weber, 1976) and the absence of an autonomous space for politics and institutions (Badie, 1987). On this view, Islamic culture leads to a timeless civilization in which everything is interrelated and reflects the same structure. Such a civilization has then been brutally confronted with the challenge of a modernity arisen from outside (Lewis 1993, 57). According to this narrative, Islam is the major obstacle prohibiting access to political modernity.

In the political domain, the 'invention of modernity' (Hall-Gieben 1992) lies in the emergence of an autonomous space separated from both the religious and the private spheres. Secularism and politics 'are born of a closing in of Christian thought onto itself' (Hall 1985, 57). This is not to deny that there has been some remarkable historical and political research addressing the birth of politics and the modern state. But the consequence of most of these works has been to suggest that there is no modernity outside of the Western political model (*ibid.*, 68). The argument that is usually put forward, consists of two main points: parliamentary democracy, the ideology of human rights and the law based state are ethically desirable and economically more efficient; historically this configuration comes out of Christian Europe (Sayyid 1997, 111). In postcolonial settings, this argument has stirred up heated debates and provoked passionate reactions; mainly it is considered as a tool of 'post-imperialist' strategy and thinking (Marranci 2008, 96).

My argument here is that the real problem might revolve around comparativism. Put another way, comparativism tends to take one of the elements of the comparison as the norm for the other, finding that there is either a resemblance or a lack of one, but never 'questioning the primitive configuration' (Castoriadis 1987, 68). The risk involved in this approach is the isolation of the two specific entities, and the dismissal, not only of their individual dynamic, but also -- more relevantly -- of the dialectic of their relationship. That is to say, there is definitely an Islamist corpus and an Islamist discourse, but it would be misleading to simply set an equivalence between a civilization and a history on the one hand and this corpus on the other (Turner 1994, 57), without thinking of their mutually constitutive discourses.

If comparativism is adopted as a method, a link is instituted between the Islamic corpus and the concrete sociological reality. It is argued that the lack of modernity in Muslim countries is explained by the absence of some conceptual categories that are present in Western thought: for example, given the absence of the concept of a state based on territory, it is claimed that it is impossible to achieve a proper modern state that is, by definition, 'territorialized'. At times, the same lack of modernity is explained by the presence of certain specific sociological categories not reflected in this corpus: the patrimonial state, the segmentation into solidarity groups, *asabyyyia*. (Hall-Gieben 1992; Badie 1993).

The point that I am making here is that, far from being marked by a lack, Islamist thought is just inscribed within a different configuration of the relationship between Power and Law: what the philosophy of cognitive science would call 'the contextuality' (Gershenson 2002). That this configuration could, in turn, be a source of difficulties is not in doubt, but what my dissertation argues is that the assessment should not be produced in relation to the Western state but, according to its original meaning (El Zein 1977, 68). What is definitely original, for instance, is the place of the *sharia*, Muslim law, with respect to power. The *sharia* has two characteristics: its autonomy and its incompleteness. At the same time, the *sharia* does not depend on any state, on any actual positive law, on any political decision, and neither does it depend on any official body, church or clergy. Another important element is that the *sharia* is never closed, for it is based not on a core of concepts but rather on an ensemble of precepts, which is at times very general, and at times, precise. While the basic precepts, as they are explicitly formulated, cannot be called into question, their extension is a matter of 'casuism' (Damasio 2000, 78). These two main considerations highlighted above (i.e., no institutional or conceptual closure) also give me the opportunity to present another relevant reflection. Totalitarianism, as the kidnap of the entirety of the social realm into the political realm, is absolutely foreign to Islamic culture (Roy 1996, Euben 2002, Mamdani 2004). On the other hand, the excess of the state (totalitarianism) is always latent in the place the state occupies in the West. It is not surprising, thus, that Western contemporary thought on the birth of the state 'would be a reflection on and against totalitarianism' (Roy 1996, 57).

These very brief, and perhaps sketchy, reflections are aimed at showing that there are different configurations and dynamics in the relationship between the state and society in the so-called Islamic and Western cultures. To investigate the first culture on the basis of the concepts of the second, elevated to the level of universality, can only highlight an

absence, a lack of something: an empty category that does not explain much but could cause several misunderstandings.

I might add that the culturalist-orientalist approach is echoed by a similar response given by some Muslim intellectuals (Marranci 2008, 78). Their stereotypical arguments can be summarized into three categories: the so-called nostalgia argument (it was Islam that brought civilization to the West); rejection of any serious hypothesis and analysis of Western models; apologia for Islam (everything is in the *Qur'an* and in the Sunna) (Roy 1996, 58). The first one is defensive: it just evades the question. The second and the third ones are analysed in my dissertation.

To put it another way, paradoxically enough, some Islamists analyse and study Islam by approaching it in the same guise as conceived by the culturalist-orientalist approach: a timeless, dehistoricized entity beyond criticism, a *sub specie aeternitatis* (ibid., 61). Ironically, they refuse to look at the Islamic civilization as a socio-historical configuration; they project an Islam deprived of its historical sedimentations and therefore 'fictitious', not real but -- as my dissertation argues -- certainly a novel development.

On the culturalist-orientalists' side, this kind of approach to Islam is not synonymous with innovations, but with lack of perspectives. It is a matter of the same essentialising attitude, which, however, produces different contents. Furthermore, there is an interesting dynamic to take into consideration: what is promoted by the Islamists as a return to the true origins or fundamentals of Islam, but is instead an innovation, is considered by the culturalist-orientalist discourse as a backward refuge into the past.

In other words, there is a sort of paradoxical dynamic, which means that the categories imposed from above, become unconsciously internalised from below, although both parties propose an inverted image of what is real: namely, the mirroring effect.

My point here is that dismissing this element in the analysis could mask a refusal to address a failure in making a serious political examination of the phenomenon itself. Doing this also implies endorsing a casuistic analysis based on empty categories and sharp 'de-contextualised' definitions (Gershenson 2002), without venturing into questioning, challenging and deconstructing them.

My hope is that this dissertation has managed to avoid such perspectives. This intention also explains why I decided to adopt a constructionist approach that sees 'cultures' and 'religions' as political acts, within the terms, the dynamics, the struggles, the possibilities, and the unforeseeable strategies, of a power-relationship. The same purpose clarifies why I decided to embark on a two-year fieldwork to share the experience of the political actors

themselves, to study the discourses and practices, to understand the self-representation of Islamists in the UK.

CHAPTER III

The Set of Islamic beliefs and beyond

This chapter looks at the main sources of the Islamic beliefs (the *Qur'an*, the *Hadith*, and the Sharia) to better understand how Islamism has evolved and how Islamists have variously given 'works' to the 'words' (Mawdudi 1982, 13) by performing discursive practices of 'meaning' and in so doing, creating an Islamist discourse.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the knowledge and comprehension of these main sources are important in order to grasp the variety of their representations, the breadth of their potential representations, and mostly the discursive operations of their agents, the British Islamists. This implies that the main focus of my analysis is not what the *Qur'an* actually says, but what the Islamists say the *Qur'an* says. In this, my examination differs from the culturalist-orientalist one, which represents Islam as a global timeless system and ignores the fact the 'Islam' exists only through the practices and discourses of its agents, the Muslims and the Islamists. This is also the reason why I have decided to analyse here the concept of jihad and the debate on 'Islam and Democracy', both of these being much sought-after topics in the West, especially in the aftermath of 9-11. My aim is to show that there is no one univocal understanding of jihad among Islamists; its interpretation differs according to their various Islamist discourses and contextual practices.

In relation to the issue of the incompatibility between Islam and Democracy, in summary, my argument is that Islamism is a political discourse, and as such it is compatible with different political systems. Therefore, Islamist groups should not be ostracized from the political arena. It is a certain dominant culturalist-orientalist discourse which assumes, to such an extent, that there is an 'ontological' incompatibility between 'Islam' and 'Democracy', that it, paradoxically, turns Democracy into a corpus of religious beliefs, and as such, unchangeable. This chapter demonstrates how such analysis is misleading and unsustainable.

The excessive emphasis on Islam

Certainly, one element that captured my attention about the debate on Muslims, and mostly on Islamism, is the fact that it turns on one question: What is Islam? The tacit premise here is that most events involving Muslims are related to Islam as such; this paves the way to other questions like, what does Islam say about jihad, suicide bombers, democracy, women, and so on? Islam is therefore seen as a coherent entity, a closed and unchanged set of beliefs, values and cultural patterns, imbued in a common society, history and territory, which could allow a use of the term as an explanatory concept for almost everything involving Muslims (Asad 1993, 90; El Zein 1977, 118; Marranci 2008, 91; Sokefeld 1999, 427).

Another important element to consider is the lack of understanding, or constant confusion between 'Islam' as a religion (a set of beliefs) and the so-called 'Muslim culture' (if I am allowed to use this term). A good starting point for the analysis would be to recognise that Islam as a religion comprises the *Qur'an*, the *Sunna* and the commentaries of the Ulama. On the other hand, 'Muslim or Islamic cultures' include, and are made up of, literature, traditions, science, social relationships, cuisine, historical and political paradigms, urban life, and so on.

If such a 'culture' is difficult to spot or single out from among cultures based in certain historical eras and geographical areas, it is certainly misleading to explain most of the characteristics involving Muslims and Islamists in terms of Islam as a religion. The core argument of the culturalist-orientalist approach (outlined earlier) is that not only does culture matter but that it is mainly a matter of culture, defined as a fixed, unchanged, unchangeable entity and, mostly, deprived of *agency* and *agents*. In this connection, the famous question raised by several journalists and commentators post-9-11 'Why do they hate us?' (Fallaci 2001, 12; Philips 2006, 11; *The Times* 2004; Zakaria 2001) was often answered in very simple essentialising terms, by highlighting that 'American culture stands for freedom and choice' while *their* culture is based on atavistic 'traditional' patriarchal repression (Fallaci 2001, 45; Philips 2006, 78; Schwartz 2002, 56). Even when there was a serious attempt to look for the political factors behind the very ill-defined 'Islamic rage', it ended up assuming, without questioning, the putative category of Islamic rage (Marranci 2008, 94). It is easy to understand how these culturalist-orientalist frameworks of understanding are disingenuously flawed, and largely, politically disempowering and marginalising (Varisco 2005, 24). If everything is reasoned on the basis of culture

imagined as a fixed, dehistoricized, totalizing and pervasive entity, then there is no room for any change and the agency of the subjects has been totally denied or, worse, ruled out. For instance, expressions like the 'Arab mind' clearly show this operation of disempowering stereotyping. It assumes that there is an entity or super-entity called 'Arab culture', which *determines* an 'Arab' mind (Marranci 2008, 6). This leads me to affirm that a culturalist-orientalist analysis of cultures is always fundamentally stereotyped, as it tries to homogenize and 'freeze' a process that is otherwise diversified and contested: continuously in progress, without a 'definite' product.

As Stuart Hall (1997, 125) puts it, cultures are about circuits of meanings and different actors always debate those meanings and, in the process, construct cultures. With regard to Islam, and therefore Islamism, it is sometimes argued that it is grossly incompatible with the democratic system, and this argument is supported by adducing as central factors the anti-democratic, despotic, violent *essence* of Islam, Muslim culture, and to this end, a more robust proof is found by quoting passages of the *Qur'an*.

An observation would be that a sacred book is subjected, by definition, to arguments and interpretations; therefore, it is not a matter of written text, but mainly of 'discursive practices' and interpretations carried out by the agents. Furthermore, if there is still a debate about what the *Qur'an* 'actually' says, this means that nobody really knows, or at least, the people who think they know, disagree among themselves.

Hence, my answer to the culturalist-orientalist framework consists of adopting a constructionist approach and examining the complex variety of the Islamist discourses and discursive practices, according to the temporal, spatial and political contexts; by analysing the *genealogy* (Foucault 1977, 151-152) of 'British Islamism' within the Islamists' imagination.

An important reminder that needs to be made here, is that clear-cut categories (conservative, moderate, mainstream, radical) which are used in order to make sense of the Islamist discourses, might sometimes be useful, but they cannot pretend to subsume the real life of millions of people, even if these terms seem to be heuristically relevant. The same individual -- object of my analysis -- may employ various levels of conceptual references, jumping from the letter to the spirit of the scriptures and back again. Certainly, there is still the need to study the available literature, in order to give more 'substance' to these categories when they are deployed in the analysis, and to trace the discursive operations and practices of the *agents*. Doing so does not constitute a counter-claim to my argument that categories can never exhaust the complexity of the experience of the

individual (unless we consciously decide to resort to some kind of essentialism); for categories are never merely descriptive, but they are normative, and as such, exclusionary (Butler 1993, 19). However, I am also aware of the fact that this operation of categorizing, erasing and representing, performed by a researcher (by myself in this case) cannot easily be avoided; nevertheless, it continually needs to be charted, acknowledged, questioned, unsettled, and finally, displaced.

The Fundamentals of Islam

The beliefs and rules of worship found in Islam are based on three sources: a holy scripture (*Qur'an*), stories about the Prophet's life (*hadith*), and Islamic legal scholarship (*shari'a*). The fundamental elements of the faith, the 'Five Pillars', are:

1. *Shahada*: The recognition of the oneness of God, and that Muhammad is His Prophet;
2. *Salat*: Prayer five times a day;
3. *Zakat*: A 'social responsibility' tax to care for the poor;
4. *Hajj*: Pilgrimage to Makkah once in one's lifetime, if possible;
5. *Ramadan*: Observing daytime fasting and undertaking spiritual reflection during the month of Ramadan.

Beyond such basics, however, Islam's principles have been interpreted in widely different ways, and the practices of Muslims have varied just as much as those of any other 'world religion'. Indeed, shortly after the Prophet's death (632 C.E.), a schism occurred between two groups, Sunni and Shi'ia, over who should be his rightful successor: Abu Bakr (Muhammad's uncle) or Ali (his son-in-law).

The *Qur'an* is divided into chapters called *surah*, meaning 'fences'. They are arranged in order of length rather than chronology. The themes within each *surah* are not entirely sequential, but (according to Sunnis) purportedly reflect the order established by Muhammad. Shi'ite Muslims assert that the *Qur'an* should be in chronological order. The verses are called *ayahs* meaning signs. The *Qur'an* is held to have been gradually revealed over 23 years, reflecting the prophetic career of Muhammad. Sometimes, the reader encounters contradictory injunctions or comments in the text and this reflects the changing circumstances of Muhammad. Muslim scholars believe in a concept called *naskh* or 'abrogation' and the *Qur'an* itself refers to this concept. Basically, the later verses abrogate

the earlier ones. More specifically, certain verses that materialized when Muhammad was a powerless preacher in Mecca are replaced by those emerging when he was a ruler in Medina, following the *hegira* (migration). This concept becomes very relevant for its effects on Islamism, when a concept like jihad is considered. For example, the Surah 43:89 enjoins that pagans be ignored; Surah Baqara 2: 190-191 orders that they be resisted and slain. The logic would be that the later verses abrogate the earlier. In practice, the uses and implementations by the Islamists themselves vary widely, from alternatively quoting both Surah, to finding a justification for both Surah in different situations; from preferring one over the other in the same situations, to preferring one over the other in different situations; from denying the value of the second to even denying the existence of the first one (Marranci 2006, 11).

This brief account of an apparently schizophrenic attitude (*ibid.*, 15) is helpful as it shows the ‘consistency’ of my hypothesis that the analysis should focus first and foremost on the discourses and practices of the Islamist actors, and not on the ‘theological’ corpus *ascribed* to them. Nevertheless, knowledge and perusal of this corpus is essential in order to understand how the Islamist discourses and the practices are performed and legitimized, even when the human *imprimatur* is utterly denied.¹¹

The second source of authority for Muslims is the Sunna or the ‘path, way, manner of life’. Essentially, the difference between the *Qur’an* and the Sunna is that, with the *Qur’an*, Muhammad is said to have brought the direct speech of God, precise and incorruptible, whereas, the Sunna is human speech and action, unprotected and subject to fallibility. The Sunna is transmitted through the *Hadith*, meaning news or narration; records of the life of the prophet. This becomes relevant for the present analysis in several ways. For example, on the question concerning how to interact with a wider ‘secular’ non-Muslim society (such as whether to participate in elections), the prophetic model is looked at for guidance. It is often argued that, in Medina, Muhammad established a multi-faith society with a constitution. Moreover, the Prophet Joseph was effectively Prime Minister in pagan Egypt, and therefore, involvement in non-Muslim structures is allowed (Momen 1985, 135). However, Islamists who are opposed to voting, claim that there is no record of Muhammad acting in this way.¹²

A major division between Sunni and Shi’ia is in their *hadith* collections. Sunni Muslims

¹¹ This concept will be fully analysed in chapter 6, when reporting the findings of my ethnographic work.

¹² Parties like Hizbu-ut-Tahrir, the Saved Sect, Al Ghurabaa have repeatedly claimed the forged nature of this *hadith*. See chapter 6 for more details.

regard six of these collections as authoritative: Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, Abu Dawud, Al Tirmidi, An Nasai, Ibn Madja. Shi'ia Muslims adhere to their own collections and regard many of the Sunni *ahadith* as forged.

As Tariq Ramadan aptly affirms, in the West, the idea of Sharia calls up all the darkest images of Islam: from the repression of women to stoning, from the cruelest physical punishments to the denial of a democratic political system. This association is strong to such an extent that many Muslim intellectuals do not even dare to refer to the concept, for fear of frightening people or arousing suspicion of all their work by the mere mention of the word (Ramadan 2004, 31). It is certainly a fact that dictators have used it for repressive and cruel purposes, and that the ideal of the Sharia might have been betrayed by Muslims themselves, but this should not prevent a study of this central notion in the Islamic universe of reference. My analysis is aimed at understanding the ways it has been, and the reasons why, it still remains, fundamental and active in the Muslim consciousness through the ages, and what place it holds in the Islamist discourse. To an extent, it might be stated that if the *shahada* translates the idea of 'being Muslim', the *sharia* shows 'how to be and remain Muslim'. This also means that the Sharia responds, not only to the expression of the universal principle of Islam, but to the framework and the thinking that makes for its actualization in human history, considering -- as my analysis shows -- that the concept of 'being Muslim' has been subjected to changes and developments through time, place, history and geography. Likewise, the Islamist discourse has undergone the same 'contextual' developments (Marranci 2006, 24).

The *Qur'an* and the *hadiths* are central to the formation of what Muslims called sharia (Marranci 2008, 21). For example, it is from both the *Qur'an* and the *hadiths* that the five pillars of Islam (*arkana-al-islam*) fundamental to the sharia are derived (Dien 2004, 56; Esposito 1988, 59). The *arkana-al-islam* are the *shahada* or professing of faith, *salat* or the five daily prayers, *zakat* or almsgiving, *sawm* or fasting in the month of Ramadan, and *hajj* or the pilgrimage to Mecca to be performed at least once in a lifetime (Dien 2004, 59). Yet, both the *Qur'an* and the *Sunna* (the narrated tradition of the actions and sayings of the Prophet, composed of *sirah* and *hadiths*) were still insufficient to resolve all the circumstances in which a legal decision had to be taken (ibid., 61). After the death of Muhammad, the ummah lost its supreme judge and guide for deriving the divine law from the *Qur'an*. Muslims needed a mechanism to maintain their legal system within God's will (Marranci 2008, 21). The solution was a process in which *ijtihad* (the individual opinion of a scholar) was based on analogical reasoning starting from the *Qur'an* and then the *hadiths*,

qiyas (Dien 2004, 65). But, individual opinions could lead to disagreements or *khilaf*. For this reason, a new law was considered valid only if consensus, *ijma*, was reached (ibid., 68).

Fiqh in Islamic jurisprudence, literally means the ‘true understanding of what is intended’ (Philips 1995, 13). Technically however, ‘fiqh refers to the science of deducing Islamic laws from the evidence found in the sources of Islamic law’ (ibid.,14), and it addresses specific situations not directly considered in Sharia (ibid, 45). Mawdudi states that ‘*fiqh* deals with observable conduct...that concerning itself with the spirit of conduct is known as *Tasawwuf*’ (Mawdudi 1998, 75). The essence of Islamic conduct centers on the concept of *halal* (permitted) and *haram* (forbidden), and so, a major function of *fiqh* is to determine the appropriate response to questions concerning practical ethics. As a result, the following categories have emerged: obligatory; recommended; indifferent; disapproved but not forbidden; prohibited.

It is easy to understand how these concepts become immediately relevant when we consider -- for instance -- the ‘permissibility’ option of Muslim and Islamist participation in the electoral context. In the British context, parties like Hizbu-ut-Tahrir and the Saved Sect, Al Ghurabaa and the SOS, have all declared and established that voting is *haram*.

Other important concepts utilized by one or another of the distinct school of *fiqh* include *ray* ‘opinion’, as well as the *Sahabah* ‘Companions of Muhammad’ and the *fuqahah*. Yet another means of establishing an opinion, that is favored by some, is ‘custom’ or *adat* and customary usage or *urf*, either of the Ummah, or especially, the Caliphs. Among others, the concept of welfare or *istislah*, is a category which enables a juristic decision. The public interest, especially where issues of finances are concerned, may, at times, be an overriding concern. These concepts are increasingly used by British Islamists in order to decide on the Muslim-Islamist participation in elections in a non-Muslim majority context. As mentioned above, these concepts are highly ‘flexible’ and can be discoursed in a variety of ways which ultimately depend on the user’s uses, discourses and practices.

The Schools of fiqh

Throughout early Muslim history, several *madhabs* or schools of *fiqh* arose but only four schools of the Sunni sect continue. These are the Hanafi, Shafi, Hanbali, and Maliki schools. In practice, Shi’ite *fiqh* is a little different from the Sunni counterparts (Guillame

1978, 100). It is interesting to note that the Islamic revolution in Iran has led to a more dynamic *ijtihad* and an element of convergence with Sunni *fiqh*. Traditionally, the Shi'ia held that during the occultation of the twelfth Imam, civil government authority could only derive from the common law or 'urf', rather than from Islamic law. They also held that the rulings of a dead *mujtahid* were not binding on the living. The elevation of Khomeini to the position of 'Supreme Jurisprudent' and representative of the hidden Imam, transformed the situation. His fatwa against Salman Rushdie for blasphemy, for example, was felt by most Iranian Shi'ites to be irrevocable (Cole 2002, 194-195).

Khomeini also applied the Sunni principle of 'maslah' or 'state action on behalf of the public good' which previous Shi'ite *fuqaha* had not recognized, and which allow the Islamic Republic to do virtually anything and declare it in accordance with the Islamic law, on the basis that it benefits the Ummah. Once again, this consideration confirms the view that human practices are dynamic, subject to change -- *changeable* -- and more powerful and effective than written texts, even when those texts are regarded, and referred to as, divinely inspired or transmitted. Neglecting this aspect of the analysis would mean taking the risk of failing to address the analysis entirely, and of sidestepping the issue of the many stereotypes hovering over Islamism, Islamist discourses and Islamists' practices. There is also the added risk of portraying the relation between Islam and Islamism as causal and direct, by making a 'casuistic' examination of a political phenomenon.

The other two major distinctive features of the Shi'ia *fiqh* are the rejection of the *ijma* of the Sabaha and their belief that their *fuqaha* can still exercise *ijtihad*, which the Sunni have regarded as a closed science since the Mediaeval Abbasid era. Furthermore, the Shi'ia jurists stated that the sources of the Sharia are four: the Book, the Sunna, *ijma*, and *aql* (reason); emphasis on reason being a major feature of Shi'ism. The Shi'ia position is that 'Everything that is commanded by reason is also commanded by religion' (Al-Islam, 1998, 35).

The present overview of the main sources of the Islamic belief has been mainly aimed at offering some more background elements in order to discuss issues -- such as jihad, 'democracy' and involvement in non-Muslim political structures -- in relation to the British Islamist parties which are featured in chapters five and sixth of this dissertation.

In this context, an important issue is *ijtihad*. By the Mediaeval period, the gates of *ijtihad* were considered closed, although Hanbalis and some Shafis upheld the prerogative of a jurist to employ 'rational and independent judgement in legal questions'. Most had concluded that *ijtihad* was no longer necessary since all possible issues had already been

raised and addressed (Philips 1995, 105). However, Islamic *faithfulness* in time has been variously challenged, and new 'faithful' answers were required in connection with the Sources. In particular, 'human reason' has been active and creative in putting forward original proposals in keeping with the time and place (Ramadan 2004, 62). This means that there have been several attempts to revive *ijtihad*, to provide answers to questions that previous *fuqaha* could not have addressed. Moreover, since large Muslim minorities have arisen in Western lands and become a 'permanent feature', this question has become more acute. Islamic theology/jurisprudence prescribes that normally Muslims should migrate from non-Muslim lands to Islamic countries; similarly, exposure to the reality of complete religious liberty and the right to convert have led some scholars¹³ to question traditional Islamic rulings on apostasy. In this same context, it is very interesting to report what Abu Hamza answered, when asked if he favors *hijra* from non-Muslim to Muslim lands: 'I tell Muslims to go into a Muslim environment not a Muslim country, because in our countries of origin, we have Muslims but we do not have Islamic states' (Angelfire, 2001). This is a clear definition of what could be called a de-territorialized Islam, an environment more than a definite territory or land, where 'religiosity' ought to be transformed and discoursed and practiced in 'original' fashion. These are the relevant elements of analysis -- which my thesis has been seeking to illustrate and single out -- to reach a less 'essentialistic' understanding of Muslim minorities living in the West and work against certain culturalist-orientalist representations of the Islamists (Varisco 2005, 79). This also implies that within de-territorialization and de-culturation, the ways the self is reconciled with 'religion' (*religiosity*), are several, disparate and thus, not easy to categorize (Marranci 2008, 89). Those modalities are variously discoursed, practiced, and mobilized within different relationships of power. Nevertheless, these developments are all equally 'legitimate' and interesting to analyze, without imposing any ready-made category, for any such category is never merely descriptive (*ibid.*, 91), but tends to be normative, and therefore, exclusionary.

Jihad

The Arabic word *jihad* is derived from the root word *jahada*. The latter word has the sense

¹³ See for example Hassan-al-Turabi, Yusuf-al-Qaradawi and Azzam Tamimi.

of strive or exert. *Jahada* has been classically defined as 'exerting one's utmost power, efforts, endeavors, or ability in contending with an object of disapprobation' (Firestone 1999, 16). The literature characterizes such an object as deriving from one of three sources: a visible enemy, the devil, and the aspects of one's own self. There are, therefore, many kinds of jihad and most have nothing to do with warfare (Al Banna 1996, 34). Scholars of Islam distinguish between two broad traditions of jihad: *al-jihad-al-akbar* (the greater jihad) and *al-jihad-al-asghar* (the lesser jihad). The greater jihad, it is said, is a struggle against weakness of the self; it is about how to live and to attain piety in a contaminated world. Inwardly, it is about the effort of each Muslim to become a better human being. The lesser jihad, in contrast, is about self-preservation and self-defense; directed outwardly, it is the source of Islamic notions of what Christians call 'just war', rather than 'holy war'. Thomaz Mastnak has affirmed that jihad cannot properly be defined as holy war. In his view, jihad is a doctrine of spiritual effort, of which military action is only one possible manifestation; the crusade and jihad are, strictly speaking, not comparable (Mastnak 2002, 64-65). An observation that needs to be made is that it has been 'modern western thought' (Mamdani 2004, 47) -- strongly influenced by Crusades -- era ideas of 'holy war' -- which has tended to portray jihad as an Islamic war against unbelievers, starting with the conquest of Spain in the eighth century. At the same time, as Al Banna observes, political action is not contradictory to jihad. Islam sanctions rebellion against an unjust ruler, whether Muslim or not, and the lesser jihad can involve a mobilization for that social or political struggle (Al Banna 1996, 35). On the other hand, Mawdudi states that 'to alter people's outlook and spark an intellectual and mental revolution through the medium of the speech and the written word is a form of jihad'. Contrary to a widely held Western belief (Tamimi et al 2004, 19), historically speaking, the practice of lesser jihad as central to a 'just struggle', was occasional and isolated, marking points of crisis in Islamic history. After the first centuries of the creation of the Islamic states, there were only four widespread uses of jihad as a mobilizing slogan -- until the Afghan jihad of the 1980s.

The first was by the Kurdish warrior Saladin in response to the conquest and slaughter of the First Crusade in the eleventh century.

The second widespread use was in Senegambia region of West Africa in the late seventeenth century. By the second half of the seventeenth century, the slave trade had become the principal business of European powers on the African coast. Among those who sold slaves were Islamic rulers in the region. The crisis was felt most deeply in Berber society, which was caught in a 'pincer movement' (Mamdani 2004, 51) between Arab

armies closing in from the north and the expanding frontiers of the European slave trade in the south (Boubacar 1998, 51-58). In this context, Islamism started to take shape as a movement led by Sufi leaders (*marabout*) intent on unifying the region against the negative effects of the slave trade.¹⁴

The third time jihad was widely waged as a just war was in the middle of the 18th century in the Arabian peninsula, proclaimed by Muhammad-Ibn-Abdul-Wahab (1703-1792), who gave his name to a contemporary doctrine identified with the House of Saud, Wahabism. Ibn-Wahab's jihad was declared in a colonial setting, on an Arab peninsula that had been under Ottoman control from the 16th century. It was clearly not a jihad against unbelievers since its enemies included Sunni Muslims from the Ottoman Empire (the colonizers) and *Shi'ia* heretics, whereas its beneficiaries were a newly forged alliance between the ambitious House of Saud and the new imperial power on the horizon, Great Britain.

The fourth widespread practice of jihad as an armed struggle was in Sudan when the anti-colonial leader Muhammad Ahmed declared himself as Al-Mahdi in 1881 and began to rally support against a Turko-Egyptian administration that was rapidly becoming absorbed into an expanding British Empire. In this context, the battle for a jihad was a battle against a colonial occupation that was both Muslim (Turko-Egyptian) and non-Muslim (British). Al-Mahdi and his followers were spectacularly successful; armed with no more than spears and swords, they won battle after battle, and in 1885 they reached Khartoum where they killed the British general who was then governor in the Turko- Egyptian administration. However, once the victorious Al-Mahdi moved to unite different regions and create a united Sudan, the anti-colonial coalition disintegrated into warring factions in the north and into a marauding army of northern slavers in the south. As the war of liberation degenerated into slave raids, anarchy, and famine, it is estimated that the population of Sudan fell from around 7 million before the Mahdist revolt to somewhere between 2 and 3 million after the fall of the Mahdist state in 1895 (Deng 1995, 49-52). As in Saudi Arabia and West Africa in previous centuries, the experience of Sudan also showed that the same jihad that began as a rallying cry of a popular movement could be turned around by those in power -- at the expense of its supporters (Schulze 2000, 116-117).

¹⁴ The first war of the Marabout began in 1677 in the same area that had given rise to the 11th century Al-Moravid movement. The difference was that whereas the Al-Moravids had moved north, ultimately to conquer Spain, the Marabout moved South. The second war of the Marabout culminated in the Muslim revolution in the plateau of Futa Jallon in 1690. The leaders of the revolution in Futa Jallon set up a federation divided into 9 provinces, with the head of each appointed a general in the jihad. When the last of revolutionaries leaders died in 1751, the leadership passed from the religious marabout to commanders in the army. The new military leaders began an aggressive policy, targeting neighbours and raiding for slaves, all under the guise of a jihad (see Boubacar 1998,46, 58, 94-95).

Traditionally, *fiqh* has divided the world in two main conflicting orbs: Dar-al-Islam (abode of Faith) and Dar-al-Harb (abode of War). Defensive and offensive jihad relate to these two concepts. It must be remembered that these are theological *constructs*, not primary sources (unlike the *Qur'an* and the *hadith*), and as such, they are not 'set in stone' (Ramadan 1999, 123). It happens too often that *commentators* seize on these two terms when addressing the subject of jihad, without emphasizing that they are not binding on all Muslims, and that they are essentially theological *hypotheses* and therefore can be altered. In this context, Tariq Ramadan emphasizes that *Dar-al-Harb* and *Dar-al-Islam* are two concepts that cannot be found either in the *Qur'an* or in the Sunna. As he aptly observes, it was the ulama who, during the first three centuries of Islam, started to classify, define and border the different spaces in and around them (Ramadan 2004, 56). The definition of *Dar-al-Harb* has become increasingly complicated. Traditionally, the concept of Dar-al-Harb is understood in the following terms: Dar is home and Harb is war. It is a term used to describe enemy territory or a country that is under the political authority of a non-Muslim government that is at war with Muslims (Tamimi 1993, 181).

The Hanafi majority view has been that if 'Friday and the religious holiday can be observed, the land is *Dar-al-Islam*' (Lewis 1995, 191). Conversely, *Dar-al-Harb* is the land where Muslims are neither protected and safe, nor at peace.

Paradoxically, by following this reasoning, it might be argued that the appellation *Dar-al-Islam* is applicable to all Western countries, whilst this is not the case for a great majority of the Islamic countries where the population is overwhelmingly Muslim (Ramadan 1999, 125). Taking this reflection a bit further, Rachid Gannouchi has suggested that the establishment of a 'secular democratic government' which will respect human rights, ensure security and freedom of expression and belief, is, in fact, 'the essential requirement of mankind that Islam has come to fulfill' (Ghannouci 1993, 60).

Ramadan concludes that a discussion on the definition of Dar-al-Harb and Dar-al-Islam is mostly sterile and the terms are no longer relevant, given globalization and migration movement (Ramadan 1999, 129).

My contribution to this debate would be to say that, given the *deterritorialization* of Islam today, it might be useless to struggle for finding a borderline between the two entities.

However, Omar Bakri, the leader of al-Muhagiroun, who lived in the UK until 2005, once stated that there is no Dar-al-Islam today, since the whole world is Dar-al-Harb because it is the sphere of non-sharia; there is Dar-al-Harb everywhere in terms of military aggression and occupation (Al-Bakri 2003).

My methodological approach for the present research has consisted of focusing on, and analyzing, the discourses, practices, sometimes the silences and the allusions, made by the political actors themselves (the Islamists), over an hermeneutics of the theological corpus. In other words, in the light of Bakri's statement above, we are again at square one, and forced to see and to consider how, where, when the borders of Dar-al-Islam and Dar-al-Harb have shifted or are claimed to be shifting. My second argument against a quick dismissal of this division between the two abodes, is that in the so-called era of globalization, borders are more often 'vocal' than 'material' and 'visual', 'mental' more than 'geographical'. If this hypothesis can be accepted for a discussion about the plausible end of the nation-state and the opening up of the traditional geographical frontiers, it cannot be rejected when voiced by Islamists for an analysis on Islamism. Ultimately, this also implies that, to deny the existence and the consistency of these terms and concepts does not help in understanding the reasons why a group of people feel the necessity of marking those borders and 'politically' acting to secure them. By doing so, they define a political entity and -- as political actors -- they hail a political project, within an Islamist discourse: acknowledging this is the first object of my analysis, before assessing the practical applicability and political implications of the foregoing.

The call for a jihad through 'modern' history

Historically speaking, the call for a jihad, which has been considered by the Egyptian Farag as the absent obligation (the sixth pillar), can be traced to two key thinkers at the beginning of the Cold War: the Pakistani journalist Abu-Ala-Mawdudi, whose work began being published in Egypt in 1951, and Sayyid Qutb.

Mawdudi appeared at a moment when the ulama organized as the Jam'iyat-i-Ulama-i-Hind (Society of the Ulama of India) were supporting a multi-religious, decentralized yet united India against the demands for the creation of Pakistan. Meanwhile, the poet Muhammad Iqbal, considered as the spiritual founder of Pakistan, had envisioned Islamic identity not in terms of a nation-state, but as a borderless cultural community, the *ummah*. To an extent, it was ironic that though the formation of Pakistan gave its Muslim inhabitants self-determination, this was as residents of a common territory and not as an *ummah*. Instead of being a profound critique of territorial nationalism and nation-state that Muhammad Iqbal had intended Pakistan to be, it was a territorial nation. Mawdudi seized upon this specific

contradiction, by appealing to the so-called 'post-colonial Islamist intellectuals'. Mawdudi claimed that the Islamic state could not just be a territorial state of Muslims; it had to be an ideological state, an Islamic state. To realize that end, he established Jammat-Al-Islami in Karachi in 1941, had himself confirmed as its Emir, and talked of an 'Islamic revolution', perhaps being the first man to do so.¹⁵ A key feature of Mawdudi's thought was centralized power and *jihad* was the ultimate struggle for the seizure of the state power; as Kalim Siddiqui reads Mawdudi, this was a way 'to take Pakistani nationalist sentiments on board, his (Mawdudi's) political thought and the Islamist party he founded' (Siddiqui 1996, 85). In Mawdudi's view, the ultimate objective of Islam was 'to abolish the lordship of man over man and to bring him under the rule of one God', and jihad was its 'relentless pursuit' (Mawdudi 1985, 285-88).

Far from advocating a spiritual power, he re-defined the meaning of *Din* in a purely secular way, by stressing that it was 'useless to think that you can change things by preaching alone... *Din* actually means the same thing as state and government' (Mawdudi 1986, 296-97). It might be observed that he 'secularised' Islam,¹⁶ by equating it not with other religions but with political ideologies that seek the conquest of the state, such as popular sovereignty or monarchy or, above all, Communism. Mawdudi clearly affirmed that 'a total Din, whatever its nature, wants power for itself. A Din without power to govern is like a building, which exists in the mind only'. He was also the first to claim that armed struggle was central to jihad and the first to call for a universal jihad. Those features made him the 'pioneer of Islamic political thought in the subcontinent', making the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* 'relevant again' (Siddiqui 1996, 56).

Mawdudi's decisive influence on Sayyid Qutb regarding the necessity of *jihad* as an armed struggle is widely recognized; nevertheless, there are some differences between the two, which are in need of being acknowledged. Even if Qutb advocates the absolute sovereignty of God, he does it in a totally different way from Mawdudi (Algar 2000, 15). Unlike Mawdudi's preoccupation with the state as true *agent* of change in history, Qutb's thought is far more society-centered. Reinhard Schultze has noted that the deputy of divine sovereignty for Qutb is man 'as an individual and not the state' as Mawdudi saw it (Schultze 2000, 176). Qutb's search for an *Islamic* road to modernity placed him alongside Al-Afghani and Al-Banna as his predecessors; he elaborated Mawdudi's thought and took

¹⁵ Kalim Siddiqui, in his *Stages of Islamic revolution* celebrates Mawdudi as the founding father of the new 'Islamic era of political renaissance'. (Siddiqui 1996, p 58-60).

¹⁶ He therefore discoursed an Islamist discourse.

it to a more radical conclusion. He made a distinction between modernity and westernization, calling for an embrace of modernity but a rejection of westernization, thus having a profound influence on the Islamic revolution and on Khomeini's political project (Sayyid 1998, 112-119). Qutb's reformulation of *jihad* resonated with contemporary Marxism-Leninist, both Maoist and Leninist. Echoing the Maoist distinction between the ways of handling contradictions among the people and the enemies, Qutb argued that *jihad* involves both persuasion and coercion, the former appropriate among friends but the latter suited to enemies. In Qutb's compelling reasoning, only physical force will remove the political, social and economic obstacles to the establishment of a *true* Islamic community. Islam had not only the right, but also the obligation, to exercise force to end slavery and realize human freedom (Qutb 1990, 92-94).

Here it is hard to not notice, a resemblance to the dialectics of Marxism-Leninism. Qutb argued that jihad is a process beginning with the organization of a vanguard, followed by a withdrawal that would make possible both study and organization, and then return to a struggle. Again in his *Milestone*, Qutb echoed a key dictum of Leninism: 'How to initiate the revival of Islam? A vanguard must set out with this determination and then keep going, marching through the wide vast ocean of jahilia which encompasses the entire world...I have written the Milestone for this vanguard, which I consider to be a reality waiting to be materialised' (Qutb 1990, 5-6). It is worth considering that it was Lenin who, in 1905, spoke of the difference between a just and an unjust war and of revolution as the only 'just war'; Kalim Siddiqui later in 1996 will say, 'the Islamic revolution is the only just war' (Siddiqui 1996, 3).

In the history of the 'Society of the Muslim Brotherhood' (*Ikwan-al-Muslimina*), Sayyid Qutb is identified with the ascendancy of radical Islamism, in contrast to Hassan-al-Banna's moderation. The difference between moderate and radical Islamism -- although I do not fully agree with those two categories as being epistemologically exhaustive and consider them to be highly problematic -- could be put in the following way: whereas moderates fought for social reforms within the system, the radicals were convinced that no meaningful social reforms would be possible without taking over the state. This consideration has also led some authors, such as Oliver Roy, for example, to distinguish between Political Islam (the first form) and Islamism (the latter expression). As previously discussed, I consider Islamism as a political project and my understanding of the 'political' is not limited to projects which aim directly at seizing the state power through a singular founding act called revolution. My argument is based on a notion of the political as the moment of the

institution of the social (Laclau 1990, 31). It may involve the capture of the state apparatus by a vanguard, but it may also include a different strategy of 'intellectual' reforms of civil society as a possible precursor to acquiring state power. This also implies that, within such a broad understanding and definition of Islamism as a political project, there is room for very different Islamist strategies, or for *Islamization* according to such an open-end category.

In the case of Qutb, it might be argued that, perhaps, fifteen years of forced labor in Nasser's camp convinced him that religious and 'secular' intellectuals could not live at peace in the same society. It might also be sustained that Qutb's renunciation of reforms through coexistence was 'inspired' by other contemporary schools of political thought, such as Marxism and Leninism.

This takes me to another relevant consideration, which might sound platitudinous, but it is what the dominant culturalist-orientalist approach refuses to acknowledge, and therefore, as a concept, it needs to be stressed. Islamist intellectuals whether 'secularly inspired' or 'religiously educated' were, like other intellectuals, mostly preoccupied with the issues of political power and political identity. There is little doubt that Islamist intellectuals discoursed and developed Islamism through encounters not only with the *ulama*, but also with other intellectuals who ignored the Islamic tradition and drew on sources such as Marxism or Western liberalism. Through this double encounter, they developed Islamism in multiple directions: the different interpretations and potential uses of jihad as a 'political tool' to achieve an Islamic state are further proofs of this statement. Above all, if we just look at the different directions and conclusions reached by the two Islamist intellectuals Qutb and Mawdudi -- who have been written about here -- it is easy to understand how the common 'Islamic' matrix (intended as the teleological corpus and sources) can offer a very little insight into their thoughts and political projects.

According to Mahmood Mamdani, the single conviction that unites radical Islamist intellectuals is the preoccupation with taking power. They are convinced that the historical moment defined by the collapse of Communism is the moment that 'Muslims must seize to advance Islam as a universal ideology of emancipation' (Mamdani 2004, 59). If this holds true, it is very difficult to establish *a priori* which understandings of jihad have to be rejected and which ones accepted; to do so would mean there exists a syllabus of unchanged and unchangeable political practices originating from a theological corpus, and this is something that my thesis considers to be a fruitless, foundationalist method of analysis, mostly deriving from a dead-end culturalist-orientalist approach.

In this context, it is very interesting to report what Sheik-Yusuf-Al-Qaradawi, a leading figure in the Iqwan, has stated in relation to the different uses of jihad in different contexts; he vigorously distinguished 9-11 from HAMAS actions, saying that in the case of 9-11, the objectives and the means employed (using civilian aircraft full of non-combatants against people not occupying homes taken from Muslims and attacking buildings full of innocent people) were totally illegitimate.

Azzam Tamimi expressed this point, very strongly by explaining that the Palestinians are simply 'resisting an occupation of their homes, by invaders who came from Eastern Europe, America, South Africa and many other places' (Islamic Institute of Political thought, 1993).

There seems to be widespread theological support from ulema for the view that shahid (martyr) operations against the Zionist enemy are wholly legitimate, while the attack on the World Trade center was not. Dr. Ramadan-Al-Bouti of Damascus University draws a clear distinction between the actions of Al-Qaeda and those of the Palestinian resistance. In his view, if people in the Twin Towers had unjustly occupied them, without permission of their owners, then 'humanness justifies that the owners of the buildings take action and avenge this wrongdoing'. This example is a way to justify, by analogy, the Palestinian resistance, and to de-legitimize the 9-11 attacks. (Dr Al-Bouti stresses that if the Twin Towers had been owned by certain individuals and were forcibly taken from them by thousands of other men and women who inhabited them, it might be said that those people are occupying buildings that do not belong to them, something which is blatant injustice. But, this was clearly not the case in the 9-11 situation since 'those people dwelled in those buildings rightfully') (Al-Bouti, M. Sa'id Ramadan 2001, p.16).

A similar position regarding the Palestinian resistance is held by the Leader of Al-Muhagiroon, Omar-Al-Bakri, who nevertheless, has several times shown support for the 'Magnificent 19', seeing them as martyrs to avenge the sufferings of the Muslims around the world. To the objection that among the victims of 9-11 were hundreds of Muslims, his reaction was to quote the words pronounced by Bin Laden, who claimed that the 'Islamic Shariat says Muslims should not live in the land of the infidel for long' (Jihadunspun, 2001). Drawing some conclusions, let me state that the present section was aimed at showing how a discussion of jihad should, first and foremost consider that the term 'jihad' is, in itself, broad and contested enough, so that it can include different (or even any) actions to allegedly advance Islamism as a political project. As claimed above, my analysis has found it fruitless to refer strictly to the Islamic sources in order to categorize or judge the

variable uses of jihad made by the different Islamist leaders and activists. Such platitudes would suggest that it is a political discourse which functions through a 'religious' vocabulary, being very weakly connected with religious tendencies, whether extremist, radical, moderate, conservative or even secular, if those categories make any sense. By trying to find an 'Islamic' explanation of jihad while referring to Islam as a theological corpus, would mean downplaying the *political*, precisely that my dissertation suggests, is fundamental to understanding Islamism, to even its extreme manifestation as *political terrorism*.

Furthermore, it cannot be assumed that, just because an Islamist would endorse jihad as physical force and violence in one sphere and by one group, he will support such an operation in another arena and by a different organization. The point is that such action will always be born of a *political* encounter, and within a relationship of power: the practice of 'making sense' of this action (its discursive practice) will always be *political* as well. In other words, *jihad* is what the Islamists say *jihad* is: a discursive practice of producing meanings, which actually is producing, use, re-using, subverting and displacing them.

Islam and Democracy: the concept of Democracy in Islam.

An analysis of the discourses and practices of the Islamist parties operating in the West, that examines the 'plausibility'¹⁷ of their agendas within a 'Western' political system, inevitably ends up discussing the topic of the compatibility between Islam and Democracy. My argument is that the way the debate is set up and the topic is framed, itself leads to the creation of the problem, and towards the thesis of the incompatibility between the two (viz. Islam and democracy), on the basis of their supposed 'ontological' differences.

Besides, nowadays such debate has become so frequent among the media, academics and policy-makers (as much as it has become shallow), that I find it important to explore its structure and reasoning, in order to demonstrate the lack of depth of the arguments and criticize, once again, the culturalist-orientalist approach, that informs it.

The clash of civilizations discourse certainly echoes a modern version of the 'culturalist-orientalist approach'. The celebrated phrase, 'a clash of civilization's is taken from the title of the closing section of Bernard Lewis's 1990 article 'The Roots of Muslim Rage'. Lewis's

¹⁷ I emphasize the word 'plausibility' because I clearly disagree with this approach, which I find, at the very least, anti-democratic.

text provided the inspiration for a second and much more exuberant and aggressive version of the same, which was written by Samuel Huntington, a political scientist at Harvard, (and variously involved with the US policy establishment since the era of the Vietnam War). It might be stated that whereas Lewis confined his thesis to the historical relations between the two civilizations he called 'Islamic' and 'Judaeo-Christian', Huntington's reach was far wider and more ambitious, to the extent of covering the entire world. To summarize, Huntington's argument was built around two ideas: first, that since the end of the Cold War 'the iron curtain' of ideology had been replaced by a velvet curtain of culture, and second, that the velvet curtain had been drawn across 'the bloody borders of Islam' (Huntington 1993, 22). However, Huntington was not alone. Régis Debray, for instance, saw the new era as sharply defined by a 'Green Peril' -- the color green clearly standing for Islam -- that was far more dangerous than the 'red scares of yesterday because it lacks rational self-restraint' (Debray 1990, 44-45).

My opinion is that it is Bernard Lewis, who has provided the more durable version of this approach (Sen 2001, 46). He writes of the Islamic civilization, 'of the religious culture of Islam', as if it were an unchanging doctrine in which Muslims are said to take refuge in times of crises (Lewis 1990, 5).

Lewis elaborated his notion of the doctrinal core of Islam in a book that 'was already in page proofs' by the time 9-11 occurred, but was published soon after; it was provocatively titled *What went wrong?* Paraphrasing Hegel's old claim that freedom is the distinctive attribute of Western civilization (Gilroy 2003, 15), Lewis wrote: 'To a Western observer, schooled in the practice and theory of Western freedom, it is precisely the lack of freedom, that underlies so many of the troubles of the Muslim world'. To this, he added the absence of secularism as the second explanation for the yawning gap between contemporary Islam and modernity (Lewis 2002, 103, 158-159).

One of the main consequences of this approach is that 'religion' swallows up and denies the political discourse of Islamism (Sen 2001, 78) . Had this discourse not developed so powerfully, it would not be easy to understand a statement such as: 'Democracy lags in the *Muslim* world'(Freedom House study of political systems in the non-Western world concludes with this). As if inspired by Bernard Lewis's thought, Stephen Schwartz, director of the Islam and Democracy Project, claims that the roots of terrorism really lie in a sectarian branch of Islam, the Wahabis.

The same sort of approach permeates problematic affirmations such as 'Islam clashes with the basic features of democracy because Islam itself is a special type of religion that

presents itself as a totality or complete way of life, not separable into the components to which we are accustomed in modern Western thoughts...Religion by definition has a dogmatic core and it is therefore on tense terms with Democracy, which encourages ceaseless debates and self-questioning. Democracy promotes secularism' (Tamimi 1993, 27-29).

There is little doubt that such a reading of Islam is slightly parochial, a-historical (or de-historicized), that is to say, very culturalist and orientalist. In other words, although it advocates that the discrepancy between Democracy (which is paradoxically turned into a theological corpus) and Islam consists of the fact that the first 'fears and resists the absolutism of the Pure, the Grand Ideology' (ibid., 30), it is itself a very diagnostic analysis. Furthermore, the observation that Islam is a 'special' religion, smacks a bit of 'essentialism'. Paraphrasing the late Edward Said, this 'special' vision of Islam is like a stable and undisturbed thing, like a room full of furniture in the back of your house (Said 2000, 581).

I have already argued (in the second chapter of this dissertation) that the focus of my analysis is not religion, but *religiosity*. I have also endorsed my choice by demonstrating that the examination of a theological corpus is somewhat unproductive for understanding the discourses and practices of its believers: in my specific case, to comprehend those among them, who, speak through the vocabulary of religion to discourse their political projects and future (Asad 1993, 67; Mamdani 2004,12; Roy 2004, 46). If the difference between Islam and Democracy is asserted by the fact that the latter promotes a ceaseless debate, while the first is highly dogmatic, Then, what about the innumerable interpretations of the *Qur'an*, the endless debates about the meaning and the values of the *hadiths*, and the existence of the multiple arguments and debates regarding the *fiqh*? The same could be said of the possible interpretations and practice of jihad, the function of Sharia inside the state, and the possible configurations of an Islamic state. Thus, an argument that advances the incompatibility between Islam and Democracy might suffer from several stereotypes, dogmatic assertions, and culturalist- orientalist echoes (Varisco 2005, 90).

Therefore, in order to engage in a less 'essentialized' analysis of the concept of Democracy in Islam, I would begin by quoting Abu-Ala-Mawdudi, who claims that 'the Islamic government is a divine *democratic* government because the Muslims have been given a limited popular sovereignty under the sovereignty of God', or alternatively, 'a theocratic democratic state run by popular vice-regency' (Al-Hakim 1993, 79).

I would then reiterate here, the view expressed by Mamdani, who claims that the

difference among the different tendencies of Islamism resides in the different status of *sharia* and then *democracy* in the state (Mamdani 2004, 46). Put another way, we are compelled to analyze the concept of Democracy **in** Islam (rather than Democracy **and** Islam as two incompatible topics), in a more detailed and specific way, by setting it within a proper context.

As Muhammad Al-Awa aptly observes, neither in the *Qur'an* nor in the *Sunnah* does Islam prescribe a specific system of government. Nevertheless, it clearly defines the values and the guidelines the *ummah* should adhere to and that the rulers should abide by. In addition to other nomenclatures - he continues- these values may be referred to as 'general rules' or 'comprehensive issues' (Al- Awa 1993, 70).

The basis for Islamic governance and legislation is the *Qur'an* and the Sunna elaborated by the *fiqh*. To a certain extent, it might be said that the *Qur'an* and the *Sunna* act as the political constitution of Islam. The Qur'an and the Sunnah are held by Muslims to have been revealed by God, therefore there is no space for alteration. The only possibility lies in re-interpretation, *ijtihad*, which is not divinely inspired.

The upshot of this is a belief that political sovereignty in a state is prerogative of God, and not of the Human, and herein lies the debate and conflict within Islamism and indeed between the Islamists. A modern Islamist sustains that, if in the Islamic state, sovereignty is invested in the Almighty God, the authority to run the affairs of the State is delegated to the people. According to his reasoning, Islamic government takes the form of a republic. The term 'Islamic' confers the ideological basis for the state (Al-Akim 1993, 78).

Essentially, the belief is that the state should be governed by God's revelation in the *Qur'an* and the *hadith*, and this would reject the idea that the Human is an autonomous being who may initiate laws. However, there we surely enter the area of 'semantics' and signifying practices, since inevitably the 'alleged' Islamic state¹⁸ and Islamic government have to, and surely *do*, initiate laws, although this is usually presented as an 'extended' interpretation of 'divine' legislation. The human is (theoretically) merely entrusted with the '*administration*' of divinely instituted legislation. In this sense, he is the 'representative' of God on earth. Mawdudi elaborated very precisely and compellingly the concept and the meaning of Caliphate. He suggested that Khilafa means representation. The Human, according to Islam is his vice-regent and the authority of the Khilafa is bestowed on the

¹⁸Here I use the adjective 'alleged' for two sets of reasons. Firstly, I am reporting the Islamists' opinion, that there is no current state in the world which can be called Islamic. Thus, there is the need for a political change (see chapter 4 and 5 for more details). Secondly, I myself agree with them and find it difficult to name a proper example of an Islamic state (which countries like Iran or Saudi Arabia cannot exhaustively represent).

whole of any community that is ready to fulfill the conditions of representation (Mawdudi 1980, 9-10). Siddiqui argued that 'The Islamic state was the movement and the person of Khilafa was the centre of allegiance' (Siddiqui 1983, 185).

However, sovereignty is presented as God's unique prerogative and to propose human sovereignty is to usurp a divine attribute. Mawdudi states explicitly -- by quoting the Sura An-Nisa (4:48) -- that 'anyone who claims the authority or power independent of or in rebellion against God, commits *shirk*' (Mawdudi 1984, 86).

Looking closely at the British context, groups as the MCB have been heavily influenced by figures such as Qutb and Mawdudi, while the MAB was directly influenced by Al-Banna and Qutb. However, they have all 'revised' and 'contextualized' the teachings and the conceptualization of democracy, according to political and discursive practice. Therefore, it is important and valuable for understanding the subject, to closely investigate these thinkers in their historical context, before having them wear the ideological cloak of the anti-democrat

The Iqwan-Al-Muslimiina (the Muslim Brotherhood) was founded in Ismaylia, Egypt in 1927 by Assan-Al-Banna, a teacher. At the time, Ismaylia was dominated by the British Suez Canal Company and -- as Al Banna pictured it -- the Europeans (with their corrupting traits, which included 'semi-naked women, imported liquors and vices') worked assiduously (Al Banna 1996, 22). While Al Banna was badly affected by the Westernization of Ismaylia, his successor Sayid Qutb had a much more direct encounter when he spent two years in the USA from 1948 onwards. His anti-Western hostility -- if phrasing his aversion in those terms makes any sense -- was mainly based on the racism he encountered in America; he had quite dark skin. He was also extremely angered by the support for Zionism and the American delight at the execution of Al Banna (Esposito 1983, 69).

Qutb was a noted and knowledgeable Qur'anic exegete. As mentioned earlier, Qutb took some of Mawdudi's thoughts to a more radical conclusion and also supplied a radical new addition to Al Banna's teachings. The core of his argument was that Islam is a totally new revolutionary movement, which has come to inherit the earth in order to remove all the false ideologies, false beliefs and false social systems, and it must do so using all the means at its disposal, including war. So, jihad is 'a movement to wipe out tyranny and to introduce true freedom to mankind'. In this context, Islam is intended as a means to liberate human beings from enslavement by other human beings and, apart from this, it must undermine all other systems- such as Materialism, Communism, Hinduism, Christianity. Indeed, as Qutb put it, Islam does not force people to accept its beliefs, but it

wants to provide a free environment in which they will have the choice to believe' (Qutb 1990, 91-94). As mentioned above, there is more than a just a passing resemblance to the dialectics of Marxism and Leninism; it might also be argued that Qutb's own life experience and historical and geographical settings and contingencies had a relevant influence on his thought. This is a further consideration which bolsters my argument that Islamism is the product of a complex, dynamic, fluid discourse of an intellectual and political encounter at a specific historical conjunction. Islamism cannot be analyzed as an appendix to the theological corpus of Islam, unless the analysis aims to endorse the essentialist and *a-priori* positions and, in so doing de-politicizes of the Islamist actors.

This is the reason why, for instance, British Islamist groups such as the MPGB claimed that, although they wish for and support the institution of an Islamic state, they consider it an impossible option in Great Britain, where they live and operate as an Islamist party (Muslim Parliament of Great Britain 1992, 7). Similarly, the Islamic society of Britain does not list among its objectives, the establishment of an Islamic state in Britain. The Mawdudist Young Muslims UK states, under the heading of 'tadarruj' (gradualness): 'the Sunnah necessitates hard work and struggle *before power is given*'. The YMUK defines itself as being 'here to create and maintain in Britain a society where the people rule by Islam' (YMUK, www.idiscover.co.uk). In this, they echo Mawdudi, when he stresses that the difference between a Western Democracy and an Islamic Democracy lies in the fact that 'the latter is based on the concept of *popular* sovereignty, while the former is based on the concept of popular *Khilafa*' (Mawdudi 1980, 10).

As highlighted earlier, the concept of Khilafa stands for representation; in other words, *human vice-regency*. As the Muslim Brotherhood specifies, 'the ruler is a mere guardian, and the Ummah cannot delegate anyone it chooses to rule for it, except in matters that the Sharia has permitted' (Muslim Brotherhood 1994, 24).

By those wanting to draw comparisons, the nature of the caliphate has been described as 'Presidential'; to some degrees it follows the American model, rather than the British system of parliamentary rule where the Premier is simply the leader of the largest group of MPs and the Crown in Parliament is effectively sovereign. The caliphate system makes the Amir the *de facto* sovereign in terms of veto (Mawdudi 1980, 10). An example of this was the fact that Khomeini could freely direct the course of the state without any reference to his *Majlis*. However, practices and interpretations directly imply one another, so that there is no practice without the correlative constitution of a field of interpretation, nor any interpretation that does not presuppose and constitute a practice; the same holds for

intervention (or the interference) and the role of the *political* practice and *discourse* in place and time.

Al-Akim, for instance, argues that the understanding of *Shura* in the West has mostly been misled, and it is also misleading. The meaning of 'shura' has been conceived as 'consultation' whereas it is a legislative process whereby the executive authority is obliged to accept the decisions of the legislative authority. In his view, shura is an integral and constitutive process in the function of the Islamic state since it is the only collective legal way through which the ummah could enact and legislate laws or decisions related to the pursuance of its 'national interests'. It constitutes the backbone of the Islamist system. It is interesting to note the following. First, that the author speaks of 'national interests', which a *depoliticized* culturalist-orientalist representation of Islamism would consider as a blatant contradiction, since the Ummah should not be confined by any national borders or have any national (read political) interests. Second, that on this basis, the Caliph would be subject to the Majlis, which is more in conformity with the British parliamentary system. As Al-Akim describes it, 'the Islamic government is a mixture of presidential and parliamentary systems'; he also notes that another distinguishing feature of the Islamic system is 'pluralism', and the only condition for non-Islamic parties is to adhere to the state constitution (Al Akim 1993, 78-81).

The concept of pluralism -- as Tamimi aptly puts it -- is not an innovation among Islamists. Tahtawi, for instance, who is considered to be the father of 'modern Islamist thinking', compared political pluralism to forms of ideological and jurisprudential pluralism that have existed in the Islamic experience. Muhammad Abduh, who was a proponent of parliamentary democracy, defended pluralism and opposed the view that it would undermine the unity of the Ummah (Tamimi 1997, 3).

The brief but significant historical overview presented by Tamimi would support the argument that 'forward looking' Islamist thinkers have very often looked within the Islamic tradition for sources of innovation, renewal and change, by coming to terms with, and making sense of, a 'tradition' (ibid., 16). They looked at doctrine and history, not just for continuity, but also for reforms. This consideration would also help Tamimi and Ghannouci's argument that the rejection of Democracy by some Islamists is based on a 'faulty' understanding of the nature and the purpose of divine law and divine government. As Ghannouci underlines, *Hukm-u-ullah* is a revolution in the sense that it limits a governor's powers. *Hukm-u-ullah* does not mean that 'God comes down and governs humans', but means the 'sovereignty of law' -- which Ghannouci notes -- 'is a fundamental

feature of the modern state, the state of law and order' (Ghannouci 1993, 53-54).

When it comes to the qualifications for a Caliph and or a member of the Majlis, Islamists will look at Sharia, as well. As Mawdudi elaborated on this, the usual refrain for the Amir is that he must be 'sane, male and a Muslim'. And Mawdudi seems to imply much the same for the members of the Majlis; the exclusion of women and religious minorities from ruling the 'Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan' was a feature of the Taliban governance. However, this specific procedure cannot be taken as being synonymous with 'Islamist practice of governance'.¹⁹ It might also be noted that under the Ottomans, the various confessions were organized in semi-autonomous *millats* and not necessarily on a geographic basis. Furthermore, there are sufficient historical traditions of Jewish or Christian Grand Viziers for creative *ijtihad* to resolve this issue. In the past as well, as McRoy notices, Egypt and Syria have had Christian Prime Ministers, and Jews have held ministerial posts in the Iraqi and Moroccan governments (McRoy 2006, 115-116). One objection to this consideration -- one that my interviewees would raise -- is that these above-mentioned historical experiences have nothing to do with an Islamic state and they 'cannot be considered as examples of a Khilafah' (interview with Taji Mustafa). Without taking sides with any of the political actors featured in this research, I would contribute to the debate by simply quoting a very interesting statement once pronounced by Makrqaam Ubeid, the Egyptian Christian leader of the Wafd Party: 'My homeland is Islam, my religion is Christianity' (Burgat 2005, 35). It is quite challenging to attempt an explanation of such a claim, where the two religions, Islam and Christianity, co-exist according to different practices of *religiosity*, inhabited by the same subject, acting as a *believer* and as a *political actor*. Islam is advocated as a territorial and cultural entity, a cluster of traditions, habits, political and historical paradigms; it is certainly geographical and *imaginative*. On the other hand, Christianity is claimed as a corpus of religious beliefs, which is inevitably intertwined with the *Islamic homeland* and with the feelings of belonging to such an entity.

This last example is just a way of suggesting that an 'alleged' religion can function and be discoursed according to a complex variety of discourses, practices and discursive practices of meaning. It can 'inhabit' and embody different *practices*, depending on the *practitioners*: the human agents. In other words, it is very difficult to determine the 'legal

¹⁹ As Tamimi points out, in the Sudanese and Iranian cases, there were seats reserved for the Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian minorities. However, what emerges clearly, is the impossibility that a woman or a non-Muslim could be the ruler of the *Khalifa* and this seems to be a majority opinion. Tamimi also adds that there are moves such as a modern 'Sudanese *ijtihad*, which grants Christian Majority provinces in Sudan the right to opt for a legal system other than Sharia in order to organize their affairs' (Tamimi, www.ii-pt.com/web/papers/humanrights.htm).

boundaries', and thus the practical examples of an Islamic state. This becomes more complicated when it is overlooked that even as the 'political' *discourse* (Islamism) interacts, 'dialogues' and comes to terms with other political discourses, practices and *practitioners* of meanings: the *agency* still resides with the human (and not with the Divine), within several, different relations of power. In this way, the outcome of the process (the establishment of an Islamic state) can never be determined *a priori*, as a toy provided with its instructions, or a colonial government or state imposed from above (Rodinson 1979, 132). This consideration also leads me to stress the fact that the disputes and debates on the incompatibility between 'Islam' and 'Democracy' are often very ideological, and mostly informed by a culturalist-orientalist framework of analysis (Marranci 2006, 80) which this dissertation considers to be politically disempowering and flawed.

Having said that, the author's intention is not to endorse a shallow dismissal of the whole debate, but just to warn against the use of too many categories, sweeping statements, and stereotypes that stress an inherent anti-democratic nature of *Islam*.

As Ghannouci brilliantly puts it, an Islamic state can never mean that 'God comes down to rule'. The decisions and deliberations are still, and they definitely have to be, 'man-made' and -- from my humble point of view -- man-inspired; this implies the need for a detailed and historical analysis of both parts, supporters and detractors of the 'Islamic state' (Ghannouci 1993, 45).

On the other hand, divisions and 'internal jihad struggles' go back to the early days of Islam (Tamimi 1993, 89-90). The death of Muhammad produced a major political and 'constitutional' struggle that is still present (this being the Sunni-Shi'ia divide).²⁰ As

²⁰ When Abu Bakr became Caliph by popular acclamation, the 'political tool' and mechanism used was the 'public election' (Mawdudi 1982, 19). Conversely, according to the Shi'ia position, the prophet's succession should have gone to his son-in-law Ali (who eventually became the fourth Caliph). This also implies that his descendants have the unique right to lead the Ummah. Thus, there is a major point of divergence with the Sunnis in relation to the question of legitimate government. The Shi'ia rejected the first three Caliphs specifically because they questioned the Caliphs' legitimacy as rulers, rather than on account of any major 'theological' difference. With the occultation of the Twelfth Imam, a major constitutional crisis emerged in Shi'ism. From 'late Safavid (17th to 18th century) some *mujtahids* claimed that they had more right to rule than did the impious, wine bibbling Shas' (Keddie 1981, 19). This had to come to an end -- arguably -- when following the Iranian revolution, Khomeini established the *Vilayat-i-Faqih*, the 'Guardianship of the Jurist'. The theory is that the *ulema* ruled, according to *fiqh*, as a 'trust' until the return of the Twelfth Imam. Their Islamic Knowledge and *Taqwa* permits this.

The negative implication of both Sunni and Shia theories of government -- as Tamimi highlights -- is that these rulers not fulfilling those qualities -- such as Atatürk-type secularists or Saudi-like western puppets -- are disqualified. However, the relevant point to consider here is that the historical practice of the Islamic movements, which wanted to 'reinstiate the Islamic way of life', is that they formed and defined their political in resistance against the 'westernization campaigns aimed at undermining Islamic cultures and values'. (Ghannouci 1993, 79). Once again, apart from 'doctrinal' and 'theological' explanations, there are historical, political events (read the experience of colonialism) and power relations that need to be taken into account in order to understand the Islamists' thought, (in conjunction with the preoccupation of taking the political power and the state, for some of them).

Ghannouci explains, the constitutional arrangement that Islamists would endorse, mirrors and includes the views of both Shi'ite Islamists and Sunnis. In this respect, Ghannouci himself advocates the concept of power-sharing with non-Islamists where a Khalifa is not possible for some reason. He also stresses the fact that any power-sharing be is seen as a transitional step to a full Islamic state (Ghannouci 1993, 57).

The considerations and perspectives voiced by the different Islamist thinkers featured here have shown that there is no any 'ontological' incompatibility between 'Islam' and 'Democracy'. As strongly stated by some of them, democracy is intended as a means to achieve an end; the most appropriate mechanism through which the Sharia can be applied.

When the detractors of the so-called Islamic state (within the Democracy and Islam debate), quote examples of 'Islamic tyrannical government' (Roy 2004, 35) in order to dismiss the possibility that there could be something like an Islamic *democratic* state, they are forgetful of the fact that 'those extreme forms of oppressions and worst types of tyranny in history', were the result of the 'interpretation' of religion so as to satisfy and meet these specific political needs or ambitions of the 'oppressors' (Al Awa 1992, 66). In this case, the allegedly 'religious' motivations behind such tyrannical oppressions are just 'fictions' created in order to justify the reasoning about the incompatibility between Islam and Democracy.

Here, it would also be very useful to consider that the excess of the state, which is latent in the place the state occupies in the West, is totalitarianism. It is not surprising that the contemporary Western thought on the birth of the state should also be a reflection on, and against, totalitarianism. Nonetheless, this specific aspect never led anyone to claim that in the 'Western' concept of the state, there are some features which are 'ontologically' undemocratic.

As one Islamist thinker brilliantly pointed out, 'realism and flexibility' are among the most important features of Islamic ideology and, as a matter of fact, the exercise of 'political' *ijtihad* for the purpose of organizing and administering the state has never ceased through history (Al-Awa 1993, 68-70). As Al-Akim has declared, democracy is a tool and a means to achieve an end, which should be the community well-being. My argument is that it might be slightly misleading to elevate Democracy to a value in itself, or to a Universal Truth. To certain extent, it might be said that some argumentations turn Democracy into a *religion* or a *theological corpus*. And yet, it does not constitute a valid counter-argument to this proposition to say that Islam is a *religion* and a *theological corpus*. Therefore -- as the

reasoning goes -- I am implicitly denying that there is any space for religion in politics and within a democratic system.

My response to this observation is that we are not dealing with 'Islam'²¹ here, but with 'Islamism'. That implies, we are speaking of a 'political' discourse, of political practices, interpretations and of 'power-struggle', which opens up a field of different possible responses, reactions, inventions within that relationship of power. It is not relevant for the analysis to underline that some subjects within that relationship of power speak the vocabulary of religion (Islam) to voice their political identity and to re-present themselves as subjects and agents (Islamism and Islamists); that Islam and Islamism share the same 'lexeme', therefore there is a direct and *archeological* relation between them. The *genealogy* of Islamism is, primarily, within the Islamists' imaginings.

In other words, my point is that there is no need to ossify the debate around 'Democracy and Islam' to the extent of adopting a very 'ideological or foundational' approach by treating the 'practices' of Democracy as a 'Theological' corpus, which 'allegedly' cannot be altered.

To conclude, the reflections conveyed here have endorsed the view that an Islamic democratic state is possible, thinkable and implement-able, by using Democracy as a tool, which could be used according to *Islamic* guidelines. Beyond this, there are the human agencies and practices to take into consideration; there are the political practices and discourses to evaluate, and eventually, to contest and challenge. By failing to recognize this dynamic, we completely refuse to address the analysis and our possible analytical mistakes. Even worse, taking such a view has some uncomfortable similarities with George Bush's propaganda when he was claiming to wage 'endless wars' to spread 'Democracy', echoing the calls made by 'Islamic terrorists' and 'enemies of the West' to spread 'Islam'.

Da'wah

Finally, I ought to say something about the concept and the practice of *da'wah*, which is strictly linked to the concept and practices of jihad. Firestone observes that 'peaceful means of striving for religion' include *jihad-al-lisan* or 'striving with the tongue', *jihad-al-*

²¹ In relation to this point, an interesting argument is offered by Ayubi (1991; 1995, 231) on the limits of the political claims of Islam in the classical traditions.

da'wah or 'striving by propagating the faith' and *jihad-al-tarbiya* or 'striving through education' (Firestone 1996, 109).

The concept of *jihad-al-da'wah* is especially important in terms of the conduct of jihad, since in the offensive jihad the call to conversion to Islam is normally supposed to precede the act of war. For example, Taqiuddin-an-Nabahani, founder of Hizbut-at-Tahrir declared that fighting the enemy would not become lawful until the 'call to Islam has been delivered to the people' (Taqiuddin 1998, 144). In his collection of the sayings of Imam Ali, *Nahjul Balagha* reports that when Ali was asked about the division and meanings of jihad, he replied that jihad is divided into four branches and *da'wah* (mission), and by extension political lobbying and activism, constitutes one of its interpretations (*Nahjul Balagha* 30).

Bringing the concept into the contemporary age and to the British context in particular, MPAC claims that its lobbying activities constitute *jihad*. For instance, in June 2003 they lobbied the British Broadcasting Corporation about a two-part programme in a series called *Spooks* that concerned MI5 fighting an extremist British Mosque. The MPAC felt that the programme was a smear against Islam and British Muslims and their final victorious words were 'our job is to fight the Jihad', which clearly meant a political lobbying activity, without any use of violence (MPAC 2003).

In Britain, if a main ideologue of *da'wah* has to be identified, this would be the Mawdudist Khurram Murad. Previously deputy leader of the Pakistani *Jama'at-al-Islamiyya*, he moved to Britain to become Director of the Islamic Foundation. In the words of Larry Poston, 'what Hasan-al-Banna did for Egypt and Mawdudi did for the subcontinent, Khurram Murad did for the West' (Poston 1992, 82). And according to the YMUK president Zahoor Qureish, he 'formulated a strategy and gave a vision for Muslims living in the West and more specifically, in the UK' (Qureish 1997, 21).

The form of 'Islamism' proposed by Murad, which some authors persist in calling 'Islam',²² is influenced by the thought of Abu-Ala-Mawdudi and *Jama'at-al-Islami* to the extent that the Islamic Foundation has not merely acted as a pro-Jamat thinktank, but it has also played a major role in effecting the contextualization of Mawdudism in Britain.

Among these acknowledgements, there is the assertion made by a member of the Islamic Foundation, Ataullah Siddiqui, who prizes the organization for 'representing an *Islam*

²² Here, I am referring in particular to Jenny Taylor's 'An Islamic vision for Britain?' that was published in *Faith and Power: Christianity and Islam in 'Secular' Britain* (edited by Lesslie Newbigin, Lamin Sanneh, and Jenny Taylor, London: SPCK, 1998, p109). The author explores the role and the clear Mawdudian stamp on Murad's thought, but she never acknowledges the fact that Mawdudi was indeed one of the leading figures of contemporary 'Islamist' thought; instead, she persists in speaking of 'Islam' as a cluster of 'religious' practices in 'secular' Britain.

untainted by cultural accretion' (Siddiqui 2005). Interestingly enough, this statement gives further substance to my argument that Islam and Islamism 'in vitro' have been crafted mostly by the British Islamists, despite their denial of it.

Although this issue will be fully analyzed in chapters four and five of the present thesis, it seems reasonable to introduce the topic here by offering some initial considerations in light of Ataulloh Siddiqui's claim.

'An Islam untainted by cultural accretion' clearly means an Islam, whose representation is conceived as unchangeable and dehistoricized: essentialised and stereotyped. 'Islam', which is always voiced and experienced as an 'all-encompassing system of life', thus becomes deprived of its attributes: it is socially, politically, culturally 'de-contextualized' (Foucault 1972, 95-96). This also implies that such dehistoricized -- and therefore 'a-historical' -- Islam stands, if not as 'virtual', then as a totally 'novel product'; an offspring rather than a legacy, within the Islamists' imaginings (Marranci 2008, 57).

My argument is that this is mostly due to the fact that the passage to the West, and specifically to Britain, has accelerated and favored a radical change in the nature of 'religiosity', which allows, and then requires, the invention of a 'novel Islam', to the extent of legitimately speaking of 'British Islam' and 'British Islamism'.

This element becomes more clear when such 'Islam' is set specifically into action: 'worn', inhabited, discoursed as a political discourse, ready to enter the *political* 'space', to be 'visible', and therefore, to take part in the *political* 'struggle' -- it is Islamism. By so doing, it plays a very active political role in the 'western' context, in terms of 'political' agency, and in terms of a process of substantial transformation from a supposedly original form (ibid., 36).

In this context, it appears slightly myopic to assert the Foundation's main aims as: 'to create an Islam, which is suited to the environment of the West, without losing the *fundamentals* of faith' (Geavis 1996, 204). Similarly, it is also forgetful of the fact that in the 'Western environment', such 'Islamic faith' has to be read as 'Islamism', with a very clear 'political' agenda, as the concept of da'wah itself demonstrates. This is not exhaustive and it could be misleading (in relation to the Foundation's activities and Murad's ceaseless efforts) to speak of a 'faith', which becomes 'suited' to the Western environment. Such phrasing also leads to a double denial: the political aspects of the 'Faith' (Islamism and not Islam) and its 'active role' in the interaction with the 'West' (which is more than a matter of a merely adaptive process).

Had it not been this way, it would be rather difficult to understand and appreciate Murad's

long-term commitment to organizing the very training measures for Muslim youth that his writing advocated. In 1982 Murad formed, under his own leadership, a steering committee of 10 to 15 young people, with the idea of training the youth. The YMUK was the practical realization of this vision: 'thus in 1982 the idea of launching the vehicle to carry out this mission, the YMUK, was produced' (Qureshi 1997, 21). Tariq Ramadan sees YMUK as a major force combating the ghetto mentality, and one that does it along the lines clearly expressed by Murad in terms of 'political and financial independence from foreign states' (Ramadan 1998, 253). Also, Murad showed his concern in relation to the issue of Muslim socio-political powerlessness in the West, which he rated as 'zero' (Murad 1981, 7). As stated above, it is very difficult and mystifying to analyze these issues if we neglect their 'political' discursive practice. As a further example of such political drive, it is perhaps interesting to remember a powerful call once voiced by Murad. He declared that Muslims in Britain have only three possible futures: first, being assimilated and absorbed in a secular culture, with just a 'niche where you can practice your private customs and festivals'; second, to face genocide or extermination, like the Muslims in Spain and Bosnia and the Jews in Germany; third, to bring Islam to the West and the West to Islam (Islamic Society of Britain 1995, 8-9).

Had not Murad's claims been inherently political, there would not be such a hyperbolic phrasing to represent the threat of a domination (within that relationship of power); he would not be calling for decisive 'action' to subvert the situation: 'to bring Islam to the West and the West to Islam'. This third alternative is offered as a remedy against the two negative perspectives outlined before: being unwilling to act ('being passive'), and therefore 'becoming assimilated', or worse -- *in a crescendo* -- becoming unable to act ('becoming a victim') 'by facing genocide and extermination'. My 'political' reading stands as a possible interpretation that reflects upon the fact that any act performed in a perspective of power is indeed a political act. It finds its confirmation and representation in Murad's words, which read that 'Da'wah and Tabligh are political' (Murad 1981, 36).

Might I add again, the denial of this political is in turn political and a product of a culturalist-orientalist framework of analysis.

To conclude, the considerations offered in this chapter in relation to the concepts of jihad, democracy and da'wah are the product of the author's own reading and perusal of the written texts. In the next two chapters, these reflections will be expanded, questioned, *inhabited*, displaced, and unsettled by entering the 'discourse' and the practice, by sharing the 'experience' with the actors themselves: the British Islamists.

CHAPTER IV

The Genealogy of British Islamism

This chapter looks at the history of Islamism in the UK, through a series of relevant historical events that witnessed the emergence of a British Islamist discourse and practice -- from the Rushdie affair to the 7-7 bombings -- over a period of nearly 20 years.

My purpose is to review and critique the culturalist and orientalist analysis and representation of these events, by showing how this approach's constant denial of any political aspirations in relation to the Islamists, and its reductive examination of their claims in terms of 'racial' or 'religious' community issues, renders them non-political, to the extreme of condemning their quests and actions as 'fundamentalist' and a threat to national security.

My analysis demonstrates, instead, how those aspirations are inherently political and essential to the Islamist discourse and practice; how they are not the product of any 'fundamentalist' or terrorist plot, and how their dismissal from the dominant discourse is itself an act of political ostracization (Varisco 2005, 56), which could, possibly, have had some responsibility for endangering the very same national security.

The Rushdie Affair

The publication of Salman Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses* in 1988 is commonly considered as a defining moment for British Muslim identity and is seen as less as a sign of the emergence of an Islamist identity in Britain (Keppel 1997, 123; McRoy 2006, 56).

Muslims were only seen as part of a general 'Asian' community (Metcalf 1996, 67), despite the fact that Muslims were, and they still are, 'racially' diverse (Trepagnier 2006, 67); likewise their activism was perceived as being limited to 'race' issue. The other fact is that the academic celebration of 'difference' has led to the creation of separate and bounded 'ethnic bubbles' (Asad 1993, 24; Bhaba 1989, 78; Gates 1992, 67; Gilroy 1987, 13) in which the emphasis has been on 'culture' as the primary source of collective identification (Grillo 2003, 171). The central symbol of this 'multi-culturalist rainbow' (McGhee 2005; Modood 1998, 75) vision is the 'community', in which individual subjectivity blends with

collective ideals of culture, ethnicity and belonging (Damasio 2000, 44). Consequently, according to this vision, there is very little room for contact and change and less for conflict and confusion. The image is that of homogenous, bounded, autonomous groups (Benson 1996, 56).

This section aims to explore and understand which factors -- in concomitance with the Rushdie affair -- have concurred in changing the category of representation for the term 'British Asian': from the 'essentialization' of their ethnos to the one of their religion (Varisco 2005,49). This section also attempts to explore the possibility that in the aftermath of *The Satanic Verses* affair the black/white division has been replaced with one of the British/Muslims, with Muslims being placed as the new social pariahs, and increasingly, as the new objects of 'desire' for academic research (Grillo 2003,170). Alongside this, Islam has been increasingly positioned at the centre of the political and academic discourse as Public Enemy Number One: the enemy within.

In this context, I argue that this focus on religion (Islam), shares with its precursors the evocation of fixed boundaries and absolute identities in which religion, ethnicity and culture are naturalised and *essentialised* (Marranci 2008, 6) to the point of becoming, in effect, synonymous with race (Gilroy 1992, 13). Muslims have then, ironically, become the 'new black'. This section examines such an attitude as the result of a disempowering culturalist-orientalist approach (El Zein 1977,228), that primarily implies the denial of any political aspiration in relation to Islamists, and confines them to Islamic issues. Ultimately, this means the ostracization of Islamist parties from the public space and the political arena (Asad 2006, 12; McGhee 2005, 11).

Having said that, the topic of *The Satanic Verses* affair still remains very complex and difficult to unravel, considering that Rushdie himself was of non-white British origin, an Indian, a successful writer, and famous for his anti-racist statements and outspoken criticism of Margaret Thatcher's policies. He was someone about whom middle-class Indians and Pakistanis could feel proud, a symbol of success; someone who had managed to overcome British society's racial prejudice.

Rushdie has often spoken of the way he was mocked by fellow pupils for not being able to eat the traditional breakfast kippers without choking on the bones. Suddenly, in England he discovered he was Indian, he was later to recall. His identity was thus formed in reaction to the 'disparaging eye' of the Other, within a cultural system of differences and reciprocal perceptions. This complex construction of identity in the postcolonial and post-modern world of immigration constituted the *lietmotiv* of *The Satanic Verses* (Keppel 1997, 135). It

reflects an image of the world where legacy and tradition blend into a universe of migrations, electronic communications and satellite transmissions (Appadurai 1996, 57). In this framework, *The Satanic Verses* used the derogatory term *Mahound* for Muhammad, and reversed the articles of faith in by employing the term Jahilia for the holy city of Mecca, and the name of the wives of the prophet for the prostitutes in the city. What emerged, metaphorically speaking, from *The Satanic Verses*, was mainly a new individual: a kind of mutant, the product of a cocktail of cultural influences. The hybrid migrant characters in *The Satanic Verses* are a clear embodiment of this view (Marranci 2008, 56). However, for those who felt and presented themselves as the defenders of the Islamic community's identity, the world presented in Rushdie's novel meant the dissolution of the Muslim community through the adulteration of its faith (Ruthven 1991, 67). The melting pot vision presented by Rushdie was thus perceived and stigmatized as a new form of Islamic adulteration akin to the earlier political crises stretching back to the 19th century, against which the internal hegira of the various Deobandi, Tablighi-Jamaat-at-Islami movements had formed in imperial India (Appignanesi and Maitland 1989, 122; Marranci 2008, 59).

In a way, it could be said that Rushdie work was bound to upset the religious leaders who had managed to establish 'their control over the populations of Muslim origin in Britain' (Sardar and Davies 1990, 45). Likewise, it could also be argued that by undermining the very basis of an Islamic community identity, it threatened their cultural, social and political domination of their flock (ibid.,46).

However, the significance of the affair cannot be fully grasped if the events are not contextualised properly. At the time of the publication of *The Satanic verses*, in September 1988, the British Muslim community (McRoy 2006, 57) was at a turning point. Pressure groups had been set up to lobby councils in several key cities and they were capable of achieving their demands regarding 'Muslim education' and of managing a network of social services linked to the mosques. In addition, several city councillors and officials responsible for race-relations policy were themselves originally members of various mosque committees. In many towns, this form of Islamic representation also meant that a link between Muslims and British political authorities had come to dominate the political and cultural expression of the population of Muslim origins (Lewis 1994, 56). In Pierre Bourdieu's terms, the local leaders had re-created an Islamic 'religious field' (Bourdieu 1971, 23), establishing its hegemony over their followers. However, it is a fact that the services which the Islamic community leaders had access to, remained limited. The so-called employment quotas for 'non-whites' within positive discrimination policies opened

jobs for Muslims, but only within the limit set for each-ethnic racial group; therefore, these opportunities had to be shared with West Indians, Africans, Indians and others. (Modood 1990, 36). Finally, in relation to the structure of the Muslim community, there was a great divide between the older generation and the younger English-speaking Muslims. While the elders tried to perpetuate lifestyles imported from the subcontinent and to protect practices and customs, the second and third generation Muslims were constantly exposed to the 'cultural world of television, soap-operas, electronic games' (Kepel 1997, 131); this latter generation definitely knew the British society from the inside and had mastered some of its cultural codes.

It was in this context that the Rushdie affair exploded. By ridiculing the Prophet, his wives and his companions, Rushdie violated an inherited, diasporic Islamic identity and exposed it to the agents of identity re-construction in post-colonial and post-industrial Britain (Metcalf 1996, 67). On the one hand, the ranks of 'traditional' Muslim notables found themselves unable to respond to *The Satanic Verses*, which, to an extent (albeit in a hyperbolic guise), expressed the identity problems faced by young British Muslims (ibid., 70). On the other hand, the affair offered the opportunity to other better-educated political actors, to challenge the traditional notables' domination of the 'religious field' by presenting themselves as better defenders of the community. The violence and the unrest which came to characterise the affair was not only the result of the confrontation between Rushdie's supporters and opponents, but also of the rivalries between the various groups competing for the control of Islam in Britain (Sardar and Davies 1990, 151). Paradoxically, the controversy had the merit of bringing together a very wide section of the British Muslim population, reinforcing their sense of 'affiliation' and making them more receptive and more eager to have Islamic leaders. In other words, the affair pushed some British Muslims to enter the political and public arena in the name of Islam: to start using Islamic metaphors to express their political identity, by discoursing an Islamist discourse (Marranci 2008, 60). This also implied blending, surpassing and bypassing any other national, ethnic, and 'racial' element: dismissing any diasporic link in favour of a political discourse (Trepagnier 2006, 67).

The first moves were made by the Islamist movement inspired by Mawdudi's Jama'at-Al-Islami, whose secular arm was the Leicester-based Islamic foundation. The movement, strengthened by a strong international backing through Saudi Wahabism, led the campaign until mid-January 1989, when the Bradford Council of Mosques took over with its spectacular burning of the book, which captured the world's attention. The stakes were

upped when the Ayatollah Khomeini issued his famous fatwa and this also prompted a new protagonist on the scene, the Muslim Institute, later to become the Muslim Parliament. The result was the establishment of a sort of separate self-styled 'parliament', sitting in parallel to the Westminster Parliament. Besides these movements, the anti-Rushdie campaign also attracted to its front-line young English-speaking Muslim intellectuals. Ultimately, both sets of protagonists were seen by the local notables and mullahs as a threat to their hegemony (Bowen 1992, 72). The case was that the campaign against *The Satanic Verses* required leaders able to operate at a national or even international level; leaders who were well-educated and capable of conveying the feelings and frustrations of the young generations of English-speaking Muslims, born in Britain and 'radicalised' by their own experience of race and racism (Essed 1991,56). Put an other way, the affair begot a considerable shift for Islam in Britain, from a 'communalism' of management (Kepel 1997, 145) -- which perpetuated the diasporic link of the traditional Islamic order from the subcontinent -- to a radical political mobilization.

The ascendancy of the Bradford Council of Mosques started to fade when the anti-Rushdie campaign found its ultimate champion in the Ayatollah Khomeini, who, on the 14th February 1989, issued his exceptionally notorious fatwa, against 'the author of *The Satanic Verses* and all those who have published it', calling on 'courageous Muslims to execute them as soon as possible, wherever they maybe' (Marranci 2008, 58).

Again however, a single event like this is not fully understood, if it is not properly contextualised.

At the beginning of the 1989, Khomeini, who had been forced to agree to a cease-fire with Iraq the previous year, was certainly in need of reasserting his ideological hegemony as a champion of Islam, especially since his Saudi rivals had mobilised their international networks of influence in the anti-Rushdie campaign. According to Islamic law, the fatwa should have concerned only the Shi'ites who recognised the Ayatollah's spiritual authority and respected his interpretations of Islam. The relevant aspect was that, by addressing all the Muslims in the world in his judgement against Rushdie, Khomeini was proclaiming himself as the spiritual guide of all Muslims (ibid., 61). Moreover, the peculiarity was that no precedent existed for a fatwa condemning to death, in the name of Islam, an individual living outside the 'Muslim world'. The message that Khomeini was sending was clear and outspoken: the universal mission of Islam was not constrained by any national frontiers but it included people who had emigrated to Islamic enclaves in Europe (ibid., 63). Whilst the British media and non-Muslim public opinion unanimously condemned the Ayatollah's

death sentence on Rushdie, many different shades of opinion could be observed among the Islamic community in Britain (Trepagnier 2006, 78). In particular, the associations that aspired to an intermediary role between their followers and the authorities, dissociated themselves from the incitement to murder. But at the grass-roots level, many Muslims, especially the young, were deeply involved in the campaign: slogans calling for Rushdie's death and posters depicting him covered in blood were elements of the proceedings. Amid such an escalation of events and tensions, a new political actor was emerging; an organization which proclaimed support for the fatwa in order to 'bank on' (McRoy 2006, 10) the anger of the Muslim youth, and consequently set up a Muslim Parliament to counter the Westminster Assembly. The author of the project was Kalim Siddiqui, the son of an Indian landowner who fled to Pakistan in 1947, had arrived in Britain in 1954, having begun a career as a journalist, was hired by The Guardian. He had studied Islamist political thought, through Mawdudi's writings, and whilst studying for his PhD at the University of London, he was in contact with other Islamist students from the subcontinent. At the start of the anti-Rushdie campaign, Kalim Siddiqui did not organize any major activities, but he soon became a sought-after speaker on radio and television. Unlike the often self-educated leaders of the Islamic associations who spoke English with difficulty, he performed very well in debates, and by endorsing the Ayatollah's fatwa, he soon became the so-called bad guy that the British media wanted, (Varisco 2005, 38). In terms of his political strategy, Siddiqui de-legitimized the other campaign leaders by stressing their inefficiency and criticising the 'complicity' between the Saudis and the West. He expressed contempt for the Saudi lobby as embodied in the UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs and declared that the campaign had paradoxically helped Rushdie to publicize his book. Kalim Siddiqui set about bringing together all those who had supported the fatwa by convening a series of meetings all over Britain to discuss a text, which he himself had drafted, titled the *Muslim Manifesto*. His objective was to establish a 'body that can speak with authority on behalf of Muslims and operates like a parliament' (Siddiqui 1989, 9-10). According to the Manifesto, the Muslim Parliament was to 'consolidate the Muslim population in Britain into an organized community in pursuit of the goals set by Islam' (ibid., 11). In this connection, the acquisition of a British nationality through birth or naturalization 'does not absolve the Muslim from his or her duty to participate in the jihad; this participation can be active service in armed struggle abroad and/or the provision of material and moral support to those engaged in such struggle anywhere in the world' (Siddiqui 1990, 5). The inaugural session of the Muslim Parliament took place in London

on 4 January 1992. In his opening speech Kalim Siddiqui declared that 'we are a political system in every sense and meaning of that term. We want to take our place among the primary institutions of Great Britain. The inauguration of this Parliament transforms the disparaged Muslim minority in Britain into a political community with a will and purpose of its own' (ibid., 13). Siddiqui's plan of giving an embryonic organization the grandiose title of Muslim Parliament, was of course, in order to obtain maximum publicity; he also declared that Muslims would oppose and defy any public policy and legislation regarded as inimical to their interests. However, manipulation and political rhetoric aside, the initiative in itself was very rich in significance (Marranci 2008, 62). It was a clear announcement of the birth of a political entity. It was definitely inaugurating the emergence of an Islamist discourse and witnessing the performance of an Islamist practice, something which was construed and represented by a certain dominant discourse as an issue to be discussed under the rubric of the multicultural society (Marranci 2008, 64; Trepagnier 2006, 68).

The culturalist-orientalist discourse's use of the category of 'culture' was a way to avoid and deny any political implication and aspiration in relation to the Muslims (Grillo 2003, 160). A proof of this can be found in the fact that the Rushdie affair certainly had the merit of rekindling the debate among British politicians about the meaning of integration (Anwar-Baksh 2003, 143). In 1965, the Labour Home Secretary Roy Jenkins had defined integration as a combination of equal opportunities and cultural diversities 'in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance' (Webster 1990, 54). In March 1989, he declared that Muslims 'had clearly not succeeded in blending their culture' (Appignanesi and Maitland 1990, 134). A statement like this explains how the anti-Rushdie campaign, the demonstrations, the unrest and the consequent institution of the Muslim Parliament, were read and represented by a certain culturalist and orientalist approach as a negative sign of a 'multicultural' failure (Varisco 2005, 115) and not instead, as the positive symbol of the emergence of a new political discourse. It was not a matter of a lack, of an absence, of a negative event, but the positive, deliberative fulfilling of a political discourse and of its aspirations (Essed 1990, 67). Again, what the dominant discourse was reluctant to 'accept' were the political discourses and the practices of the dominated (the Islamists). They were reprimanded as inadequate, according to 'multicultural' standards, and as such, in need of being ameliorated (Grillo 2003, 161; Trepagnier 2006, 68; Varisco 2005, 66); this is finally the assumption at the base of the culturalist-orientalist approach, where the Other is not just different, but inferior, and as such, in need of being educated (Asad 1993, 168; Asad 2006, 22; Marranci 2008, 7).

The Gulf Crisis

After the Rushdie affair, there was another crisis -- although it was less a 'domestic affair' (Lewis and Schnapper 1994, 105) and more an international one -- which soon captured the attention and imagination, and dominated the efforts of British Islamists: the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Among the several British Islamist groups, this event was mainly interpreted as an 'anti-imperialist' action to reverse the artificial colonial borders imposed after the First World War by Britain and France. In this specific case, the Foreign Office Minister, Douglas Hogg, was subjected to 'continuous heckling' at the UMO February conference for 'supporting the war against Iraq whilst rejecting similar action to end the Israeli occupation of Arab lands' (Muslim News 1991, 1). At a conference in Manchester, one of the speakers condemned the 'sham and hypocrisy of Western claims to be following the international law, while neglecting issues such as Palestine and Kashmir' (McRoy 2006, 73). In this same context, Saddam Hussein was praised because he had dared to challenge the West directly, and the USA was opposed particularly, for its perceived pro-Israeli bias, and for the fact that its forces were attacking Iraq from the Muslim Holy Land (Werbner 1997, 145). An important actor on the scene was the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; anti-Saudi sentiments amongst Muslims during the Gulf crisis were very public, the reason being that 'the Saudis could invite American and European forces onto Saudi territory' (Muslim News 1991, 3). As Werbner acutely observes, a popular Muslim reaction to protests that Saddam was a tyrant, was the rhetorical question 'Which is the greater evil, America or Saddam Hussein?'. At this point, some authors observe that 'the lesser of the two evils' is a feature of Islamic law (Del Valle 1997, 6; Fallaci 2001, 40; Kepel 1997, 19; Lewis and Schnapper 1994, 67; McRoy 2006, 51). In other words, this case demonstrates how the culturalist-orientalist framework of analysis represents and explains the British Islamist discourse by specifically referring to a written text and a legal source (Marranci 2008, 28). In so doing, the Islamist actor's agency is suppressed and his/her practices and discourses are de-politicized (Asad 2006, 41; Bowen 2007, 69). The reference to the Holy text automatically eradicates and expels Islamism from the 'nets' of the relationships of Power, from the struggles, the provocations, the actions, re-actions, resistances performed by the Dominant and the Dominated at the same time (Mamdani 2005, 27).

At a national Muslim meeting in Bradford on 20 January 1991, a resolution was tabled in order to condemn the USA-led aggression against Iraq and the Saudi ruling family's decision to allow European and American forces to have access to the Islamic heartlands. There was a definite escalation in the British Islamist groups' opposition to the USA-led attack when, during an air-raid shelter operation, an allied missile caused a large number of civilian deaths through incineration. The Bradford Council of Mosques issued a heated statement entitled the 'Baghdad Massacre', accusing the British government of being responsible for the incident. The statement demanded the avenging of the deaths and it declared that 'the House of Islam' was at war with all those who attack its interests, including the 'conspirators' with the forces of Western imperialism (Muslim News 1990, 1). The Bradford Council of Mosques' reaction is interesting, since it represents the view of a leading, and broadly representative, body of British Muslims, on the nature of the war (McRoy 2006, 55). The main perception was that Muslims were under attack by the imperialist West, aided by its puppets, the 'so-called Muslim regimes' (Muslim News 1990, 2), specifically, the Saudi regime. There is an interesting parallel concerning the Saudi lack of political credibility in front of the leading British Islamist groups, in the cases of the Rushdie affair and the first Gulf war. If, in the first case, the 'Saudi family had shown a very soft approach in dealing with the event' (McRoy 2006, 57), now they were allowing the West to attack and massacre Muslims. Paradoxically, the Gulf crisis also resulted in giving a dangerous stimulus to the violent incidents against British Muslims and British Islamists, and this 'evident rise in anti-Muslim sentiments' (Siddiqui 1996, 46) has been interpreted as a clear sign of Islamophobic opinions among the British population.

The prevalent view was that British Muslims and Islamists were fanatic supporters of Saddam Hussein. Media involvement in spreading this image was paramount (Trepagnier 2006, 66; Varisco 2005, 71). As Vertovec notices, the media's vilification of Muslims during the Gulf crisis, the hostility of the general public, the very fact that the holy buildings were defiled and Muslims were physically assaulted, all, in a sense, brought the attacks on 'Muslims in Iraq home to Muslims in Britain' (Vertovec 1996, 183).

In this context, the British Government paid little attention to the Islamist groups' concerns (Marranci 2008, 51). The Rushdie crisis had already demonstrated (to the Islamists) how powerless they were, and it had also left them virtually friendless (ibid., 49).

At the Manchester conference, one speaker attacked the misrepresentation of British Muslims in the media and then bemoaned the Muslim community's lack of proper political organization and mobilization. Werbner (1997, 154) refers to the sense of frustration, the

basic political inactivity of Muslims in Britain, and the call for more activism, over not just the Gulf crisis, but also domestic concerns, such as immigration rules and discrimination against Muslim schools (ibid., 155). Likewise, he considers the claim -- 'in order to preserve our rights, identity, integrity, we need to fight, and fight hard'(ibid., 156). -- relevant, and warns against it .According to Webner, this could easily be read as a weak political statement, which gives relevance to secondary issues – pure rhetoric such as identity and integrity -- by neglecting the more important matters such as a strategy to achieve a better integration (ibid., 156-157). In other words, this is a further example of an inherently de-politicizing approach in relation to the Islamist discourse, which is, otherwise, represented under the rubric of discourses and practices of 'multicultural' integration (Trepagnier 2006, 15; Mcghee 2005, 14). It also implies a *negative* representation of the Islamist identity, constantly proposed as an absence, an entity not conforming to the standards. This also means, according to the culturalist-orientalistic approach, the representation of the 'Other' as the distant, the stranger and ultimately the inferior, which cannot be discoursed, but as the negative of a 'dominantly' accepted image (Grillo 2003, 160; Varisco 2005, 66).

The Bosnian conflict and the disintegration of Yugoslavia, analyzed in the next section, further confirm that that the dominant discourse of representation of Islamism (Varisco 2005, 78), was strongly based on the dual dynamic of a political rejection and a culturalist 'dismissal' of its political discourse and practice (El Zein 1977, 230).

The effect of Bosnia

During the Gulf crisis, there had been accusations that Muslims were disloyal to Britain in a war situation. The implication was that Muslims were not really British, and therefore, not part of the 'Western' or 'European' civilisation (Haddad and Qurqrazi 2002, 55). Furthermore, that they were unwelcome because of their religion, or more specifically, their assertiveness about it (McRoy 2006, 68). As the Home Office Ministers worded it, British Muslims could only fully 'function in Britain, if they become integrated'; this was interpreted as 'to become passive about their religion' (MPGB 1993, 3).

The Bosnian crisis shocked the British Muslim community, partly because -- to a certain extent -- Bosnian Muslims held the very identity that the government ministers were understood to be suggesting for British Muslims, and yet, this did not prevent their being

slaughtered (Haddad and Qurqmazi 2002, 56). Their perception was that Muslims were unwanted in Europe: given Bosnia 's proximity to Britain, Muslim voices expressed concern that they could be the next victims of European 'Islamophobia' (Hasan 2002, 67; Trepagnier 2006, 77). There are several indications of a widespread fear in the community resulting from the crisis. When Jacobson engaged in field-research among the Muslim youth of East London, one interviewee stated that some young men of his acquaintance did not wish to be interviewed in the wake of events in Bosnia, because they felt that Muslims in Britain should be wary of researchers gathering information about them. Jacobson found that Bosnia was a recurring international issue raised by the interviewees. One of them declared that research could be used against Muslims in the same way that in Germany statistics had been used in the efforts to round up and kill the Jews (Jacobson 1998, 55-56, 79).

That young men could feel threatened by a writer engaged in research, indicates the degree, both of the psychological trauma inflicted by the Bosnian crisis on the community, and also the sense of conspiracy involving the British government.

In this context, it is interesting to analyse the conclusions offered by the Runnymede Trust report on Islamophobia. According to the report, many Muslims in Britain believed Islamophobia had played a major part in western attitudes to events in Bosnia. One of their correspondents (not himself a Muslim) wrote that the British politicians' reluctance to sanction military intervention in Bosnia was rooted, to a large extent, in their reluctance to support the creation of a new Muslim polity in Europe. The cabinet minister, when asked the reason why the UK government was refusing to lift the arms embargo against the Bosnian government, replied that 'Muslims have a tendency to radicalism' (Runnymede Trust 1997, 10).

Here, it is certainly worth analyzing the way certain authors (Dayan-Herzbrun 2000, 11; Kepel 1997, 138; Werbner 2002, 56) framed and represented the events involving the 'Muslim organizations' and their reactions to the Bosnian events. Keppel (1997), for instance, affirms that such 'fears' in the community were used by several 'Muslim organizations' in their struggle for power in the community; in particular, 'UMO, the Muslim Parliament of Britain (Kalim Siddiqi) and the Mawdudists were promoting those fears to compete against each other and to undermine tendencies towards more secularised approach' (1997, 139). My comment here is that, an analysis like this, assumes and represents the Islamist discourse and practice as 'a-political'. There is little doubt that the British official declaration mentioned above regarding 'the Muslim radical tendency'

denotes a substantial degree of Islamophobia (Trepagnier 2006, 67) or a very culturalist-orientalist approach (Marranci 2008, 59). The Islamist 'fear' and outrage in the face of the Bosnian carnage was surely within reason. To point out that, the current events at the time were used by Islamists in order to gather consensus and support, does not add much to the understanding of the Islamist parties' activities themselves. Practices and strategies like these, are not unusual among political parties and political leaders, irrespective of their ideologies, especially in periods of crises. My point is that, the assumption underlying Keppel's analysis is that Islamist parties are not political; therefore, the fact that they acted according to a 'logic' which is commonly followed by party leaders and, more generally, by political actors, elicits surprise.

As highlighted in the previous section, the representation of Islamist quests and aspirations in the dominant approach is construed in terms of an exception and a disruption to the normal functioning of a multicultural society (Grillo 2003, 172; Varisco 2005, 79): each assertive stand is interpreted as illegitimate, as not conforming to the 'standards' of a faith group, and therefore, in need of being 'tamed' and replaced within the 'cultural'-'minority groups' domain (Hasan 2002, 55).

Islamophobia

Whilst all these crises (Rushdie affair, Gulf Crisis, Bosnian Crisis) were continuing, a 'new phenomenon' -- identified as Islamophobia -- was perceived by the British Muslims to be increasingly growing.

As highlighted in the first chapter, the hypothesis that my dissertation advances, is that the operations of categorizing and stereotyping performed by the dominant discourse toward the dominated (the mode of 'oppression') function in such a way that reifies the mode-of-being stereotyped. Specifically, the culturalist-orientalist operations of categorizing and stereotyping toward Islam and Muslims result in a substantial depoliticization of the latter as social actors; something which functions as a dangerous practice, remains unnoticed, and is therefore, perpetuated. The perverse effects of this dynamic can be analysed in relation to the phenomenon of 'Islamophobia'.

The main perception among Muslims was that such a feeling of 'racism' or aversion towards Muslims and Islam (Runnymede Trust 1997, 12) was equivalent to anti-Semitism, and that it had first manifested itself during the Rushdie crisis. The generally negative

reaction to the Anti-Rushdie campaign shocked Muslims widely. This was mostly due to the fact that such a response had been given by sections of society previously seen as sympathetic and supportive, the liberals and leftists. The focus of the antagonism displayed by the latter was not understood as a biological or a cultural difference, but an *ideological* distinction. The media and the general public viewed British Muslims as 'intolerant', 'Nazi', 'bigots', as was claimed by the press reaction to the Bradford book burning (Lewis 1994, 158). A particularly ironic response came from Roy Jenkins, former Labour Home Secretary and architect of the 1976 Race Relations Act. In the *Independent* of 4 March 1989, he lamented that 'we might have been more cautious about allowing the creation in the 1950s of a substantial Muslim community here'. This quote, and the fact that Jenkins was responsible for introducing the 1976 Act, surely undermined the confidence in 'traditional race structure and policy' (Modood 1990, 46). This was also interpreted as a clear sign of the fact that 'Muslim' discrimination did not yet have a name and maybe there was the need of creating one: a category that could be put under the rubric of 'religious' discrimination.

Islamists themselves started to exert pressure for legislation against religious discrimination. This point was strongly made by the Islamic Human Rights Commission Chairman Massoud Shadjareh, at the launch of the report entitled *Anti-Muslim Discrimination and hostility in the UK, 2000*. The report's findings indicated that unless something was done urgently at the government level, 'Muslims in Britain and Europe are likely to face the same fate this century as Jews in Europe in the last' (Islamic Human Rights Commission 2000, p.5).

Three years earlier, in 1997, the Runnymede Trust had published its report titled '*Islamophobia -- A Challenge for Us All*', and since then the phrase 'Islamophobia' has entered the public discourse, receiving increased recognition, despite the lack of a precise definition. However, some authors contend that using the term Islamophobia itself is a way to intensify the assertion of the priority of the Muslim identity and the 'radicalism' that accompanies it (McRoy 2006, 26); that the term does not explain much about the 'phenomenon' itself and it could be the product of an obsession with categories and categorization, which too often silences a more accurate analysis or diverts it from a more subversive one (Butler 1992, 56). The reaction to hostilities of the kind expressed by Roy Jenkins is not surprising, and to imply that it was exaggerated, is contentious.

My question here is of a different kind. I enquire about the nature of Islamophobia, in terms of the urge to find a category to describe a phenomenon of alleged hatred against Muslims

qua Muslims (Trepagnier 2006, 6; Grillo 2003, 171). Furthermore, I will discuss and attempt to analyse the effects produced by the publication of this seminal.

In order to conduct a more detailed examination of the topic and to give substance to my argument about the mode-of-oppression reifying the mode-of-being, (whilst dangerously masking and endorsing forms of depoliticization), it is useful to analyse the text in itself, by attempting -- with hindsight -- to trace its resonance, ten years after its publication.

My first remark is that 'Islamophobia' is, at best, a term that everyone knows and uses, but probably could not accurately define (Allan 2005, 78).

At the time of its publication, the Report clearly announced the urgency of finding a label and a category, by stating that there was a 'new reality that needs naming'. The report not only named this new reality, but also established an eight-point typology in order to create a more accessible way of understanding Islamo-phobia. The Runnymede typology thus described 'closed' (as opposed to 'open') views.

The 'closed views' that they established were:

1. Islam is seen as a monolithic bloc, static and unresponsive to new realities;
2. Islam is seen as separate and other -- (a) not having any aims or values in common with other cultures (b) not affected by them (c) not influencing them;
3. Islam is seen as inferior to the West -- barbaric, irrational, primitive, sexist;
4. Islam is seen as violent, aggressive, threatening, supportive of terrorism, engaged in a 'clash of civilisations';
5. Islam is seen as a political ideology, used for political or military advantage;
6. Criticisms made by Islam of the 'West' are rejected out of hand without consideration;
7. Hostility towards Islam is used to justify discriminatory practices towards Muslims and their subsequent exclusion from mainstream society;
8. Anti-Muslim hostility accepted as natural and 'normal'.

It is a fact that, despite its overwhelmingly simplistic approach -- maybe even because of it -- the initial impact and subsequent legacy of the Runnymede research has been both highly significant and deeply influential, not just as a policy document but also as a blueprint for academic engagement.

Subsequent to the report's publication on Islamophobia in Britain, almost all academic research has tended to acknowledge its indebtedness to this very typology and has rarely

gone any further than this particular understanding (ibid., 81). The Runnymede definitions and typologies have played an important role in understanding and identifying Islamophobia, and it might be fair to suggest that

the report's overview of the coverage and subsequent representation of Muslims and Islam in the British media became the catalyst that inspired and shaped much of the work relating to 'Muslims in the Media' that has emerged since. Elizabeth Poole's analysis of the representation of Muslims in the British press (Poole 2002, 253), as well as other work with a much broader geographical focus (for example, by Malise Ruthven) is surely indebted to the Report's original efforts (Donnan 2002; Hafez 2000; Ruthven 2002; Siddiqui 1997).

The report acknowledged the seriousness of Islamophobia in the media, by suggesting that many in the media were guilty, not only of perpetrating inaccuracies and misinformation, but also because such inaccuracies and misinformation attained an unchecked and blanket acceptance as fact, without any alternative recourse to accuracy or accountability. Put another way, it might be stated that this was paving the way to a process of naturalization of the phenomenon in itself. In addition, the proliferation of media, and a rapidly expanding globalised audience renders the situation bleak; whether at the local or the global level, the problem remains equally relevant.

I will consider an example of this media coverage, by utilising the Runnymede typology of closed and open views. The article I have chosen was written four years after the Report, but the example can highlight just how relevant these 'closed views' could be, and how important is the selection of the parameters of analysis.

The article in question is from a regional daily newspaper from the West Midlands, *The Express and Star*, dated 13 October 2001. Beneath the headline, 'Why they hate you...', there is a photograph taken shortly after the Friday prayers outside Birmingham's (England's second largest city) most prominent and well-known mosque. The photo is framed so that Arabic text is central to the focus. As worshippers are leaving the mosque, so the image suggests that they are all queuing for the books, tapes and CDs that a seller has to offer. There is the blatant 'Us' and 'Them' contrast, for instance, in the central focus juxtaposing the words 'Birmingham Central Mosque' with the Arabic calligraphy next to it. Similarly, the appearance of the man selling the goods, clearly suggests a 'non-Western' look. The short text accompanying the photograph informs the reader that this 'non-Western' man was also once 'Jewish' and he was 'giving out' -- rather than selling -- pictures of Osama Bin Laden, videos and CDs; and through these, one might understand

why Muslims everywhere hate the West.

Here, many of the closed views described in the Runnymede Report are easily recognizable. Muslims are seen to be all the same, by implication they are also alleged to be supporters of Osama Bin Laden. By re-proposing the 'Us' and 'Them' dualism, Islam is uncritically established as distinctly separate and *other* from 'the West'. The image of Muslims apparently interested in getting such material clearly suggests an interpretation of 'them' as being threatening and supportive of terrorism, especially when 'directed towards Western powers'. Moreover, Islam as a whole is implicated as being largely synonymous with a dangerous political ideology, So that any criticisms that Muslims may justifiably have of the 'West' are rejected out of hand, and any hostility towards Islam or Muslims could be justified on the basis of other 'closed views'.

I remain slightly perplexed about the fact that the newspaper illustrates, in the photo and the text, everything detrimental and denigratory -- possibly Islamophobic -- to Muslims. (Whitaker 2002, 53-57). One needs to re-analyze this particular article from the premise of the final closed view (point 8 in the Runnymede list), i.e, that Islamophobia was becoming increasingly 'naturalized'. Looking at the headline alone, not only does it reaffirm the dualistic opposition of the over-employed simplistic entities 'Islam' and 'the West', but it also indiscriminately uses the word 'they'. My question here is very simple: who are the 'they'?

'They' are a fairly defined yet wholly indiscriminate group: 'Muslims', as an external and separate entity. Such language confirms that all Muslims ('they') hate 'you', where 'you' becomes the everyday reader, part of an equally indiscriminate, undifferentiated and homogenous group. At the same time, this image reminded its readership that this was happening at the very heart of Muslim communities in Birmingham. Consequently, the logical assumption might be, that as a result of such blanket demonizing and inappropriate generalization, the newspaper's readership may become subsequently more suspicious and distrustful of *those* Muslims and their respective communities. Ultimately, such logic of stereotypy would cause Islamophobic motivated beliefs and attitudes to become increasingly accepted and taken for granted; in other words, a process of 'naturalisation' would occur.

This leads me to ask another significant question regarding this article and what it stands for: 'Why?' Why, for example, was the picture printed? Why were there so few words? And, Why was this particular piece printed in preference to others, particularly when Birmingham experienced no problems concerning its Muslim and non-Muslim communities

at the time?

In attempting to answer this question, I suggest that we must go beyond the Runnymede typology of open and closed views. This is because, whilst they give indicators that negativity is present, they do not explain why or answer questions relating to the thought-processes or reasoning that underpins the phenomenon. This might imply a lack of reason, or ascertain a self-feeding process (Damasio 2000, 13).

Since there was no backlash or public questioning of the newspaper article either, one must also ask why such articles can covertly embody such meaning, whilst maintaining a natural or normal enough appearance.

Islamophobia is clearly not as simple and single-layered as the Runnymede report might have (or possibly just appeared to have) suggested.

The Runnymede theoretical framework for understanding Islamophobia excludes anything within its typology that can even begin to ask 'why' and 'what'; thus, it is largely redundant for anything beyond the superficial level.

Subsequently, the 'open-closed' distinction cannot accommodate subtlety, complexity, difference or implication. And whilst it can identify, it cannot answer why (Modood 2005, 56).

My argument is that Islamophobia in the contemporary climate is a significantly different entity to what it was when the Runnymede report was produced, and it has certainly evolved as a 'phenomenon'. Events, within the local and global contexts, have given impetus to allegedly 'anti-Muslim' expressions that might be considered under the rubric of Islamophobia, and they might have given credence to theories and ideas that had previously been academically dismissed. Whilst Islamophobia is authoritatively defined in terms of the Runnymede report, in the British context at least, it is legitimate to ask, to what extent such authority and status continues to be relevant and justified today.

Considering the remit of the Runnymede typology and definitions, it would seem that a reasonably vast disparity exists between the 'simplistic' Islamophobia via Runnymede, and a much more insidious, complex, implicit and naturalized version that is lingering outside its framework. Such processes can be better identified through a more detailed discursive analysis of the material to hand. And whilst an interdependence will almost certainly exist, there is much to suggest that research into Islamophobia now needs to go beyond the Runnymede baseline, and that we need to analyze more accurately the impact of the Runnymede theorization as well.

That is to say, the most influential piece of research into Islamophobia in the UK

desperately needs reevaluation, refocusing and reassessment; not only in light of the reality of global contemporariness, but also in light of the fact that the report itself stated that the phenomenon of Islamophobia will be undergoing change, whereby it would shift and become relatively unidentifiable and unobserved as it goes through increasing 'naturalization' or 'normalization'.

Also, as the sophistication of media reporting changes and reacts to these very same processes -- alongwith the very definite shifts that have occurred in this period of 'urgent history' (Nielsen 2003, 155) -- so too must we change the way in which we analyze the media in order to validly maintain a rigorous and legitimate anti-Islamophobia critique of it. Definitions and understandings of Islamophobia must therefore be flexible and fluid enough to be able to accommodate and acknowledge that some form of naturalization has occurred, and will probably continue to occur, to the extent that the dichotomy established by the report is consistently reified in an unchecked way.

This could be regarded as the failure of the evolution of the report and research into the phenomenon itself: not only has its legacy been stagnant and mostly ossified across academic research, possibly because of its distinctly 'non- academic' remit, but also as a policy document, it failed in getting many of its recommendations implemented.

Without a radical overhaul of ideas and theoretical understanding, the increasing levels of 'normalization', and the greater sophistication and complexity of such disseminated messages and meanings, may result in a situation that becomes even more difficult to comprehend, as other rigid dualistic definitions, typologies, and dangerous ossifications come to hold sway.

It is, therefore, essential that research into Islamophobia is continued beyond and outside the Runnymede legacy. There is always the risk that instead of erasing stereotypes, new ones will be created in a sort of self-feeding process that reproduces the same categories that the critique itself is meant to de-construct and de-legitimise. That itself might be the main failure of the Runnymede report.

2001: Oldham and Burnley and Bradford riots: A retroactive omen for the enemy within

2001 is considered by many scholars as a watershed year for British Muslims (Abbas 2005, 46; McRoy 2006, 81; Modood 2005, 115; Ruthven 2002, 46). I am not fully convinced by this analytical framework and I contend that such a way of interpreting those events is

slightly rhetoric, or at least, not useful for understanding them. However, I acknowledge the fact that the above-mentioned time span was extremely dynamic and need a more careful examination that goes beyond the media sensationalism.

In the summer of that year, riots (variously characterized as Asian/Muslim race riots) erupted in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford. Consequently, the Government commissioned reports on these disturbances. The reports approached the riots from the twin poles of ethnicity and socio-economic issues. This methodology virtually ensured that their conclusions would effectively reflect their presuppositions, because the deployment of those categories excluded a priori any other explanation or hypothesis of the emergence of a political discourse.

Marsha Singh, the Labour MP for Bradford West, declared after the Bradford riots: 'We have to put the events into some sort of perspective. It was nothing to do with deprivation, this was sheer criminality' ([Thisisbradford](#), 2001). Furthermore, a police report stated that 'the majority of violent racist incidents are perpetrated by Asians on whites, which is an ongoing trend involving primarily Pakistani and Bangladeshi teenagers'. To support this view, the report added that 'the issue of racial attacks on whites dates back to 1992' (Manchesteronline, 2001).

A crucial question was raised by some scholars about whether seeing this as a racial issue was misleading, since the sociological explanation for the 'Northern riots' significantly ignored the fact that the riots did not involve blacks, Hindus or Sikhs (Allen 2005; McRoy 2006, 87; Verkaik 2010). Indeed, reports from Oldham recorded Muslim youth attacks on Hindus and blacks. It might be said that the riots had to be positioned mainly within a religious context and represented as a matter of 'religious' hatred (Trepagnier 2006,43). I think that a view like this does not add or divert much from a 'racial' or 'ethnic' explanation; it reproduces and re-presents the same categories within the culturalist-orientalist framework of analysis (Varisco 2005, 3).

A further, more specific, question would be: what does 'Asian' mean? Is it broadly referring to immigrants from the Indian subcontinent and their British-born children? Because, the majority of Asians rioting in the North of England were British Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, who were thereafter united by being subsequently targeted for their 'Islamic faith'.

Besides, within the problem-oriented approach to ethnic and religious identities, the generational issue is implicit, though often unstated. The police report itself highlights this as it refers to 'Asian teenagers'. The groups most often positioned as being 'in crisis' are

young people, particularly of course, young men. Although the category youth has been a popular focus of study since the 1950s, as Giroux (1996, 153) has aptly argued, the category 'youth' itself denotes a specific set of associations focusing on crisis, making the seamless link with deviance, violence and threat. Or as Hebdige (1976, 3) appropriately points out, 'youth' in our society is present only when its presence is a problem. More precisely, the category youth gets mobilized in official documentary discourse, and concerned editorials at those times when young people make their presence felt by going 'out of bounds', by breaking rules and bottles, by issuing challenges to the law. In the specific case of the Northern riots, the question is: how did the Asian youth -- a demographic group largely invisible to white mainstream society -- once seen as passive and largely ignored, become the most volatile, destructive and misunderstood 'kids' of 2001? Recall how the three minutes of news footage from Oldham showed young Asian men speaking in a northern slang, dressed in high street sports gear, and expressing grievances that few would have believed existed in 2001 (Masood 2006, 57).

As Werbner (1990) observes, many studies of ethnic or religious communities tend to reify the community to the point of rendering the youth invisible, and where they do appear, usually as an afterthought, their generation is experienced as conflict and as a threat, as a product of cultural over-determination on the one hand, and 'failing masculinities on the other' (ibid.,15). In this framework, the primary source of youth identities almost by default becomes the peer-group, a repository of self-esteem, security and status. That leads me to two observations. Firstly, that the representation of the riots as having been provoked by 'young Asian teenagers' could also be explained by advancing the hypothesis that, within the culturalist orientalist attitude, there is a strong tendency of 'infantilization' of the Other. This implies representing the Other as not responsible of his/her actions, as being deprived of his/her agency, and thus, depoliticized (El Zein 1977, 232). Secondly, that there is another important category of representation implied here, which combines youth cultures with deviance, the 'gang'.

It might be stated that the idea of the 'gang' is, in many ways, the 'archetype' of the intersection of all these dimensions -- race/ethnicity/youth -- as the ultimate symbol of crisis, deviance and threat. Klein (1995, 191), for example, in the American context, has noted in his description of the *American street Gang*, that 'gang' identity is largely defined as black, male youth. He argues that 'gangs' tend to be self-identified groups of ethnically racially homogenous, almost exclusively African-American or Hispanic, men with an

average age of 20 years. In addition, they are always urban, territorially-based and involved in criminal activity, having a strong association with violence. Although the 'British' history of gang activity traditionally differs (with its somewhat romanticized notion of the East End villains), it can be argued that the notion of gang has been re-inflected through the American discourse, to present the idea of the Gang as an already-raced entity, standing for the dangerous 'Other' in contemporary British society (Hall et al. 1978, 10; Hasan 2002, 35). It might be observed that the term works not only to naturalize and criminalize group identities, but it also serves as a substitute for analysis, in particular where ethnicity or race is privileged as the primary group-marker and offered as a self-explanatory motivation for conflict or control. The same can easily be applied to religion as a primary group-marker, and this occurs in particular in relation to Islam as a religion.

This sort of shifting of categories in the representation and perpetuation of 'Otherness' is easily recognizable when we compare the media framework of analysis on the 'Northern riots' before and after 9-11.

The so-called summer riots, which were described as being the most violent in the UK in 20 years, took place between May and July 2001, in the Northern cities of Oldham (25-28th May), Burnley (24-25th June) and Bradford (7th July), just two months before the 9-11 events. By collecting articles and browsing through the *BBC news* for Bradford and West Yorkshire, the *Bradford Telegraph*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Manchester on-line*, and the *Guardian*, one finds the unanimous view that it was a matter of 'racial clashes', of ethnic community rivalries, stirred up by young Asian gangs, and escalating due to provocations from BNP members in Bradford.

The explanation which is most often invoked, links the eruption of violence to the phenomenon of 'ethnic segregation', and thus to the poor level of schooling among the young Asians, and to their inability to integrate with the wider 'British' community (Trepagnier 2006, 45).

Only a few voices arose at the time to point out the fact that the riots were not the product of racial or ethnic hatred among the Pakistani (Verkaik 2010), Bangladeshi, and Indian communities, but just a matter of 'sheer criminality', that cannot be vaguely labeled as being ethnically inspired (Essed 1991, 17).

However, as mentioned above, the 'climate' changed after the 9-11 events, when paradoxically -- it might be argued -- another type of gang came in handy: the Al-Qaeda (Asad 2006, 6). The 'Northern riots' were now explained in terms of Muslim disaffection (Haddad and Qurqmazi 2002, 38) and their 'unwillingness' to integrate; in Britain clearly

the word 'Asian' had outlived its usefulness (Varisco 2005, 55).

During the period of autumn-winter 2001, politicians like the Prime Minister Tony Blair, and the Home Secretary David Blunkett, showed a certain readiness to jump on the bandwagon of labelling the 'British Muslims' as a self-segregationist group and the enemy within (BBC Radio 4-18 November 2001). On the occasion of several official speeches regarding the need for 'tackling extremism and violence' among young Muslims in Britain, they found it useful to give the powerful example of the past 'summer riots' (ibid.), by highlighting the fact that the young Muslim rioters (once described as Asians) had shown banners and symbols supporting Hamas (ibid.). This implicitly meant that in order to support Hamas, one had to be a Muslim foremost, and according to this logic, also a 'bad' Muslim, who has to be put under surveillance (Mamdani 2004, 3).

The other underlying assumption allowing analysts and observers like Blair and Blunkett to declare that it was a matter of Muslim riots (since they were supporting Hamas), (BBC Radio 4-18 November 2001) was that Hamas was considered to be as party whose allegiance was related to a religious membership and not to a political choice (Grillo 2003, 159). Instead of acknowledging its 'political' nature as an Islamist party, it was considered to be a sectarian expression of the Muslim minority in Britain (Trepagnier 2006, 69). Therefore, as the reasoning went, if you support Hamas, you have to be Muslim. For a group like Hamas, this tacitly rejects any chance of an independent political space detached from religion as the primary group-marker (Asad 2006, 21). It also reinforces my argument that the use of certain categories, and specifically that of religion, works in a way to depoliticize Islamist groups. (Marranci 2008, 7).

On another interesting note, in a guise very similar to the Prime Minister Tony Blair, it was Nick Griffin, an 'acceptable' face of BNP (and its chairman), of who said to Jeremy Paxman that it was not an Asian problem, it was a Muslim problem: 'Stop saying Asian. It is not Asian versus whites, this is a Muslim problem. There are Hindus who have been pushed out of their homes. There are West Indians who have been burnt out' (Newsnight, 2001).

My point is that there is little doubt that an assumption like this could be taken to be slightly Islamophobic. It is certainly peculiar that a leader from an active far-right party defends Blacks and Hindus and then talks about Muslim segregation? (Hasan 2002, 68) It might be stated that the BNP was playing out at a local level, what global forces have been claiming since the end of the Cold War, that Islam is the 'new communism and the new Enemy within' (Barber 1996, 24; Del Valle 1997, 8; Huntington 1997, 11; Fallaci 2001, 34; Zakaria

2001). Furthermore, a similar approach -- as the Prime Minister's declarations clearly testify -- is not just adopted by the infamously 'Islamophobic' far-right parties, but it is much more widespread in the British political panorama (Siddiqui 2006, 123).

Unfortunately, some scholars (McRoy 2006, 32) have also joined the ranks of media and politicians in the efforts to represent the once 'racial/racist' summer riots as, newly discovered, 'sectarian' clashes. Needless to remark that most of these 'unmentioned' reports came to light in the aftermath of 9-11.

According to this novel representation, of 'Muslim riots', it was reported that Bradford churches had been physically vandalized, pastors and church officials physically attacked. It was mentioned that Rev. Paul Bilton of St. Columba's and St. Wilfrid's had reportedly stated that he had received physical threats from Muslim youths and his church had been threatened with arson. Similarly, Rev. Paul Ahckwood of St. Margaret allegedly faced intimidation from 'Muslim' youths and the word HAMAS was spray painted on his church (ibid., 32-33). Such refashioned sectarian (as opposed to 'racist') representation finds a further element of credibility by mentioning the fact that a *black* majority Pentecostal church, Victor Road Church of God of Prophecy, was also intimidated. My suggestion is that there are two important elements, which have been used to justify the prevailing sectarian dichotomy over the racist one (Trepagnier 2006, 5). The very way of discoursing it, paradoxically, attestats of a very 'racist and racialised' view over an Islamophobic one (ibid., 10). The church attacked was a '*black* majority Pentecostal church'; therefore, if 'black' is assaulted, then it could not be the case of a racial clash since black is still retained as the 'Other' in matters of race (Essed 1991, 56). But the target of the riot was a 'Christian' church. Therefore, as per reasoning, the attackers had to be Muslims. This re-proposes the 'Crusaders' metaphor or Huntington's clash of civilizations (1997) in its post-Cold War version.

Thus, that this discourse and the representation of Islam as the Enemy Within, had developed quite consistently in the years following the riots (Marranci 2008, 57), to the extent that it was stated: 'there was no surprise that the 7-7 bombers originated from West Yorkshire' (this latter place being the scene of the riots) (McRoy 2006, 36).

9-11 and the Iraq war: a self-fulfilling prophecy?

As if to add substance to the discussion surrounding British Muslims and Islamists and

their primary form of allegiance -- as represented by the culturalist-orientalist framework: religion over politics, Islam over Britain -- the 9-11 events came into the scene (Varisco 2005, 46).

Surprisingly, the terrorist attacks in the USA led to attacks on 'Muslims' and mosques across the UK, including in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Belfast; this happened by and large, as an effect of the 9-11 events (McRoy 2006, 113).

The terror attacks had also the effect of 'polarizing' British Muslims into two quite distinctive camps (Varisco 2005, 78; Mcghee 2005, 10) -- a minority deeply affected by 'anti-Westernism' to the point of having an acute sense of 'Occidentalism' (Said 1991, 67) and a vast majority who declared themselves to 'be proud of being British, Western and Muslims' (Hussain 2004, 68).

In this climate of 'urgency', under the powerful effect of mirroring stereotypes, several UK Islamist groups felt bound to condemn the 9-11 attacks. In particular, the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), as an umbrella organization raising Muslim issues 'nationally' (Mosaad 2006, 35), stated that 'British Muslims, along with everyone else', were watching 'events in America with shock and horror'. They declared themselves to be standing 'shoulder to shoulder with remarks made by our Prime Minister Tony Blair', and conveyed 'the deepest sympathies to President Bush and the people of America'(MCB press release, 11-9-2001). However, parties such as the Supporters of Sharia (SOS) aired the theory of a Zionist plot behind the scenes. They stated that '4000 Jews did not go to work at the World Trade Center on that day, 11 September 2001'. They reported that Stern-Intel, Aeronautical experts had suggested 'that the plane was not even hijacked....Civil engineering experts suggest that it was a pure demolition, no steel framed towers fell like the way WTC's fall' (Angelfire, 2001).

Nevertheless, the public pronouncements of British 'Muslim' and Islamist identity were soon frustrated when the government committed troops to USA-led bombing of Afghanistan. While the majority of British Muslims unconditionally supported the bringing to trial of the perpetrators of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, the bombing of Afghanistan was seen as an indiscriminate act of aggression by America and Britain upon the Afghan nation. The MCB had no hesitation in questioning the validity of the bombings, and publicly condemning them.

According to a 'temperature-gauging poll' conducted by *The Muslim News* online, the single most difficult issue for British Muslims to reconcile with, was the Government's role in international affairs (Muslimnews 2001). A massive 86 percent believed that UN and the

West had double standards in dealing with the 'injustice in the world' (ibid.). More than two out of five agreed that if the West had been more tough and exacting against Israel, they would have been more supportive of action against Osama Bin Laden (ibid.).

Therefore, an overwhelming 79% of Muslims disagreed that it was right to bomb Afghanistan, 73% said that they would have preferred a criminal investigation and an extradition process. More than 2/3rds believed that it was wrong of the USA and the West to describe September 11 as an act of war (ibid.).

This was not the first time that the British had been exposed to the 'effects' of Osama Bin Laden's actions and USA's retaliation. In 1998, bombs had exploded in Kenya and Tanzania outside the US embassies, killing and maiming a number of people. Soon Al-Qaeda was blamed by America, and in response the USA had bombed Sudan and Afghanistan because of their purported links with the dissident leader (McRoy 2006, 89). The MCB had charged at that time that the American action was a 'clear violation of law', 'taking us back to the days of gunboat diplomacy when might was right and the law of jungle prevailed'(MCB, 1998). Similarly, the IHRC had attacked the bombings as abuses of international law, and by accused Clinton of trying to divert attention from the Monica Lewinsky crisis (IHRC 2005).

These reactions demonstrate how widespread and deep-rooted the overt opposition to US policy had become amongst British Islamists (Allen 2005, 89). However, it should be noted that this is not generally to the way migrant minorities sympathize with their home governments being in confrontation with the host country (Haddad and Qurqmazi 2002, 78). Pakistan, Bangladesh and Yemen, for instance, are US allies. So the support for Sudan or Afghanistan was not based upon a sentiment of ethnic nostalgia; comparatively, a minority of British Muslims are of Sudanese or Afghan heritage (ibid.,80). Rather, my argument is that this was a political stand: an Islamist one, which could not be represented by using an ethnic or diasporic 'categorization' of the phenomenon (Grillo 2003, 160).

When Islamist organizations like the MCB condemned the UK's bombing of Afghanistan, they were asserting their politicals view and beliefs, as conveyed by the 'ideological' metaphor of the *Ummah* (Marranci 2008, 61).

A culturalist-orientalist approach, as displayed by several commentators, would point to the fact that this was the case of a religious (Islamic) response prevailing over a political or national one (ibid., 57); that the reason behind the support for 'radical Islamist states' like Afghanistan is the common Muslim heritage and the priority given to the religious identity over a secularized one (Keppel 2001, 57; McRoy 2006, 115; Ruthven 1998, 79). Once

again, the culturalist-orientalist analysis works to avoid a 'political' analysis of the phenomenon: essentially, it degrades and downplays the 'Islamist' (and not 'Muslim') challenge to UK's foreign policies in Afghanistan (Hasan 2002, 67). Besides, reflections like these are likely to raise further 'rhetorical' questions about British Muslims -- are they British Muslims or Muslims in Britain? (Varisco 2005, 79).

Why are the same questions of allegiance and identity not put to non-Muslim anti-war campaigners or political dissenters? British Catholics are not suspected of subversion to the monarchy because of their alleged loyalty to Rome and the Pope. Nor are the majority of Irish Catholics suspected to be members of the IRA. British Jews who have the luxury of dual nationality (British and Israeli) are not asked to prioritize their oaths of allegiance, even after many have offered military service in Israel. The culturalist-orientalist approach functions in a way that denies the *political* of the Islamist parties, and reduces everything which has the word Islam as its 'lexeme' and its signifier (e.g., Islamism) to being a matter purely of religious beliefs. It does this by maintaining that the relation between Islam and Islamism is direct. Furthermore, the underlying assumption is that groups and parties which politically speak the language of religion are dangerously fanatical and have to be disenfranchised.

In this climate of 'urgency', it is also relevant to examine the role played by the Stop the War Coalition, that was formed shortly after 9-11 (Marranci 2008, 63) to protest against the Afghanistan War. It is a very broad alliance of leftists, pacifists and Muslims (notably the Muslim Association of Britain, or MAB). The movement grew even more in the wake of the UK-US plans to attack Iraq, when 'Muslims' were joined by a majority expressing the public skepticism about this war (Seddon, Hussain and Malik 2004, 135). This was exhibited in a very practical way on 15 February 2003, when upto two million people congregated in Hyde Park to protest about the war plans. More importantly, the rally organizers went further than opposing the war on Iraq, they demanded 'Freedom for Palestine' (ibid., 136).

The fact that the 2003 Hyde Park rally was comprised of a very broad alliance of political parties might be said to have sheltered the Islamist groups and protesters from any further accusation of fanatical behavior or suspected allegiance to a global Islamic community (Marranci 2008, 65). This merely confirms the view that 'Muslims' -- read Islamist groups -- are always under the obligation to prove their credentials: unless proven to be 'good', every Muslim is presumed to be 'bad' (Mamdani 2004, 36). Once again, the presumption that there are such categories masks a refusal to open a serious political debate or

address the failure to make a serious political analysis of the phenomenon itself (ibid., 38).

The *prophecy* fulfilled: the 7-7 bombings

The 7/7 attacks on the London underground in Aldgate, Edgware Road, Russell Square and on a bus in Tavistock Square are considered to be another watershed moment in the history of the British Muslim community (McRoy 2006, 10; Phillips 2006, 2). The 'community relations' re-kindled in the aftermath of the Hyde Park rally soon returned to a very unsteady and frail state; as if to confirm that the number of suspected 'bad' Muslims was still outnumbering the good ones and 'Islam' had once again proven to be the 'Enemy Within' (Barber 1996, 56; Del Valle 1997, 56; Fallaci 2001, 6; Zakaria 2001).

The oddity consisted in the fact that Britain had faced terrorist outrages before, (notably by the IRA), but it was observed that there were two essential differences: three of the four bombers were from mainland Britain (highlighting that they were essentially betrayers of the motherland) and, the attacks were 'martyrdom operations', confirming the clear Islamic stigma (Dodd 2005; Duff 2005; Mendick 2005; Morris and Benetto 2005; McRoy 2006, 5).

As if to add substance to similar Islamophobic understandings of the events, there was a wave of Islamophobic attacks across the country, including attacks on mosques, assaults on Muslims, anti-Muslim graffiti, and in one case, the murder of a Muslim man. The *Guardian* reported that the number of 'faith hate crimes' had risen five-fold in the fortnight since the London bombings. Such statements were supported by the official reports from the Metropolitan Police that recorded 800 'race' and 'faith hate' crimes after the July 7 attacks and reported that nationally, the figure for 'hate incidents directed at Muslims has passed 1200 as a backlash continues' (Dodd 2005).

On the other hand, there was a swift response from the main Islamist organizations. The MCB expressed its utter condemnation of these 'indiscriminate acts of terror in London' (Vikram, 2005). The IHRC were equally forthright, condemning 'in no uncertain terms', the 'attacks' perpetrated in London. Likewise, the Muslim Public Affairs Committee (MPAC) conveyed similar sentiments, but also pointed out that UK foreign policy was the main cause of the attacks. It further urged Muslims, and in particular Mosque leaders and Mosque Media teams to be proactive in countering Islamophobia, by calling for a rethink of the root cause of the incidents (MPAC press release, 2005).

Other Islamist parties such as Hizbu-ut-tahrir, Al-Ghurabaa, and the Saved Sect were less

urgent in issuing any condemnation, waiting for evidence but nonetheless observing that such acts contradicted Islamic law. The HT observed (wisely in my opinion) that to condemn Muslims *qua* Muslims with little evidence would be just an act of self-catharsis, 'in order to remove the pressure from ourselves'(Hizbu-ut-Tahrir, 2005).

One relevant aspect of all those official declarations, reports and culturalist-orientalist representations (Marranci 2008, 35) in the aftermath of 7-7, was that the crimes, assaults and abuses against 'Muslims' *qua* Muslims were exclusively regarded as 'faith hate' crimes, whereas the 'attacks' on 'Londoners' (considered to be Muslim attacks) were undoubtedly regarded as terrorist: innocent civilians had been killed (Trepagnier 2006, 8). The interesting observation is that Muslims had only been defined by their religious membership: perceived on the whole as an indiscriminate entity, identified merely by their faith, as per the assumptions at the core of the culturalist-orientalist framework (Varisco 2005, 9). Conversely, when 'Muslims' allegedly launch attacks on other fellow 'human' beings, this same obsession with categories and primary group-markers (religion) totally vanishes (Asad 2006, 39); the whole event is represented by using the neutral noun of 'civilians' and is dramatized by speaking of 'victims'.

My point here is that this is a further example of the way in which the culturalist-orientalist approach frames issues and represents events. This dissertation argues that the same stereotypes and 'racialized' categories of analysis insidiously affect, the stereotyped as well, to the point that such categories become constitutive of the way that the debate is structured, without a possible alternative, but still within its discursive domain (Grillo 2003, 157; Varisco 2005, 78). In doing, so the operation of depoliticization goes unnoticed till it is allowed and finally endorsed by the stereotyped themselves; dynamics my thesis explains in terms of a fetishism for politics, which is nurtured equally by both the dominant and the dominated, the *stereotypers* and the *stereotyped* (El Zein 1977, 136). The tragic consequences are the persistence of a security threat on one side, and the political failure of the Islamist parties, on the other.

In the aftermath of the 7-7 bombings, London had become a centre for foreign militants 'mullahs' and it had been dubbed Londonistan (Phillips 2006, 5). There were endless comments on the need to counter 'extremist' teaching, though there was no precise definition of the term itself. Despite the vagueness of the concept, and perhaps because of it, extremism soon became a very popular 'trope' in the official discourses (Asad 2006, 6). On 19th July, Prime Minister Tony Blair met with 25 Muslim leaders in order to 'tackle extremism'. The main outcome of the encounter was to set up a task-force that 'would

explore the extent of disaffection among the Muslim population' (Morris-Bennetto 2005). The first element that was soon questioned was the composition of the group that had met with Blair. It was noticed that there was a dearth of younger Muslims in the delegation; as the *Guardian* observed, they were 'mostly established figures in their 40s and older' (Dodd-White, 2005). Considering that 'the bombers were from the younger generation' (ibid.), this was a questionable response to the events of 7-7. In other words, the issue was mainly framed as a 'generational' crisis of 'young Muslims' disaffection' with Britain and with British politics. As previously mentioned, the clever use of those two categories combined (*youth criminality* and *disaffection to politics*) set the framework of analysis and provided the solution to the problem at the same time.

The generation gap in the British Muslim community was also expressed by the MPAC in its main response and reactions to 7-7 (MPACUK 2005). Following the Government guidelines, MPAC wanted mosques to educate their youth 'in the British political process as a way of addressing issues of concern'(ibid.). Since 7-7, this effort had been consistent; a survey of over 100 mosques was carried out to check if Mosque leaders had in fact taken 'any serious steps to stop this happening again by educating the youth and channeling their anger into a more constructive route'. The outcome -- according to MPAC -- was not encouraging, since every mosque called 'had not taken any steps to change their syllabus or reach out to young Muslims to ensure that they were educated about how they could practically make a difference' (ibid.). The main failure, according to this report, consisted of the fact that the Muslim leaders seemed not to take the threat seriously and they were certainly 'failing in their responsibility' (ibid.).

If the Muslim community and its leaders were to blame, we might also consider that there was very little proof that the 7-7 bombers had links with any 'extremist or radical' organizations (ibid). As the investigation into the bombing proceeded, it emerged that, whilst the Edgware Road bomber Siddique Khan did have some tenuous links with 'militants', the other four were 'clean-skins' (in the media vocabulary, this meant men with no established ties to 'extremist or terrorist groups') (McRoy 2006, 79).

This really undermines the assumption that it is the membership of a radical organization or exposure to 'radical preachers' (Asad 2006, 67) that radicalizes British Muslims. Another observation might be that the role of the mosque in producing the kind of 'Al-Qaeda types' who carried out 7-7 is highly questionable. My argument is that this overall way of framing the debate and setting the analysis is not just questionable, but highly misleading. Further, I maintain that the use of certain categories and the obsession with some of them, is a way

of avoiding a more careful examination, or perhaps, of silencing a more accurate one (Damasio 2002, 115).

At this point, the supporters of the theory that the answer to the 'Al Qaeda type of violence' is in the *Qur'an* and in Islam as a set of beliefs, quote the words pronounced by the bomber Mohammed Siddique Khan in a video aired by Al Jazeera TV on 1st September 2005 (BBC News 2005).

According to this essentialist and 'essentialising' analysis (within a culturalist-orientalist framework), his words demonstrate the futility of trying to persuade Al-Qaeda supporters of the 'immorality' of their actions, because 'their source of ethics' is not based on 'secular humanism' but rather on the *Qur'an* and *hadith* (Barnwell 2005; McRoy 2006, 115; Phillips 2006, 125). Other similar analyses point at the fact that echoes of Bin Laden could be heard in Siddique Khan's claim that the support of 'hostile governments' by their electorates make the voters culpable in government actions. Khan had indicated that the provocation of the attack lay in the government's foreign policy, and that he and his brothers were responding to what they saw as attacks on Muslims world-wide; the language of Ummah and of *defensive jihad* was clearly expressed in his words (McRoy 2006, 116; Phillips 2006, 128).

Taking a similar interpretation of Khan's words, my first observation would be that a good methodology consists of exercising extreme caution when dealing with discourse from a subject in general, and that is an obvious fact that you 'must not take their word for it' (Bower 2007, 29). My second comment would be that the so-defined 'source of ethics' is not based on the *Qur'an* and on the *hadith per se*, but rather on what -- I would say -- the *Qur'an* and the *hadith* are perceived and understood to be saying (Marranci 2006, 19). Thus, it is not important what the *Qur'an* and the *hadith* actually say, but what Muslims -- and in this case Islamists -- say the *Qur'an* says. A sacred book is not, in fact, a text where everything is put in unequivocal terms; by definition, it has various arguments and interpretations. If there is still a debate about what the *Qur'an* really says, it means that nobody really knows or that the people who think they know, disagree among themselves (Roy 2004, 89).

In a broader context then, my argument is that Al-Qaeda or the 'Al-Qaeda type' of violence is not an isolated phenomenon. Suicide attacks became a standard tactic of guerrilla warfare in the 80s through the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who supposedly practice Hinduism. The first suicide attack on Israeli soil was perpetrated in 1972, by the Japanese Red Army; supposedly the product of the Confucian 'civilisational' religion (ibid.,

91). Hence, that it is rather difficult, and it could be misleading, to link suicide attacks to specific religions or cultures.

A different possible interpretation could be that the real genesis of Al-Qaeda violence has more to do with a Western tradition of individual and pessimistic revolt for an elusive ideal world than with the Quranic conception of martyrdom (Asad 2006, 41; Gray 2007, 5). It is certainly striking that the delusional overemphasis on Islam is peculiar in the clichéd reference to the 72 houris, perpetual virgins, and so on, who are expecting the martyr. In my view, it is highly improbable that the two Palestinian women who committed suicide attacks in 2002 were driven by the prospect of houris. The figure of the lonely 'metaphysical' terrorist who blew himself up with his bomb appeared in Russia at the end of the 19th century and it was soon treated as a literary topic by Malraux in the *La Condition Humain* (1933).

Put another way, Al-Qaeda's type of 'jihad' could be more related to the ethos of a Western terrorist, given that Al-Qaeda's pool of recruitment has more to do with the West than with the Middle East (Asad 2006, 29). It follows that the discourse and practice of British Islamism, and of Islamist parties in the UK, have to be located and 'discoursed' in a specific context and within a geographical space: the British one. The reference to the global 'Ummah' is rhetorical (Marranci 2008, 103) and part of a political discourse: the political groups can certainly discourse through the vocabulary of religion, but this does not make them 'fundamentalist' and terrorist. In other words, analysis ought to consider and focus on their political, without censoring and neglecting it behind religious categories of analysis (as is done within culturalist-orientalist frameworks).

My hope is that the following pages of this dissertation will contribute to such an analysis, which will serve as a prelude to framing signifying representations and discursive, contested, contextual practices, thus enabling a more 'sensate' democracy where diversity and difference are not suppressed and ignored, but investigated and represented.

CHAPTER V

The un-political discourses of being political

This chapter and the next one open the second part of this dissertation on the Islamists' 'self-representation': the discourses and practices of British Islamists facing and *confronting* the UK Government on Islamist and Islamic issues.

The findings presented here are the product of over two years of fieldwork, spent meeting and interviewing a large number of Islamists, in various locations, within and outside London.

I have divided the Islamists into two separate groups, according to their approach to the British political and public life: the participationists -- groups willing to take part in the British political and public life (featured in this chapter), and the rejectionists -- groups rejecting the British political system and planning to subvert it (featured in chapter 6).

The participationist parties act politically (as they are willing to take part in the elections), but paradoxically, show a certain reticence in adopting any political label themselves. They opt to remain in the category of the 'faith groups', with a collaborative and non-confrontational approach. In doing so, they emulate and mirror the same dominant culturalist-orientalist discourse, which depoliticizes and marginalises them.

As my dissertation argues, they put themselves in the position of being 'scrutinized' and represented according to the dichotomous culturalist-orientalist framework of analysis, which either represents them as 'good Muslims' (non-political religious groups) or as 'bad Muslims' (terrorists, a national security threat, and therefore, still non-political).

The paradox in this behaviour consists of the fact that, the groups themselves act politically in terms of political practices and agendas (domestically and internationally), but refuse to acknowledge their political discourse in dealing with the Government and the dominant discourse. There is a sort of fear or repression of a political identity, which is exorcized by the Government and repressed by the parties themselves. My dissertation explains this dynamic through the concept of a fetishism for politics: a desire, repressed by the dominated (the Islamist parties) and exorcized by the dominant (the Government and the culturalist-orientalist approach), for purposes of control.

The rejectionist parties featured in the next chapter nurture a similar fetishism for politics, but their attitude toward the British government is discourses through a rejection. My

argument is that such a confrontational approach places them in a similar depoliticized, 'weak' position when facing the dominant discourse, which, in turn, represents them as 'religious fundamentalists', terrorists, and still non-political.

Here again there is a mirroring effect between the dominant representation and the self-representation of the dominated. Even if the reflecting surfaces (the images) of the participationists and rejectionists appear as being opposites (the first being collaborative and the second being rejectionist) the outcome is similar in both cases -- their depoliticization and their lack of 'incisiveness' in the political panorama, resulting in a broken dialogue between them and the Government.

The Islamic Human Rights Commission

As mentioned in the introduction (in the 'methodology' section), reflecting on how to collect and report data about the experience of the 'other' has not secured my 'objectivity' or impartiality in conducting this research. However, it has helped me to better understand my own limits as a researcher, and the contextual, contingent, and inherently political aspects of the present research topic.

The political is deeply entangled within the research process itself: in the face-to-face, first-hand collection of data and information, in the understanding and in the accounting of it, in the difficult acknowledgement of my own stake in the analysis. This awareness of limits has not foreclosed a deeper comprehension of the subject, it has instead opened new doors, offered the keys for a less essentialised, less structured but more progressive and fruitful method of inquiry and analysis.

This was my mindset when I started analysing the first group of Islamist parties, namely, groups willing to participate in the British political and public life and as such intrinsically political. The first party to be featured in the present study is the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC).

The IHRC essentially began life when it split off from the Muslim Parliament of Great Britain (MPGB) which was founded by Kalim Siddiqui. Siddiqui's death was followed by some rifts and tensions within the MPGB, which led to the defection of the MPGB's human rights committee alongwith its leader, Shadjareh, who then founded the IHRC.

At its very beginning, the MPGB was definitely characterised by an outspoken confrontational attitude towards the Government. The Rushdie affair saw the climax of the

MPGB approach, which accused the UK political system of being inherently Islamo-phobic. However, this kind of approach was not limited to just the establishment but was also directed toward other Islamist parties. Remarkably, Siddiqui stated that he would not go 'cap in hand' to other organizations that were 'alienated' from him; it was advisable that they 'remained out' (Siddiqui 1993, 2). It would not be overstating the case to say that there was a certain lack of 'collaborative' approach in his political attitude. He had an urgent sense of being invested with the role of the leader and, as such, of 'dictating' the rules and making the choices.

An aggressive attitude of this kind backfired and the immediate outcome was that the Government ignored the body and the Home Office Minister Patten dismissed the venture by expressing the hope that all law-abiding Muslims would reject such 'nonsense' (Keppel 1997, 144). This led to a high degree of isolation for the MPGB, as was visible during the 1993 MPGB Bosnia conference which had 3000 people in attendance (including speakers even from pro-Ikwan around the world), but was boycotted by the other Islamist organizations, such as the UMO, Bradford Council of Mosques, UKIM, and the Islamist Foundation. In the words of one Islamist leader (Q-News 1993, 7), the gathering was boycotted as a way of denying recognition to, and ostracizing, Siddiqui's leadership. Participation in the event 'would have given Siddiqui precisely the credibility he does not deserve' (Ehsan 1993, 6). Besides, Siddiqui's championing of 'Islamic Iran' was something that many Sunni Muslims could not accept (Philips 1996, 16). In other words, the entire political discourse and the practices of the early Islamist scene in the UK seemed to be revolving around personal struggles for power and leadership, something not too different 'structurally' from the stories and experiences of other political parties, despite their different ideological orientations and the rather secularised origins and formations. Here again, my argument is that the 'Islamic' element has to be comprehended and positioned - within and because of a political practice and discourse -- as a struggle *for* power, according to the various political programmes and mainly according to different degrees of preoccupation with taking *the* power. It is the culturalist-orientalist approach, which tries to deprive Islamism of its 'political' dimension and excludes it from the political arena and competition, under the category of faith groups.

This was the Islamist panorama when the IHRC was founded, amid power and leadership struggles. In the words of Philips, 'the IHRC's main achievement was to move away from the MPGB's confrontational nature and to remain firmly interdenominational' (Philips 1996, 8). Likewise, it has shown a more collaborative attitude with other faith-based groups,

sharing the same perspective on human rights with the Sikh Human Rights Group or the anti-Zionist Orthodox Jewish Group. For example, in June 2005, they organized a conference on the theme 'Towards a new liberation theology: reflections on Palestine', which was aimed at 'discussing the role religion plays in the lives of peoples, struggling for justice looking at other liberation struggles' (IHRC, 2005). The speakers included an Evangelical Anglican vicar, an Irish Catholic priest, Orthodox Rabbis, an Israeli lecturer, a Greek Orthodox priest and an American Sunni Imam. The event, which gained great appreciation from other Islamist groups, and even more kudos from other 'faith groups', was meant to demonstrate -- in the words of the IHRC leader -- the 'political independence of the organization, the lack of affiliation to any other party or government. A main concern of the IHRC is the rights of Muslims in the UK and abroad, in accordance with Islamic teachings and doctrine' (IHRC, 2005). The overall impression, however, is that the group itself has been refusing any political label, mostly opting to remain in the category of the 'faith groups'. Taking a collaborative and non-confrontational approach, it has sought refuge in the realm of the 'religious groups', which are not interested in politics as 'struggle for power, dictated by human greed'.²³ It is hard not to question such an understanding of 'politics', given that there is a clear support for Palestine as a liberation struggle; the origins and aims of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict having a dubious role of religion, it being (in my opinion) a war of national independence or 'post-colonial liberation' (Massari 1979, 82). Such an attitude could be elaborated in terms of the 'colonized' being the exact image of the colonizer's imagination (Memmi 1969-2003, 189); participationists like the IHRC unconsciously mirror the culturalist-orientalist approach that depoliticizes and ostracises them. It 'allows' them to act only within the domain of faith-groups, which reads as being non-political (Varisco 2005, 78). The practice of self-representation, performed by the party itself, reflects the representation offered by the dominant discourse, in this case by the UK Government. My argument is that both parties are locked in a *fetishism* for politics, which is repressed by the dominated while being denied and exercised by the dominant, as a practice of control. The outcome of this attitude is a dangerous and risky dynamic, which depoliticises and ostracizes the Islamist parties on the one hand, and threatens national security, on the other. In each case, both actors are doomed to fail: the Islamist parties end up being politically irrelevant and the Government becomes unable to protect national security.

²³ An interview with Mr. Emdad Rahman, a former activist of the IHRC, is contained in the appendix.

It is interesting that the parties featured in this chapter perform political practices but they silence political discourses: they act politically at the domestic and international levels but they do not 'discourse' politically (Buck-Morss 2003, 36).

Since its inception, the IHRC has produced reports on various international and domestic issues; its declared main aim being to 'look into discrimination cases in Britain as part of our campaign to make religious discrimination illegal' (IHRC 1996). In this specific regard, the IHRC also achieved something that Siddiqui never managed -- securing publication of its report on religious discrimination, *Anti-Muslim Discrimination and Hostility in the United Kingdom, 2000*. It was launched by Lord Ahmed at a meeting in the House of Lords that was addressed by the Home Office Minister Mike O'Brien. The launch of the report clearly marked an end to the lack of access to Government and the hostile attitude that had hindered the MPGB in the previous years. Notably, the report concerned what was considered to be the most immediate problem confronting British Muslims: domestic Islamophobia, something that allegedly the 'isolation of the MPGB never allowed it to address in any practical or effective way' (Bodi 2000, 12-13).

The IHRC has also produced reports on the Oldham Riots (2001) and the BNP. Moreover, it conducted a strong campaign for 'Prisoners of Faith', i.e., 'Muslim political prisoners' around the world, including those at Guantanamo Bay (IHRC 2000, 4-6). My point here is that 'campaigning' for political prisoners is certainly a 'political' activity, regardless of the fact that the prisoners themselves are Muslim and therefore defined by a religious membership. By silencing their own political discourse, the party's chance of having a voice in the British political arena is deeply undermined or mostly self-denied. The hostile attitude of the MPGB towards the Government and the confrontational and slightly egocentric approach shown by its leader Siddiqui did not achieve many results in terms of political influence on the politics of the UK Government. However, I think that the IHRC approach is also damaging in the long term. A depoliticized approach is equally counter-productive in terms of representation, recognition and engagement in the political arena (Grillo 2003, 170). The outcomes of these two attitudes have been the following -- either being ostracized by the establishment (Siddiqui case), or alternatively, being 'allowed' to speak, after being regarded as a faith-group, that implies 'non-political', and consequently, non-threatening (Mamdani 2004, 34).

The IHRC criticism of human rights abuses has not been restricted to *Western* governments (such as France on the hijab issue or other 'liberal Muslim countries' such as Turkey on similar matters), it has also condemned 'militant' Islamic regimes such as Sudan for

Human Rights abuses in Darfur, 'a fact that makes our work more credible' (IHRC 2004, 8). However, a declaration such as the following denotes a certain degree of self-orientalism by the IHRC:

'the situation in Sudan has been a crunch issue for Muslims everywhere. The initial silence from Muslims evidenced a combination of a lack of knowledge of the situation, and a reluctance to take a stance when *Muslims* are the *oppressors*' (IHRC 2004, 6-8)

By referring to the 'oppressors' as 'Muslims' and by appealing to the rest of the Muslims (*qua* Muslims) for a decisive action, the IHRC's stance reflects a culturalist-orientalist approach (Said 1978, 299). It is a relatively myopic way of conducting a political analysis, which degrades the 'political credentials' of its discourse and undermines the practices of its political agents (El Zein 1977, 230).

In this same context, Shadjareh expounded the IHRC position on the relationship between Islam, human rights and democracy in a presentation in the year 2000. In his view, the most important element in the meaning of 'Islamic Human Rights' is: to stand against 'oppressors, whoever they are and wherever they are, even when this means standing witness against ourselves and our own people...The whole of the sharia law deals with the question of implementing justice and mizaan (balance)' (IHRC, 2000).

It has been noted that Shadjareh's points on justice and resistance to oppressors are very close to the Shi'ia positions. 'The emphasis on divine justice has influenced not only the theoretical aspects of Shi'ism, for the Shi'ia regard justice as such so fundamental an aspect of Islam that they have often called for its implementation in society' (Shomali 2003, 93). Another surprised commentator claims that there is no reference to Khomeini's theory of the Vilayet-i-Faqihi in the IHRC discourse (McRoy 2006, 121). In other words, within this (culturalist-orientalist) framework, either Shadjareh's discourse neglects some important theological/ideological aspects or alternatively his discourse shows clear signs of plagiarism.

That the main priority of the IHRC might consist of addressing subjects from a practical perspective and not from a theological/ideological angle, is not contemplated. Further, the reflection that it is difficult and mystifying, within the Islamist discourses and practices, to draw a line between the Shi'ia and the Sunni 'fronts', does not even enter the analysis (Marranci 2008, 45). Such analysis is deeply affected by a culturalist-orientalist attitude and by several stereotypes and misconceptions of Islamist discourses and practices (Hasan 2002, 6).

Even so, the IHRC's approach toward the use and implementation of Sharia law appears to be much more contextualised, even though there are still some aspects of an apologetic emphasis and a culturalist-orientalist approach, where 'Islam' becomes a category, which 'explains' but also 'essentializes' everything (Marranci 2008, 7).

The IHRC also reproduced an interview with Sheik Ibraheem Zakzaky, who firmly stated that 'Islamic law is not meant to be practiced under an un-Islamic system', warning against the abusive implementation of Sharia in order 'to oppress people' (IHRC, 1999).

Likewise, the IHRC has also supported calls for Iran to improve the treatment of religious minorities by encouraging the Islamic Republic's authorities to 'continue their efforts towards the full realization of the Human Rights of the religious minority citizens of the country as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights' (ibid.,).

In relation to *jihad*, the IHRC affirms that it wages a 'political jihad', which mostly signifies, in practice, the involvement in, and support of, Muslim rights and political causes in the UK and abroad. Strikingly, this amounts to a full declaration of a political engagement but still there is a clear division between the category of religion and politics. As it emerges, the IHRC is willing to support the 'political' within a faith-group discourse. It does, in fact, support the political rights of 'Muslims' as religious subjects but it refuses to be called political (Grillo 2003, 158), to advance its political rights, and to stand as a political party. My observation is that such an approach is somewhat schizophrenic. It also confirms my hypothesis of a sort of fetishism for politics, nurtured by the party itself, which performs a political practice, but refuses to speak 'loudly' (openly) about a political discourse. It advances, instead, a sort of 'community-faith group' discourse, displaying a self-ghettoization attitude (Damasio 2000, 56). This is typical -- I argue -- of certain kinds of politics of identity practices and discourses (Marranci 2008, 55). These are generally hailed in a period of multiculturalist 'frenzy' but abruptly criminalised in a period of turmoil and political instability, as the events following the 9-11 and 7-7 attacks have clearly shown (Asad 1993, 268).

This position was clarified in the aftermath of 9-11, which the IHRC unequivocally condemned. However, the organization specified that whilst its condemnation of Al-Qaida was beyond doubt, there remained the need to make a distinction between Al-Qaida and what Al-Qaida considered legitimate resistance movements. In this respect, the reference was to Palestine. Its own contribution to the Palestinian struggle has led the IHRC to picket the Zionist Federation's Celebration of Israel. It has also taken part in other pro-Palestinian events and it was very active in the Stop the War rallies. To assume that the movement is

not 'political' but just a 'faith' group supporting 'Muslim rights in the UK and abroad' -- for the fact that its 'theological' and 'ideological' apparatus is poorly organized (McRoy 2006, 132) -- amounts to a culturalist-orientalist position. Likewise, on the matter of self-representation, the fact that the IHRC declares itself as just 'religious' and fighting for 'Muslim rights' because they inwardly consider politics to be despicable (*fetishism*), equally amounts to an essentialist position, which forecloses political action and denies the possibility of being publicly heard and represented (Damasio 2002, 116).

On the one hand, in relation to the critiques of IHRC for its lack of ideological apparatus, a sensible counter-argument might be that the political discourses and practices of Western, secular political movements have rarely been blamed for their progressive 'detachment' from ideological positions; on the contrary, they have been praised (Varisco 2005, 80). If the reason behind such disappointment concerning the IHRC is based on the consideration that their 'ideology' (discourse) is in fact a religion, and thus, untouchable in its dogmas, then we have the proof that such 'religion' lent to politics (Islamism) is not different from any other political discourse and practice. As such, it constantly changes and progresses by working through the practices of its agents, as well as being inherently and inescapably political.

On the other hand, in relation to some positions of the IHRC, it can be said that it is counterproductive to take part in the political struggle and practice but refuse to discourse 'political' discourses, by hiding behind 'religious categories' (Grillo 2003, 173). To a certain extent, this amounts to the same 'blindness' as is shown by the detractors of Islamist parties. The IHRC is responsible for 'allowing' the 'establishment' to allow them to speak, for not discoursing an Islamist discourse, and for letting the security threats and terrorist attacks speak on their behalf.

Muslim Association of Britain

The Muslim Association of Britain was founded in 1997 and soon achieved both notoriety and favour among the other Islamist parties. Its main ideologue is the Palestinian-born Azzam Tamimi, an Islamist intellectual. Tamimi runs a London-based Islamist thinktank, the Institute of Islamic Political thought, which is mainly concerned with issues related to the Middle East, specifically Palestine, but it also tackles the relationship between Islam and Democracy, a subject on which Tamimi (1993, 2000) has widely written and

published. The other main figure is Anas Altikriti, son of an exiled Iraqi politician. Once a President of the group, he stood down to run as a RESPECT candidate in the 2004 European elections.

The MAB has experienced two main episodes of controversy. Louise Ellman, the Labour MP for Liverpool Riverside and a member of the Labour Friends of Israel used the protection of parliamentary privilege to attack the MAB accusing its leading members of 'anti-Semitism' and terrorist links. She stated in Parliament that 'the House should not adjourn until it has debated the important issue of the role that *Islamicist* organizations play in inciting racial hatred in the United Kingdom through propagating anti-Semitism under the guise of anti-Zionism...It is time that the spotlight fell on the Muslim Association of Britain...All of them are connected to terrorist organizations, Hamas' (Parliament Publication, 2004). This soon led to furious denunciations, not only by the MAB, but also by the Muslim Council of Britain, which 'rejected utterly' Ellman's comments, by affirming that the MAB had always been well-known for their balanced views and admirable work in the Muslim community. In relation to Mrs. Ellman's wrath, the MCB suggested that perhaps the true reason behind the episode was the crucial role played by the MAB in drawing public attention to the illegal and quite brutal Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands (MAB 2003). Likewise, in a letter to *The Guardian*, Altikriti rejected the accusation that the MAB was a supporter of terrorist organizations and he clarified that the MAB was transparent about supporting all oppressed people and had never shied from criticizing states and individual who create death and wreck. He also stated that their many supporters and sympathisers include Jews (Altikriti 2003).

The MAB gave a concrete expression to this last clause during the 2005 general election when it supported Mark Krantz, the RESPECT candidate for Stretford and Urmston. In this specific case, Altikriti stated: 'that Mark Krantz who is a Jew, is standing for Respect and I, a Muslim, give him my full support, shows that what really matters is showing respect for people' (Respect Coalition, 2005). My argument is that this is a clear sign of a decisive political engagement and shows a determined will to be 'political' among other political actors. On the other hand, it could be argued that Altikriti's words still show a certain legacy of a culturalist-orientalist framework; otherwise, there would not be any need to stress that a 'Jew' and a 'Muslim' could unproblematically be part of the same political party. My point here is that the framework of this (his) discourse is still the culturalist-orientalist approach. The Islamist (and not Islamic) discourse does not emerge as a

counter-argument to this, but as an exception that needs to be reasoned and justified, allowed by the dominant. This sort of attitude is deeply depoliticizing (Varisco 2005, 7).

The other major row that engulfed the MAB was the visit by the Sheik Yusuf-al-Qaradawi, arguably one of the most influential Sunni scholars in the world. When he arrived in Britain for a series of meetings, *The Sun* newspaper ran the headline 'the Evil has landed' (The Sun, 2004). At the MAB conference, Tamimi observed 'the negative publicity that had bedevilled Qaradawi's visit to the UK, in a campaign initiated by the board of Deputies and faithfully executed by politicians such as Michael Howard and Louise Ellman, and media such as *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail*' (MAB 2004). The controversy largely surrounded his support for Palestinian and Iraqi insurgents, though Qaradawi clearly distinguished their *jihād* from that of Al-Qaida, which he utterly denounced (Marranci 2006, 67). The media coverage of the event and the government attitude toward the arrival of Qaradawi demonstrated a general lack of information and a tendency to generalise and stereotype when it comes to the 'Islamicist' discourses (Trepagnier 2006, 78). In other words, the culturalist-orientalist approach was definitely widespread and functioning in a way to exclude any possibility of dialogue: by not acknowledging the 'other' as a potential interlocutor (Grillo 2003, 166).

In this context, another recurrent accusation against the MAB is worth mentioning -- the links between the MAB and the Muslim Brotherhood. This constitutes another example of stereotyped representations imposed on the Islamist discourses, and thus, practices. It is undeniably a fact that many MAB founders were connected to the Iqwan but they have clearly contextualised their beliefs and praxis for the UK situation (Marranci 2006, 66). It is certainly vital to highlight the MB influence on the MAB Islamist discourse. Similarly, it is also essential to recognize, stress and understand how this influence has been translated and embodied in British Islamist practice (this concept is neglected and denied by the culturalist-orientalist approach (El Zein 1977, 229).

Aptly, in a statement replying to an attack on the group by Anthony Browne in *The Times* of 11 August 2004, the MAB referred to the intellectual background of the group and specifically its links to the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood. The article affirmed that MAB was proud of the diversity among its members, in terms of origins, cultures, traditions, schools of thought, ages, education, skills and specialities. It did not deny that among them are those who, back in their original countries, were members of the M.B. It stated that one of these founding members is Dr. Kamal Helbawi who was elected as the

first president of MAB in 1997 for two years in free elections, which 'Browne seems to think are not applicable for Muslims' (Mabonline, 2005).

Browne's article is a clear example of Islamophobic and culturalist-orientalist press when it calls Islamist movements -- and in particular MAB -- fascist, and compares Islamist policies and agenda towards the 'Jewish' people with Hitler's *shoa*. The mere fact that Qaradawi was invited to speak by MAB is presented as a clear proof of MAB's 'fundamentalist' politics and the dangerous radicalism inside Britain. The underlying assumption is that the Muslim Brotherhood is a terrorist organization, which follows the teachings of Said Qutb. What Browne grossly fails to notice is that Qutb's ideology and corpus of thought is not held as 'sacred' even by the Ikwan themselves across the Muslim countries (Mamdani 2004, 77). Certainly there are some fringes of the MB, who have followed Qutb's ideas in their political discourses and practices and taken up 'jihad' against the Egyptian government, but this does not allow a generalization in relation to the rest of the Brotherhood and does not imply that sympathisers of the MB elsewhere are about to take up arms against the government. A position like the one held by Browne is certainly uninformed and deceiving: it is culturalist-orientalist and Islamophobic. My argument is that an ideology, a corpus of thought (Qutb's, for example), does not mean its 'literal' exact translation into a practice. The way the political discourse is 'discoursed' into practices and through the agents' practices is shaped and developed (Damasio 2000, 56), gives the meaning (a signifying practice): along with this process, a discursive formation can also be enhanced (Fortin,Vieira,Trmbling 2006, 8). If this holds true for the variously inspired Marxist- Leninist, communist parties around the world that are not all synonymous with RAF, Red-Brigade, ELN, FARC, Sendero Luminoso (SL), 17 November (to name just a few), then it has to be deemed equally true for the several diverse Islamist parties around the world (Asad 2006, 8).

To confirm this, MAB itself declared that despite the fact that it considers Qutb as one of the most prominent Muslim thinkers and intellects of his time, he is not undisputable, because no one in Islam -- apart from the Holy Prophet Muhammad -- enjoys such a status. Many scholars, thinkers and intellectuals disagreed with Qutb on a variety of issues and they still do.

In this regard, MAB also explained its relations with the MB, by declaring its appreciation for their ideology in terms of urging dialogue with others, rejection of terrorism, and respecting those who differ in views or opinions. At the same time, MAB 'reserves the right to disagree with or divert from the opinion and line of MB, or any other organization,

Muslim or otherwise on any other issue at hand' (Mabonline 2004). As further proof of the fact that MAB ideological apparatus is the product of different intellectual influences and Islamist discourses, and not an offshore branch of MB, the MAB also acknowledges an ideological affinity, in some respects, with Jama'at figures such as Mawdudi and Murad. In other words, behind and beyond ideological affiliation and discursive references, what clearly emerges is a fully 'political' practice, and as a result of this, a firm determination to get involved with the British politics in order to influence and change the Government approach toward Muslim and Islamist issues. One aspect in particular has caught my attention as a distinguishing feature of MAB. In its agenda, there is always a clear and strong emphasis on political activism and interaction with the wider British civil society (Islamist practice), but there is never the clear admission of a political (Islamist) identity as such, beyond the protection and defence of 'Muslim' rights in the UK and in the world. It is certainly interesting to have a close look at MAB objectives and the methodology used in order to achieve their goals. MAB states its targets as follows:

- To promote and propagate the principles of positive Muslim interactions with all elements of society to reflect, project and convey the message of Islam;
- To be part of the wider British Islamic movement and a supporter of all other ventures that agree on the proper principles of Da'wah and human collaboration;
- To affirm the principles of Muslim citizenship and the firm undeniable roots of Islam and Muslims within British society

What do we want?

- For British Muslims to act as the first line of defence for Islam and Muslims all over the world;
- For a constructive dialogue to be initiated between Muslims and elements of the 'modern society' for the betterment of all concerned;
- For Muslims to become involved in the making of laws, the shaping of political and social decision making procedures and the installation of government (Mabonline, 1999)

These points clearly indicate how the MAB focuses on interacting with other Islamist-Muslim groups, with the rest of the British civil society, and with all the other political parties, notwithstanding their ideological affiliation, and therefore, divergences. The MAB

has reportedly been very successful in this, gaining widespread support and increasing very rapidly the number of its members. *The Guardian* has defined MAB as one of the organizations that has totally changed the way the war in Iraq has been reported, and the former London Mayor Ken Livingston has repeatedly extolled MAB for 'its unflinching commitment towards a stronger participation of the different Muslim groups in the British public and political life' (Mabonline, 2003). As mentioned earlier, MAB reaped most of its success in the aftermath of the Iraqi invasion. Its strategy of forming 'cross-confessional' and cross-ideological alliances placed the group in an advantageous position for attracting disaffected activists. The MAB also became an important member of the Stop the War coalition, with Tamimi being one of the major speakers at its rallies and Altikriti chairing them. The centrality of this involvement has represented the best publicity for the organization, since it linked MAB's efforts and agenda with the amazingly successful mobilization of the masses for the anti-war demonstrations. My point is that, if the MAB's practice has been convincingly political, its discourse has lacked the same conviction, because it swings between being a pan-Muslim, cross-ideological group and a grass roots, civil-society organization.

A further and interesting development was the emergence of a 'Muslim'-leftist alliance in the shape of the RESPECT coalition. This alliance has been variously criticized and rebuked as an 'unlikely marriage of convenience between Islamists and ultra-secularist, even atheist, Left'. The argument goes that the 'latter is usually associated with support for abortion and homosexuality, whereas Muslims emphasise traditional family values' (Browne 2004). The MAB strongly supported George Galloway's election bid in East London; it is certainly worth noting that George Galloway himself strongly opposes abortion as well. So perhaps, it might be argued that there is something more than a simple marriage of convenience between an 'atheist party' and a '*Muslim*' group, that their *political* discourses are not forbidden from interacting and their *political* practices are not banned from collaborating, unless the framework of analysis adopted is deeply 'essentialising' and substantially culturalist-orientalist.

In this context, MAB also advised people on how to vote in other seats, listing the supported candidates on the basis of their opposition to the war, to the 'recently proposed Anti-terror legislation, and to the call for the immediate withdrawal of the British troops in Iraq' (Mabonline 2005).

Certainly, it is rather difficult to assess what impact this had on the Muslim community, but this represented a strong expression of the MAB's commitment to be involved in 'political

and social decision-making procedures and the installation of government as well as an act of da'wah, in terms of propagating the *Muslim* position to the wider community and furthermore it was an act of jihad'. Here again, the emphasis is placed on the practice and on the activism, but it is still discourses as a Muslim position to be divulged to the rest of the society (Haddad and Qurqmazi 2000, 78). That means it remains within the claustrophobic boundaries of the community/faith-group discourse.

By mobilising the public -- Muslims and non-Muslims -- against the Iraq war and by translating this into the electoral realm, it acted as *mujahidin*. The MAB approvingly quoted the words of Salma Yaqub about her involvement in the anti-war movement: 'I actually saw it as our jihad really' (Mabonline 2005). This allowed the MAB to gain a wider popularity; to a certain extent, it also represented a clear point of connection with the Iqwan strategy as summarized by Tamimi, in the sense of adopting 'the strategy of peaceful and gradual reform of society and state' (Tamimi 2005). The MAB also greatly supported the RESPECT candidate Salma Yaqub, by enormously praising her campaign and her political agenda. In the MAB's terms, her campaign was a display of:

'people-power and real democracy in action...It was the manner in which her campaign seemed to usher in a new era in politics for the people of her constituency, a form of politics with greater involvement from the youth and women, in which people felt they could speak and vote out of conscience rather out than traditional tribal or religious ties. This was not just tactical voting...this was a real movement for change' (Mabonline, 2005).

Regarding jihad, the MAB has never expressed support for particular movements or Islamist parties. However, Tamimi has described himself as a sympathiser and supporter of HAMAS. His papers include a detailed account of HAMAS jihad, including martyrdom operations. He also wrote a laudatory examination of Hizbullah's victory against Israeli occupation, remarking that 'the Israeli humiliating defeat at the hand of Hizbullah has proven beyond doubt that the Hebrew state understands no language but that of force' (Tamimi 2002). On the other hand, Tamimi strongly condemned 'the atrocities committed in America on 11 September', and rebuked those Muslims 'whose hatred for America prevents them from recognising the savagery and inhumanity of this attack' (Tamimi 2001, 35). My point is that this argument is not sustainable, that there is a dichotomy or a schizophrenia in this attitude, as has been affirmed elsewhere (McRoy 2006, 56). It is a political, 'discursive', and contextualised understanding of jihad, which pushed the MAB to

oppose the occupation in Iraq and unreservedly condemn the killing of British hostage Ken Bingley by insurgents (MAB press release, 2004).

It is also worth noticing that the MAB attitude of active engagement with British civil society and politics has been severely criticized and condemned by some Islamist parties as well, like the Saved Sect, which defined the MAB as *munaafiqeen* or 'hypocrites'. Likewise, the fact that MAB has both Sunni and Shi'ia members has variously been seen as a lack of credible 'Islamist pedigree' (Shareeah 2005). Another interesting aspect worth mentioning is that the Finsbury Park Mosque, long a hub of Salafi members and Supporters of Sharia headquarters, was taken over by the MAB supporters in 2005. This event clearly demonstrates how the Islamist arena in the UK, as elsewhere, is variegated, politically diverse and antagonistic. It is not monolithic in its political discourses and practices and it cannot be analysed as a uniform reality. In other words, there is nothing new, peculiar or different from all the other political movements or parties, which might share some fundamental ideological principles but differ in their discursive and signifying practices. Islamist discourses too are historical, contingent, contested and contextualised, unlike the representations offered by a dominant culturalist-orientalist approach, which depoliticizes them through their representation either as religious/faith-groups or as terrorists. Nevertheless, my argument is that the MAB's practice of self-representation -- despite the strong emphasis on being politically active -- is politically disempowering too (Damasio 2002, 112); it shows a lack of assertiveness in discoursing its political discourse, by always feeling the need to justify its political stance. It still remains within the culturalist-orientalist framework, which it constantly refers to, in order to be approved and allowed.

Muslim Council Of Britain

Following a meeting in Birmingham on 30 April 1994, the National Interim Committee on Muslim Unity (NIMCU) was formed to address the issues of how to coordinate Muslim activities and provide effective representation. The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) was the fruit of these discussions. In a document titled *Invitation*, the outcome is described as a:

'country-wide process of consultation, which was the first of its kind to poll Muslim opinion across the whole of the United Kingdom...The Consultation process provided a clear signal from the community. It showed that the majority of Muslims in Britain felt that there is the need for a greater co-

ordination and unity...The Muslim Council of Britain is a practical outcome of this process of consultation' (Muslim Council of Britain 1996, 12).

What emerges quite clearly from these few lines, is that the origin of the body itself is deeply entangled with a strong political determination and a political practice which aims at becoming involved in the political debate. The process which gave birth to the Muslim Council of Britain has occurred through 'consultations' among several Muslim organizations; that definitely gives MCB a very official and representative character among the 'Muslim community'. The first reflection here is that even while the determination and the agenda are characterized by a strong activism and a determination to be politically involved, the discourse remains firmly anchored to a 'Muslim community' register.

In relation to this and to the genealogy of the MCB, there is another relevant document to take into consideration: *Seeking the Common Good*. Here the MCB justifies its existence in very alarmed tones as 'a question of the very survival of the community' (MCB 1997, 13). Specifically, the main threats perceived are termed as: Islamophobia, the events in Bosnia, and the Rushdie affair, which played a paramount role in urging the formation of the MCB, thereby demonstrating the need for *Muslims*²⁴ to take up political action, to be politically active as Muslims. This development is confirmed by a clear reference to *The Satanic Verses* and the subsequent crises like the Gulf War and Bosnia, where 'the publication of grossly offensive and sacrilegious material have shown the need and the value of greater coordination within the Muslim community' (MCB 1997, 13). The Rushdie connection -- which has been defined in the first part of this thesis as the first episode of an Islamist practice in Britain -- was made even more explicit at the inaugural conference of the body in 1997, where the 'Government's support for *The Satanic Verses*' was pointed out as having caused 'deep hurt and offence to Muslims'. In the MCB's view, the other relevant issues in need of being tackled 'are the Government's refusal to fund Muslim schools in line with the opportunities enjoyed by other communities, and its rejection of outlawing religious discrimination' (Muslimnews, 1997).

It is unambiguous how the instances under scrutiny constitute very specific political matters, in need of being politically addressed and dealt with, by taking a political stand against the Government. What emerges powerfully is the urgency of a Muslim engagement with British politics in order to safeguard 'Muslim' rights and the Muslim community's own survival; something which starts from Muslim participation in British

²⁴ My emphasis.

public and political life. What is missing is a political discourse; Islamism is presented only as an exit-strategy for the community's own survival (Essed 1991,7). It does not emerge as an assertion, but as a response to certain circumstances that threaten the Muslim community in Britain.

At a meeting in Bradford on 25 May 1996, when the representatives of various formal Muslim groups decided to officially form the Muslim Council of Britain, there was a strong and unanimous rejection of any 'ghettoisation' by insisting that 'Muslims must be concerned with the wider society in which we live' (MCB 1997, 8). This immediately identifies the MCB as a party willing to be politically visible, heard and recognized. However, my argument is that this reasoning still displays a strong attitude of 'ghettoisation' because 'Muslims' are represented as a separate body in need of integration with the wider society.

As a result of the MCB's active approach, one of its proposed activities was to effectively campaign in public on issues of shared concern, so there could never be 'any doubt that the million Muslims or more in Britain can when necessary be mobilised' (MCB 1996, 9). Very clearly, the MCB was established to form and develop a distinct, united *Islamic*²⁵ identity for Muslims in Britain: 'to create more avenues for Muslims of all cultural backgrounds, to associate and interact to remove all racial, ethnic, national barriers and develop true Islamic identity and strength on the basis of that identity' (MCB 1996, 11). What these lines indicate is that the question of racial or ethnic classification was paramount for the MCB; it was expressed in a statement by the group on the issue of including the question of religious affiliation in the 2001 census.

This was considered to be extremely important for the entire Muslim community, whereas 'the question on ethnicity in 1991 Census is increasingly irrelevant to Muslims in Britain as our identity is linked to our faith rather than ethnic origin' (MCB 1998, 15). Here again is a clear statement of how 'Islam' is lived, discoursed and practiced as a 'religious' identity, which cannot be merged with other 'identity' categories as ethnos or race (Marranci 2008, 56). The reflection here is that despite a definite political practice and agenda, the MCB is still locked within certain categories of analysis, where ethnos and race are replaced by religion (Grillo 2003, 112): the missing link is still the political discourse (and representation) as Islamists. The question on religious affiliation in the census was certainly a major MCB concern, which led the organization to strongly lobby the

²⁵ My emphasis.

Government, by specifically declaring that British Muslims, specifically British-born Muslims identify themselves on the basis of faith rather than ethnicity or national origins (MCB 1998, 18).

The MCB has also pronounced its critique of Britain's domestic and foreign policy as being 'informed by the advice of its old school experts' (UKACIA 1997, 9). Specifically, these remarks were strongly voiced during the Rushdie Affair, which also constituted an exemplary proof of the power battle between the different Muslim organizations (mostly revealing their lack of power and influence). In this realm, the MCB was formed as a means of dealing 'directly with the Government on issues of religion discrimination' (Taylor 1998, 124). The fact that the doors have been opened to MCB has raised the prospect of some progress being made in this area and the proposed Religious Incitement Bill has represented a strong signal of this.

In terms of its ideological affiliation, the MCB has often been regarded as a pro-Jam'at²⁶ organization. According to *Q-news*, the MCB is strongly dominated by pro-Jama'at elements, as the 'CWC (Central Working Committee) shows that the majority belong to or have sympathies with a UK organization which is a sidekick of the Jama'at-e-Islami in Pakistan' (Faraz 1998, 21). It is certainly the case that a considerable number of organizations affiliated to the body are Jama'at related and it has been also said that the creation of MCB was something of a palace coup in British Islam by Mawdudists (Q-News 1998, 15). However, it would be unfair to view the MCB as wholly Mawdudist; the diversity of its affiliates precludes its being depicted as a pro-Jama'at front. Though not every mosque is affiliated to MCB, the fact that it has been effectively recognised as the principal representative of 'British Muslims' by the Government, suggests that it has become the spokesperson and representative of Islamist and Muslims issues in Britain. Further, given the Pro-Jama'at and Iqwan ideological ascendancy in the MCB, its political discourse and practice have been influenced by the discourses and the thought of ideologues and thinkers such as Al Banna, Qutb, and Mawdudi.

Hence, it is evident how British Islamism is a more complex and mature discourse than the more traditionalist/ritualist South Asian variety brought over by the first waves of migration (Hasan 2002, 7). Moreover, the crucial role of Khurram Murad in the development of the Mawdudist ideology at the Islamic Foundation, and of institutions such as the YMUK, and indeed the vision of a Muslim Federation like the MCB itself, implies that Islamism in

²⁶ Jamaat-e-Islami is an Islamist party in Pakistan. It was founded by Mawdudi in 1941, and in 1947, it supported the establishment of an Islamic state in Pakistan (Roy 1996).

Britain as a political discourse and practice has been developing as a novel and indigenous product, by taking on board and mixing with other, and sometimes diverse, political discourses.

In this context, the MCB has very often faced the problem of being forced to balance its positions, between being too close to the Government on the one hand, and too receptive to more 'radical' Islamist voices, on the other. However, on several occasions, the MCB has demonstrated that it is able to take a very serious stand on international issues by supporting the more grass-roots Islamist feelings. It is surely significant that soon after its foundation, it began to confront the government on issues like Iraq and the US bombing of Sudan and Afghanistan. In the light of the Chechen War and purported Human Rights abuses by Russian troops, it strongly condemned Blair's reception of Russian President Putin in April 2000 and even announced that it was joining a demonstration against the visit (MCB press release, 13 April 2000).

On 10 September 1999, Sacraïne (of the MCB) wrote to the Foreign Secretary urging that the 'FCO should marshal its diplomatic strengths and ensure that the status of Jerusalem is not altered. The British government should further ensure that no country should relocate its embassy to Jerusalem. It should also dissuade the US from doing so out of unprincipled opportunism' (MCB 1999, 6). In light of this strong statement, I argue that there are several points worth analyzing.

It is apparent how political crises such as the Rushdie affair, Bosnia and the Gulf war have pushed British Islamists to develop an Islamist practice and how the MCB has officially and determinedly taken up the role of being the primary representative of British Muslims. However, the MCB has not fully used the chance of discoursing a proper Islamist discourse, taking refuge, instead, in the (Muslim) community discourse.

The most obvious indication of MCB's 'representative' role was when the Government, in making arrangements with the Association of British Hujjaj for a temporary consulate in the Holy City, suddenly decided to alter the composition of the delegation handling consular representation in order 'to allow MCB general secretary Sacraïne to be joint head', rather than have it led by Lord Ahmed of Rotterham (Q-News 2000, 17). Likewise, the MCB has also obtained a certain degree of credibility within the British Muslim community, by being assertive, not just about specific concerns, but generally active and operative (i.e., political) in order to push the government to consider and remedy their issues.

It might be said that the very existence of a body like the MCB is proof that the core of Muslim/Islamist identity in Britain cannot be defined by features like race or ethnicity

(Essed 1991, 67). It is built around 'Islam' lived, discoursed and inhabited as religion and as political discourse (El Zein 1977, 231). The MCB, nonetheless, misses out on spelling the political discourse more clearly. There is still a timid, reticent political attitude in terms of self-representation (Damasio 2002, 115), as if the MCB needs to display a good Muslim reputation (read non-political) in order to be accepted by the Government.

This has led the MCB to lobby the Government to insert a religious question in the census. The MCB has also strongly addressed questions of Islamophobia in the media; it managed, for example, to push *The Daily Mail* to apologize for the headline 'Moslem plot to bomb London', and to get the *BBC World Service* to commit itself to cease coupling the words 'extremist/terrorist' with 'Muslim/Islam' (MCB 1997, 2-4). The previous MCB secretary Sacraine (now substituted by Muhammad Abdul Bari) often had to negotiate the stormy waters of the relations with the British Government, wider UK society and the other Islamist parties. His intelligent public image, his education and his friendly manners were essential in the aftermath of 9-11 (the 'most testing period for British Muslims', as declared by Sacraine in his valedictory speech in 2006). In his view, the 9-11 and 7-7 events clearly showed 'British Muslims' the need to turn a page and usher in a new era of political activism, by not being driven just by the concept of a faith-based community as developed through the late 90s. This new phase requires a novel sort of mobilization and more political structure. This process, according to Sacraine, has progressively taken off in the aftermath of 9-11, even though relations with the Government and the Labour Party were severely tested by the Iraq War (as was demonstrated by the MCB press release titled 'UK Muslims reject neo-Conservative/Zionist plans for Iraq' and dated 11 April 2003). The observation here is that despite good intentions, the MCB still seems very locked into a 'politics of identity' discourse (Sacraine 2006), and even with more emphasis on political activism, their political discourse continues to be affected by the category of the 'faith-community'; it is a product of their reluctant self-representation as Islamists in Britain.

A clear proof of this can be found in Sacraine's words, who -- quoting the Sirah as a basis or guide -- claimed that the electoral participation by Muslims was not just 'tactical or an expedient course but a religious obligation' (ibid.). It is important to note that voting is certainly a political act, aimed at being politically effective and politically active. The representation of this act as a 'religious' obligation reveals the very shortcomings of the MCB as an Islamist party, and confirms my hypothesis of an inner *fetishism* for politics.

Muslim Public Affairs Committee UK

The Muslim Public Affairs Committee UK is certainly an interesting Islamist group in the UK. It is difficult to recognize a major external influence on its aims and strategy. It has no headquarters, being mainly a website group that first became politically active through (and *because of*) the net. It constitutes a specific case of how media, and in particular the new media like the Internet, are tools of empowerment and environments of political action. They do not just transmit contents and information but act as the place to share them and thereby form the discourse and the practice. The point here is to understand whether such 'virtual' political activism performed by MPAC is framed and discoursed through an Islamist discourse, or whether there is a legacy of 'grass-roots' activism.

MPACUK was originally set up as a media monitoring e-group, in order to fight the bias in the British media and redress the balance. As declared on their website, MPACUK is a system of media monitoring, political lobbying and grass-root community and institutional activism to allow the individual and the community the ability to change their own situation and the situation for Muslims at large (MPACUK, 2005). Its 'Islamism' is substantially built through the practice of 'political lobbying', which demonstrates its attitude of being actively engaged with the British society and politics; however, it still lacks a 'political discourse' to some extent.

Its main aim is centred on the transformation of what it sees as negative UK domestic policy and foreign policy (notably on Palestine). The first concern is related to the very 'local' British context and the second to other international issues, such as Palestine and Iraq. These concepts are expressed very succinctly by MPACUK when it defines its main quest and political agenda as a focus on changing the situation for which 'Muslims too many times are made to feel as Britain has done them a great favour by allowing them to live and work here...Muslims are law-abiding citizens and as such have a right to be heard, a right to be listened, and a right to be taken seriously' (MPACUK 2005).

Whereas a large number of Islamist groups usually begin by drawing upon some person or event in Muslim history as their example -- Muhammad himself, the Righteous Caliphs, the Muhagiroun -- the model proposed by MPACUK is paradoxically 'the Zionist lobby'. MPACUK indicates that there are over 100 members of the Friends of Israel lobby in the Labour Party alone, and this gives Zionists a very loud voice simply because they are active. If the Muslims could learn from their example, 'we would never have to suffer in silence again' (ibid.). Needless to remark that the emphasis is still placed on the 'Muslim

community' and the fact that the model is represented by a 'lobby' suggests the idea of a certain lack of confidence in discoursing a more structured Islamist discourse, taking refuge, instead, in a 'more practical' attitude. It is an Islamist practice which appears not confident enough to be constructed as a discourse. The Israeli lobby is considered as exemplar of what can be obtained by successful organization and mobilization within a 'minority' in Britain, this mainly involves tactics such as 'canvassing, leafleting outside mosques and homes', and 'aiming to telephone every Muslim household' (Muslimnews 2001).

Another example of this attitude can be seen in relation to MPACUK's approach toward the UK Government, which it sees as 'using the Muslim groups and individuals to support its policies rather than taking into account the Muslim voices' (MPACUK 2003). The confrontational approach of MPACUK is not directed only at the Government, but also at some Islamist leaders. The main difference is that whereas other Muslim groups might criticise certain leaders on essentially doctrinal grounds, MPACUK's approach is directly practical and uncompromising. For example, during the 2005 election, it lambasted Ibrahim Masters, Chairman of the Lancashire Council of Mosques, for supporting Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, the MP for Blackburn, in spite of what MPACUK saw as his negative stance on Iraq and Palestine (MPACUK 2005). Masters was quoted as saying 'the contact we have had with Mr Straw has resulted in many improvements for Muslims in Blackburn...We do not want to burn our bridges and ruin the work of 20 years just because of what is happening in Iraq and Palestine' (ibid.). In response, MPACUK strongly criticized this attitude, by labelling Masters as a 'traitor' who 'sold out Palestine for 20 years with the Labour Party and few mosques' (ibid.). In the same passage, there is a reference to the Righteous Caliphs, Abu Bakr and Umar, who first expressed the notion of accountability in terms of a duty pending on the community to correct the Caliph when he deviated from the right path. That is to say, MPACUK's frame of critique against Masters remains within a textual justification, which indicates a form of the culturalist-orientalist approach that mirrors the representation of the dominant toward the Islamist parties.

Besides, Masters represents a typical case of MPACUK criticism against '1500 pathetic mosque leaders', who 'do nothing to mobilize Muslims' (MPACUK 2003). Here again, there is a strong emphasis on the notion of mobilizing the masses as a vehicle for change (which echoes the propaganda of Leninist-inspired leftist parties). Yet, there is no mention of an Islamist discourse and the aim is represented as the 'mobilization' of an

undifferentiated mass of Muslims: the definition of the political actor continues to reside within the domain of the category of religion.

MPACUK's tirade, however, is not just limited to certain categories, like traditional Muslim leaders, but it is also targeted against other, more 'radical', Islamist groups such as HT, specifically on the basis of their political practice. To an extent, similar criticism is also levelled at the 'traditional' leaders; that their passive approach to British society damages, first and foremost, the interests of the Muslim community in the UK and abroad. In MPACUK's view, HT's rejectionist approach is strongly counterproductive; it prevents the Muslim community from having any influence on Government policy. In MPACUK's own words, if HT members are asked what Muslims should do, they 'will collectively shout: to establish the Khilafa'. According to MPACUK, the HT political programme *feeds* on utopian far-fetched plans, which do not help the 'Muslim cause' in Palestine, Kashmir or anywhere else (MPACUK 2002).

On the same basis, MPACUK has been dismissive of Omar Bakri and his supporters because, in its eyes, they have damaged the image of Muslims in Britain. In a press release, Bakri is defined as a 'fool' and his supporters as 'baboons who...had scored another goal for the Zionists' (MPACUK 2003). Likewise, Abu Hamza is denounced for essentially the same reasons, 'he cannot make a logical argument stand on any interview and always utters mindless remarks that make us all look stupid and ignorant' (ibid.).

In this context, it is not too off the mark to state that the main concern for MPACUK is the empowerment of the 'Muslim community'. This target is considered as essential and the means to achieve it are envisaged in the full involvement with the British political life and system. The discursive apparatus for such participation appears to be of secondary importance, and I argue that this is MPACUK's main shortfall. Consequently, the outcome is that its Islamist practice too ends up being framed within a 'Muslim community's own survival' policy, which is hailed in a period of multiculturalist frenzy, but is the first to be blamed as self-ghettoisation in period of turmoil.

In very clear and powerful terms, MPACUK affirms that the freedoms and benefits that are enjoyed by other British citizens are being denied to the Muslim population (MPACUK 2003) by still representing 'Muslims' as a separate community identified by its membership to Islam.

MPACUK also identifies democracy with *Shura*, thereby indicating its compatibility with Islam. Democracy is understood as a 'sense of Responsibility and Accountability', and so it is 'very much there in Islam'. A *Surah* in the *Qur'an* is taken as reference in order to prove

that 'the political system in Islam totally depends upon Shooriat (consultation)' (MPACUK 2005).

With regard to *jihad*, MPACUK members regularly describe themselves as *mujahidin*, and they explicitly affirm that their understanding of jihad is political and non-violent. In MPACUK terms, political activism is the most powerful weapon in order to advance the *Muslim* cause; there is no need to take up arms but there is a dire need to be proactive by using tools such as e-mails, leaflets, and the ballot box. According to MPACUK, Muslims are allowed to embrace arms in two main instances: firstly, against an oppressive government and secondly, in self-defence. Neither of those two cases applies to Muslims in Britain and therefore British Muslims are not supported if they decide to wage a violent local jihad (MPACUK 2003). Generally, MPACUK does not express sympathy for specific armed groups, but neither does it condemn groups such as HAMAS and Hezbollah. The *jihad* of such groups, although violent, is understood within the context of the Palestinian cause and according to the peculiarity of their struggle to survive. Even so, MPACUK has strongly condemned Al-Qaida's killing of innocents and they supported the Islamic Society of Britain's 9-11 commemorative event in 2002.

To conclude, it is reasonable to state that MPACUK, since its foundation, has grown in size. Its website claims millions of hits and it has also been the subject of a TV programme, Operation Muslim Vote. This programme showed MPACUK in action in the run-up to the 2005 general elections, trying to unseat Blackburn's Jack Straw and Rochdale's Lorna Fitzsimmons, both Labour MPs. In particular, Straw certainly showed a lack of knowledge and information, when he confused them with the Saved Sect, and then claimed that they were well-funded. This allowed Bukhari, MPACUK leader, to point to his less than abundant possessions. MPACUK was involved in several controversies during the campaign. The first was when Bukhari and Muddassar Ahmed, MPACUK project managers, were physically attacked by supporters of the Labour peer Lord Adam Patel in Blackburn, and those actions were caught on film. The second concerned Lorna Fitzsimmons. A local group that MPACUK was working with during the elections incorrectly identified her as being Jewish, which led to accusations of anti-Semitism by certain media and obliged MPACUK to issue an apologetic statement. In this, MPACUK said that it 'unequivocally apologizes to Lorna Fitzsimmons for this inaccurate statement and sincerely regrets this mistake' (MPACUK 2005). Alongwith this, it declared that 'MPACUK will continue its campaign against the MPs on the basis of their policies...as active members of the pro-Israeli lobby group' (ibid.).

MPACUK carried on campaigning against her and although it cannot be proven that its intervention was decisive, the combination of anti-war backlash, MCB direction to vote for candidates based on specific policies, and the on-the-spot canvassing by MPACUK may have contributed to her defeat. It was an outcome triumphantly celebrated by MPACUK as a jihad victory 'for the children of Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan, and most of all, for our faith in God' (MPACUK, 2004). The use of the rhetoric on Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan is quite frequent; however, it mostly functions as propaganda and does not replace a more substantial Islamist discourse (Varisco 2005, 78). MPACUK's main concern is the empowerment of British Muslims in Britain and it is essentially projected towards this target; it is politically active and involved with British domestic and foreign policy. This is the main angle from which MPACUK plans are conceived.

Soon after the election results, MPACUK made clear that its jihad was centred on domestic anti-Muslim prejudice and on Palestine. It declared that its campaign would intensify through the elaboration of a strategic plan over the next few years, and that it would attack traditional Muslim leaders. In this context, MPACUK issued a proper *Manifesto* focused on the message 'hold your leader to account, by getting involved in the political system'. MPACUK presents itself as a model and a 'teacher' for the Muslims, by educating them so they can understand how the election process works. The fight -- the *Manifesto* continues -- is being 'led by young men and women in their early to mid-twenties, who spend out of their pockets and work in their spare time' (MPACUK 2004). Once again, it is hard not to notice here echoes of the concept of the party as a vanguard leading the masses to revolution. This follows an idea first developed by Lenin at the beginning of 1902 and is also present in the writings of Mawdudi and Qutb. However, the central idea of 'Muslims' in need of being educated and informed about the election process reveals a certain paternalistic attitude and it also depoliticized the Islamists: they are represented as 'Muslims', an undefined mass, only identified by their religious membership (Grillo 2003, 116).

The centrality of the MPACUK (Islamist) practice revolves around keywords such as democracy and jihad and the need to translate these 'ideas into practical action' first and foremost within the UK context. This is seen as the necessary step in order to 'empower British Muslims' and render them able to influence and have their say on international issues.

It is also interesting to see how MPACUK is mostly formed and supported by British-born Muslims and how this element could be considered as essential to a very 'militant', *participationist* expression of Islamism in the British context.²⁷

Therefore, it might be stated that, paradoxically, the very British-ness of the second and third generation Muslims (McRoy 2006, 191) paves the way to a more 'decisive' action. Nonetheless, despite such pro-active approaches, the parties analysed in this chapter still portray themselves by mirroring the image and representation offered by a dominant culturalist-orientalist approach (i.e., representation as a religious community and faith group, lacking any political attribute).

The interesting aspect in relation to the practice of self-representation offered by the parties featured in chapter 5 is that their practice is definitely within the tenets and 'discourses' of Islamism. They are political, as can be seen from their participation in the election process, the various anti-war campaigns and their strong 'political' activism. But, what is lacking is their assertiveness in vocalizing and discoursing that identity and that choice of being Islamists. As argued very often in this chapter, the Islamist actors featured here are still very much trapped in a culturalist-orientalist representation, which, finally, denies their political identity and marginalizes them as political actors. It seems that they are in constant need of justifying and explaining their political stands in order to comply with the way they are represented by the dominant discourse. As I put it, they allow the Government to allow them to speak and act.

I analyse and discourse this dynamic through the concept of a *fetishism* for politics and power: the repression and denial of a strong desire for both politics and power, so that political participation is represented as a 'privilege' granted by the dominant discourse.

The Islamist parties featured in the next chapter (the rejectionists) show a more confrontational approach towards the Government, but ultimately, they reflect and mirror (on the level of self-representation) the very culturalist-orientalist representation of them -- in a more covert way, as through diverging lenses, but along the same line of a fetishism for politics, which disempowers and ostracizes them.

²⁷ This same 'demographic' element is characteristic of the other Islamist parties featured in the next chapter of the present dissertation: their political action and their Islamist practices are focused on a rejection of the UK political system and on the need to subvert it.

CHAPTER VI

Representation and self-representation of ‘radical’ Islamism in the UK: through the mirroring lenses of the political self

The present chapter analyses the practices and discourses of the Islamist parties grouped as rejectionists (they reject the British political system and they refuse to take part in it). Some of the parties featured here plan to take over power in Britain and establish an Islamist government, while some others plan to do this in the Middle East and North Africa. My argument is that despite the fact that their attitude is more vocal and confrontational than the participationist parties featured in chapter 5, their Islamist practices, discourses and self-representation still mirrors the categories of representation imposed upon them by the dominant culturalist-orientalist approach.

As my fieldwork findings show, they nurture a similar fetishism for politics. In their case, this does not happen through the discursive practices of the community group (as in the case of the participationist parties), but through the Islamist discourse of an ‘Islamic state’, where the ‘political’ is at the service of the ‘spiritual’. However, paradoxically the exact reverse happens -- i.e., the process of ‘secularization’ of that religion.

Furthermore, after two years of intense fieldwork, what has powerfully emerged is that these parties leaders’ strongly enamour power and want the upper hand vis-a-vis their ‘enemies’, political antagonists, and also their acolytes. This puts to rest the concept of a future Islamist government where the ‘spiritual’ prevails over politics.

Such a schizophrenic attitude is explained in my thesis through the dynamic of a fetishism for politics that weakens them as political actors. Likewise, this attitude is represented and discoursed by the dominant culturalist-orientalist approach through the categories of ‘religious fundamentalism’ and ‘terrorism’. This implies the lack of any intention on the part of the Dominant (UK Government) to enter into dialogue with them; an attitude which finally ends up threatening national security.

Therefore, my argument is that the fetishism for politics, on the level of representation and self-representation -- mystifying what is political behind the categories of religion and terrorism -- depoliticizes the Islamist parties on the one hand, and it causes the persistence of a security threat (Borradori 2004, 53) on the other. Overall, it is a tragic outcome.

Hizbu ut Tahrir and the diverging lenses of the self-representation

The first party analysed in this chapter is Hizbu-ut-Tahrir (Party of Liberation). It was founded in Palestine in 1953 by Sheik Taquiddin-an-Nabhani and belongs to the group of British Islamist parties, which I call 'rejectionist' because they refuse to take part in the British political and public life.

The core of its political discourse is that the depressed political condition of Muslims in the contemporary era is a result of the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924 and, thus, they believe that the way to revive their glory is to reconstitute the Khilafah. The essential idea behind HT can be found in An-Nabhani's book, *The Islamic State*, where the Ottoman regime is blamed for causing intellectual stagnation by closing the doors of *ijtihad* and neglecting the Arabic language, and for failing to understand 'the intellectual and legislative side of Islam' (something that led to perplexity when the Industrial Revolution and democratic ideas transformed Europe) (An-Nabhani 1998, 168). An-Nabhani rejects and fiercely opposes all forms of secular ideology, including democracy. He insists on the Khilafah not as just as a possible expedient, but as a sort of 'scriptural injunction', confirmed by the *Qur'an* (ibid., 222). The conditions for being a Caliph are that he must be male, sane and Muslim, which immediately excludes women and non-Muslims. He also specifies in detail how the Islamic state should be structured, something not resembling any actual and contemporary political entity (not even Iran, which is a 'mockery of an Islamic state, devoured by greediness for power').²⁸

Thus, the perfect Islamic state as envisaged in a structure based on seven pillars: the Khalifah, the Assistants, the Commander of Jihad, the Judiciary, the Wulaa, the Administrative System, and the Majlis-al-Ummah. There are four principles of the ruling system in the Islamic state:

- The Sovereignty belongs to the Shari'ah;
- The authority belongs to the Ummah;
- The appointment of one Khalifa
- The Khalifah alone reserves the right to adopt the Sharia' ah rules. (ibid., 221).

²⁸ Extract from an interview with Taji Mustafa, the media representative for HT. The interview (which is contained in the appendix) was conducted on 6 June 2006 at the HT headquarters in Gloucester Road, London.

There is a powerful emphasis on a single Caliph, in order to support the idea of a united pan-Islamic state 'without divisions among the Muslim brothers, which are source of confusion and weakness'.²⁹ Another relevant aspect of HT political 'discursive' innovation is that both Shi'ia and Sunni members are accepted, as a sign, both of their 'intellectual ijihad', and the effort towards an 'intelligent dialogue' for the construction of Khalifat. The fundamental idea is that the Khilafah will be established after 'dedicated work of preparation' through da'wah and 'Muslims will be happy and willing to work in order to achieve this, to implement Islam where it is not implemented, to change the Dar-al-Kufr into Dar-al-Islam'. From its origins in Palestine, HT has spread to other countries, especially in Central Asia, where there have been several claims of involvement in the protests that shook Uzbekistan in 2005. Apparently, there are more HT prisoners in Central Asia's prisons than those of any other movement (Rashid 2002, 115). However, it is banned in Germany and in 'most of the M.E countries as Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Turkey, Yemen, as a terrorist and extremist party'.³⁰ In Britain, it was established by a Palestinian, Fouad Hussein, and was later headed by Omar Bakri, 'despite his claims that he was the actual founder and initiator of the movement'.³¹

HT first came to public attention during the Gulf War, when some members visited the Iraqi embassy to urge Saddam to 'announce his acceptance of the office of the Caliph' (Taji-Farouki 1996, 178). Le Bor quotes Zaki Badawi of the Muslim College as stating that 'HT appeared after the Gulf War, after the delegitimation of the regimes in the Gulf, which all appeared to be paper regimes, unable to defend themselves' (Le Bor 1997, 140). The Gulf War and its many complications seemed to provide a springboard for the emergence of HT. Taji Farouki observes that the main attraction of HT was the fact that it was spreading a very simple message -- that the solution to all problems lies in the resurrection of the Caliphate -- crafted with an intellectual sophistication, 'which appealed in particular to young Asian Muslims' (Taji-Farouki 1996, 177). Surely one of the party's biggest triumph was the Khilafah Conference in August 1994, held at Wembley Arena, 'where thousands of Muslims gathered -- for the first time -- to start discussing, planning and thinking about their future as Muslims'.³² The conference called for 'the overthrow of the existing order in the Muslim world and the establishment of a single Islamic caliphate, which would come to

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Extracts from a personal chat with Majid Nawaz, former member of HTUK. The interview (contained in the appendix) was conducted on 12 July 2007 in Central London.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

the defence of Muslims whenever they faced danger'.³³ It has been argued that the Wembley conference brought together diverse anti-Muslim Brothers elements, all sharing a revolutionary ideology and a willingness to adopt an anti-Saudi stance. In fact, Zaki Badawi has remarked that the Wembley conference 'marked the final blow to all Saudi efforts to control Muslims in Britain' (*The Sunday Telegraph* 1994).

HT also achieved a great popularity among students, managing to quickly recruit a large number of young members. Its strong stance on Palestine and homosexuality, coupled with its inflammatory rhetoric, certainly attracted many young people. These were second and third generation Muslims, 'who were looking for some strong catalyst to channel their frustrations; who were rejecting the Islam brought over by their fathers, as ritual and backward, but interested in hearing its revolutionary message, as a way of feeding new hopes for their future'.³⁴ HT's inflammatory rhetoric and allegations of violent threats have fuelled condemnation from the National Union of Students; for example, a Sikh welfare officer, speaking at the 1995 NUS conference, claimed to have received 'death threats' from HT (*Muslim News* 1995).

In the aftermath of the 9-11 terror attacks and after the departure of Omar Bakri, HT became less public for a while. In 2003, it organised a conference in Birmingham under the provocative title 'British or Muslim?'; this attracted 8000 people. Once again, it came to public attention through the protests at the prospect of the Iraq War, with tables at Hyde Park and local rallies pushing its literature. However, it was derided when, during the anti-war campaign, it distributed stickers and leaflets that urged 'Do not stop the war -- except through Islamic politics'. This was meant to emphasize the importance of avoiding Kufr politics, by advising UK Muslims to demand from the Qatari and other Muslim embassies 'that their countries prevent the Americans from launching war from their soils'. HT's next major appearance came with the hijab episode, when 16 year old Shabina Begum won her High Court Case concerning the right to wear it. Her victory speech resembled a very political declaration, referring to 'a world where Muslim women, from Uzbekistan to Turkey, feel the brunt of policies guided by western governments', and declaring that her triumph was:

'a victory for all Muslims who wish to preserve their identity and values in face of an atmosphere that has been created in western societies post 9-

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

11, an atmosphere in which Islam has been made a target for vilification in the name of the 'war on Terror' (Aslam 2005, 67).

It is easy to observe that the declaration issued by the young Muslim girl sounded 'orchestrated' and the reference to Uzbekistan was certainly peculiar. The simple reason behind such rhetoric effort lay in the fact that Shabina's brother was an HT supporter and HT was proud to confirm that it had helped Shabina and advised on her case. This was surely an unusual tactic for an Islamist party which rejects involvement in the British public and political system and does not regard any 'man-made law' as legitimate. Yet this might be just one of several inexplicable, slightly paradoxical and contradictory stances of the HT and its Islamist politics, that are finally aimed at establishing the Khilafah.

There is little doubt that the main event in the UK that triggered off a heated debate around HT and 'its extremist and dangerous Islamist ideology' (*The Independent* 2005) was the UK War on Terror. This anxiety escalated in the aftermath of the 7-7 London bombings; since then there have been different political moves and parliamentary debates in order to ban the party on the charge of glorifying terrorism (Home Office, 2006). HT was prompt in responding to such a proposal; writing to the then Home Secretary Charles Clarke that it saw the Government proposal as an expression of the 'Government's own form of fanaticism and extremism to curtail legitimate political debate in Britain for their own political ends'. Similarly, their Chief Media Advisor Dr Imran Waheed stated that the proposal was 'a clear proof of the government's failure to face the political opinions of the party through *rational* debate and discussion and a desperate attempt to prevent the British public from hearing the opinions of the Muslim community' (HT press release 2005). In the same letter, it was highlighted that HT's objective was to establish a Caliphate in the Muslim world through peaceful means, not by advocating the violent overthrow of any state but rather by *da'wah*. It was specified in the other documents that HT was not planning to take over power in Britain or to establish a Caliphate state here. Rather, it *hoped* to convert Britain. In this framework, the role of the Muslims in Britain and other Western countries was to support the work of the Muslims in the Muslim lands. In other documents, the establishing of a Caliphate in Britain is not excluded *apriori*, but the need of *da'wah* succeeding in turning Britain into a Muslim majority country is also declared. In that case, there is a three stage plan to implement:

- *the stage of culturing*: this involves finding and cultivating individuals, who are convinced by the thought and the method of the party;

•*the stage of interaction*: this implies interacting with the Ummah, in order to encourage the Ummah to work for Islam and to carry the Da'wah and so that it works to establish Islam in life, state and society;

•*the stage of taking the government*: this means to take the Government and implement Islam completely and totally and carry its message to the world. (HT 1999, 32).

This also involved seeking *nusrah* ('help'), in the sense of protection, just as the Ansar provided to Muhammad in Medina. Such a long term plan also requires interaction with the wider community, which 'allows us to present our values as well as trying to engage with various public bodies in society without compromising our ideals' (Aldred 2004, 57). Allegedly, this is exemplified in the structure and organization of HTUK, as it is led by an 'executive committee, and *elections* are held to determine the composition of this committee. The elections take place every two years and the entire membership takes part in this election' (Abedin 2008). Here again, it seems slightly unusual for a party which rejects 'man-made decisions and laws', to use an electoral system for appointing its leadership. Likewise, the 'interaction' stage is envisaged as 'encouraging the Ummah to work for Islam', which is a peculiar way of presenting and framing a political plan, where the Ummah should benefit from the establishment of an Islamic state and not be the means in order to achieve it. Within the same framework, the Khilafah itself seems a rather vague ideological construct instead of being a pragmatic and achievable political entity whose establishment should bring benefits to the Islamic community. Even so, note how the definition and representation of Islam (the self-representation) appears to be very similar to the culturalist-orientalist one. More specifically, it echoes the clash of civilizations theory, where Islam is represented as a monolithic, totalizing entity, like a living being, with its own life, whose needs have to be fulfilled by the community. What is overlooked (in both cases) is that this Islam exists but through the lived experiences, the interactions, the discursive operations and the signifying practices of its agents. Representation and self-representation of Islam and Islamism are discoursed through the same 'reifying' practice, which stigmatizes and reduces a variegated, contested, historical, political and social reality to a uniform entity, that is simply artificial and manufactured in its attributes, and deprived of agency.

Within the culturalist-orientalist approach and Huntington's theory, the purpose was to identify a new enemy and define a new front to rally and fight against. In HT's case, it might be argued that the objective is the need to gather supporters for a political plan. Such a political plan is more easily divulged and promoted if it is personified and simplified,

reduced to a monolithic entity, a nearly utopian reality, where everything is legitimized and secured under the vessel of Islam. Further, it can be argued that the operation of reification in relation to self-representation, helps in gathering supporters and making them acolytes. In other words, by depriving the whole community -- the Ummah, the Us group -- of agency (by presenting it as a uniform entity) more leverage is given to the ones -- among the Us group -- who have a leading role: the party leaders. That is to say, the mirroring dynamic of representation and self-representation, in relation to Islamism and specifically to HT, interacts and discourses here, with other elements residing within the representational practice: fetishism, enamouement with power and the desire to take over power.

In this context, despite HT's intentions of engaging with the wider community in the UK and of supporting a 'rational and open debate', its members have always completely rejected any form of participation in the UK elections, on the basis of refusing to join a *kufir* political system and by defining voting as a 'sinful diversion' (Kassem 1997, 74). During the 2005 elections, for example, HT ran a campaign against voting, but this was couched in more 'accessible' and less inflammatory terms than those of the other rejectionist parties. The alternative put forward was to strengthen the *community's* Islamic identity and extend da'wah to non-Muslims. HT also rejected RESPECT, regardless of the latter's acknowledged opposition to the occupation of Iraq and Palestine, because of its policies on homosexuality and abortion (which are strongly opposed by HT as 'un-Islamic practices') and because it did not support the establishment of an Islamic state in Iraq and Palestine (Standforislam, 2005).

In terms of promoting a rational and constructive debate with non-Muslims, HT seems 'strangely' unequivocal in its views on democracy. HT considers democracy to be an infidel system and thinks only the Sharia should be implemented. It affirms that the Ummah does not possess the right to legislate because 'Allah is the legislator...However Allah has given the authority of rule and the implementation to the Ummah and therefore given it the right to elect or appoint a ruler' (HT 2000, 52). HT does allow for a plurality of parties with the proviso that they must all be established by Muslims and committed to Islam. There is little doubt that such positions are in contradiction with the oft-declared intentions of opening the debate and starting the dialogue with non-Muslims political actors and parties who have different beliefs and ideologies. HT's stances could be neatly described as 'attempts to curtail the legitimate political debate for its own political ends'. Recall Waheed's words in the letter addressed to the then Home Secretary Charles

Clarke, in which he accused the Government of 'extremist and fanaticist behaviour' for proposing to ban HT; that is plainly an example of a mirroring dynamic between representation and self-representation. However, these considerations are further explored and better conveyed through some of the interviews and informal chats that I had with the political actors themselves, the members of HT.

One thing that has always caught my attention is HT's professional attitude in presenting its political programme; its undisputable ability to talk and intervene in the debate, its display of efforts to conduct an open and rational debate with their detractors and with the non-Muslims.

But this is half the story. An important aspect related to the qualitative research method is that the context and the time are as important as the subjects and objects of the study itself. To admit this is not to undermine or weaken the scientific value of the findings obtained through qualitative research by calling them 'relativistic' and volatile, but it is to stress the importance of conducting a 'thick description' of the context and the subjects' interactions within it.

My point here is that the in-depth, face-to-face interview is very fruitful but it has to be collated and added to the experience of being a participant and non-participant observer, It is by adopting such an eclectic method that the contradictions, the multifaceted meanings, schizophrenic discourses, 'fetishist' repressions start to emerge and be spoken aloud. In so doing, the collection of political pamphlets, press releases, and official declarations also become more 'discoursed', to the extent of constituting signifying practices.

To clarify these concepts, I will relate the personal chats and interviews that I had with members of HT and report about my experience as a non(participant) observer, attending their meetings and workshops. Hopefully then, the signifying practices and the fetishism for politics and power, as well as the inner paradoxes, will become more apparent.

The core idea of HT political agenda is that the institution of the Khilafah will constitute a 'stabilizing force for the Muslim world'. This is a political plan, which is supposed to bring benefits to the community. In relation to the concept of authority, it is declared that the Caliphate is a *political* system³⁵ whose head is legitimized only through popular consent. The Caliphate -- it is also declared -- engages voices of dissent through the political

³⁵ According to what is declared in HT official documents, 'The Khilafah' in Islam is inherently a political system, a complete and totalizing way of life for the entire community, therefore it seems strange here the stress on the 'political aspects' of the system.

system by providing extensive channels for accounting all parts of the state's apparatus. My interviewee³⁶ continued by stressing that, once elected, the head of the state is bound to an agreement with the people through the *baya* contract. The *baya* contract -- it was explained to me -- stipulates a number of conditions for the leadership of the state including the condition that he manages the affairs of the people on their behalf. Until this point, I was greatly impressed with the use of political concepts and notions, which appeared exclusively human-made. Besides, to me, the terminology used appeared slightly westernized (which should sound paradoxical and perhaps culturalist-orientalist, in that it supposes that certain structures of the Modern state are the product of the modern Western history). Yet strangely, these notions seemed tailored for a Western audience. I hesitated about this specific epistemological and doctrinal point, venturing to point out the human and 'mundane' aspects of this system; I also expressed surprise at a certain lack of 'divine involvement'. The careful response I received was that the laws which regulate the Khilafah state originate exclusively from the source of Sharia, the implementation of which is presided over only by the most eminent and qualified judge in the state, who is granted extensive powers by the Shari'ah. They form the 'Court of Unjust Acts', which also monitors the Caliph's legal adoptions, with the power to demand revocations. That said, my argument was that in spite of the divinely inspired written text, there was a further stage, which implied that the act of interpretation and decision-making still resided with the 'human'. It was then explained to me that in addition to the Court of the Unjust Acts, there was another important institution that forms part of the Caliphate's accountability architecture. It is a representative assembly whose members are elected directly by citizens and can be from any ethnicity, gender or creed. This could not dissipate my doubts and additionally made me more curious about the terminology and the schools of *fiqh* (madhab) adopted by the Khilafah state system. Now, the response was sensibly laconic, simply stressing that HT encourages 'open debate' and therefore the Khilafah state will variously adopt the four schools of *fiqh*. At this point, I highlighted that this was a further proof of man-made decisions in terms of selecting interpretations. My interviewee stressed that the judges in charge receive their powers from the sharia and 'they are the best man at doing this job'; this sounded like a repetition of something declared earlier on, and possibly an assumption, not an explanation. The interview ended and my curiosity about those unclear aspects of the Khilafah state grew.

³⁶ Interview with Taji Mustafa is contained in the appendix.

My next opportunity to further the discussion arrived when I was invited to a meeting organized by HT on ‘ Radicalisation, extremism and Islamism’.³⁷ This time I had the chance of sitting near the Chairman and UK Executive of HT, Dr. Abdul Wahid, and therefore, of exchanging some views on the theme of the Khilafah state. My interest was still focused on the variable use of the schools of *fiqh*, which now became *five* in Dr. Wahid’s words.³⁸ Apart from this curious slip, once again, the prevailing impression was that -- despite HT’s intentions of instituting an Islamic state where the political dimension could not be dissociated from the spiritual one -- the political was actually winning over the spiritual, in terms of relations of power and the struggles for it, the discourse of power and its signifying practices.

My next move was to ask some practical questions in relation to such a ‘selecting’ dynamic, which would have finally clarified my doubts. Though my query revolved around the mechanism and the structures of the Khilafah state, I ended up understanding something deeply related to the substance and the discursive formations of the HT ‘Islamist discourse’. To my surprise, my interlocutor could not remember the names of the *five* schools of *fiqh*,³⁹ and I also found out that he was not fluent in Arabic, the original language used in the sacred texts. This apparently minor detail triggered a series of further questions, more about HT than the Khilafah state. With this specific curiosity, I asked other HT members attending that meeting about their level of Arabic (and therefore about the language used in the sacred texts objects of their study). The responses I received confirmed my suspicions: the language commonly used was English, as most of the members were Urdu speakers and -- in some cases -- as second, third generation Bengali and Pakistani, they could only speak English. At the European level of HT, the language used for reading the sacred texts and for writing pamphlets, documents and letters is English. This is then translated into other European languages, according to the specific country where HT is based (i.e., France, Italy, Spain). The translation from Arabic to English is very careful, and to certain extent, very ‘catchy’, in order to appeal to a crowd of Western-based supporters, Western-educated sceptical listeners and Western-minded detractors. To someone who knows Arabic and has read and studied the main texts of the Islamic schools of *fiqh*, some concepts expressed and promoted by HT in its documents

³⁷ The meeting was held in a conference centre in East London, Commercial road, on 13 July 2007.

³⁸ This is an informal chat and not a proper interview, therefore it will be not transcribed in the appendix.

³⁹ The four schools of *fiqh* (madhab) are Hanafi, Hanbali, Shafi and Maliki. There is a fifth school of *fiqh*, Jafaari, which is not recognized by the Sunni, just by the Shi’ite *fiqh* (Guillame, 1954).

and publications, seem slightly manipulated or tailored to implement the Khilafah state. If this same subject (myself in this case) decides to conduct a research project on HT as a participant observer, he/she will find the rhetoric and oratorical skills of his/her subjects of study and their ability to appeal to their audience, as being truly remarkable.

To put it differently, there is an overwhelming and overpowering dimension, which is constantly re-surfacing here, despite my interviewees' denial: politics, and above all, a fetishism for it. Its prevalence is achieved, paradoxically, whenever it is denied any possibility of a delinking between religion, state and society. The other important aspect to consider is power and relations of power, where the 'spiritual dimension and basis to Islamic polity' (HT 2005, 38) is clearly overshadowed. The writings on the Khilafah and on the Islamic state system produced by HTUK constantly stress the openness and great level of tolerance in Islamism. For example, 'what distinguishes Islam...is the existence of a detailed system of governance...for the good of mixed communities comprising both Muslim and non-Muslims' (HT 2005, 29). These declarations were clearly jeopardized when I ventured to ask Dr Wahid about the treatment of the apostates in the Khilafah. After a brief hesitation, his response was: '*Qur'an* is clear about the apostate: the capital penalty'. Such a reply left me slightly perplexed and I wondered how the population in the Middle Eastern countries -- the supposed basis for the future Khilafah state -- would receive statements like this. Besides, I then recalled my conversation with the HT media representative Taji Mustafa,⁴⁰ who had quoted a poll conducted 'among the population of the Middle East, by HT party branches, where it emerged that 87% of the population want the institution of the Khilafah state'. I also recalled that HT branches are banned in most of the Middle Eastern countries and citizens suspected of being HT supporters⁴¹ are jailed for years 'after fake trials'.⁴² Again, I was at square one and I started questioning how the 'general upheaval in support of the Khilafah' could actually happen across the Middle Eastern countries. Apart from the fact that they are banned as an Islamist party, perhaps their actual popularity was not so widespread; therefore, their political plan could only be implemented by a violent and abrupt takeover of political power. Once again, the prevailing dimension was power, a struggle and a desire for it, and ultimately, for politics. It was stated that the HT members would move to the Khilafa state and encourage 'all the other

⁴⁰ See the appendix for the complete interview.

⁴¹ There was the case of three members of HTUK, who were jailed in Egypt for four years under the accusation of trying to implant HT in Egypt (where the party is banned). They were Majid Nawaz, Ian Nisbet and Reza Pankhurst.

⁴² Extract from the interview with Taji Mustafa.

Islamists across the world to move there' as they could finally 'live in a state freed from imported political structures, alien to the values of the Muslim world'.⁴³ Needless to remark that expressions like the 'Muslim world' resemble a culturalist-orientalist approach, where Islam is presented as a unifying and totalizing entity, which swallows histories and stories of dynamic interactions, exchanges, transformations within the variegated and rich social, political and 'cultural' contexts. Paradoxically, this (HT's) is also the approach adopted by the likes of Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington, authors whose scholarship is considered crucial to USA's foreign policy interests and who are accused of 'drawing false battle lines between the West and Islam' (HT 2005, 31).

Furthermore, the mere conceptualization of Western Islamists promoting and pushing for the institution of the Khilafah, leading the 'Khalifa upheaval', without having ever lived 'there', without even being able to speak Arabic, ironically evokes certain past ideas and political plans, which started to take shape in Europe at the end of the 19th century among Zionist political circles, (the latter are otherwise labelled as 'invaders, colonizers of the Palestinian lands', HT 2005a, 13). Here again, there is an aspect of a mirroring effect: the unconscious emulation of the 'enemy' strategy (Zionists are always represented as enemies in the HT Islamist discourse).

The idea of the Khilafah state stretching across the Middle East, North Africa, Central Asia is in itself a progressive and -- to a certain extent -- a revolutionary plan, which is more than just an example of 'an indigenous political system consistent with the values of the Muslim world'⁴⁴. It is difficult to imagine the possibility of simply retrieving an historical past -- which formally ended in 1924 (the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the formal end of the Khilafah system) -- by deleting centuries of political, historical, social, economic events, transformations and interactions. Such a plan of recreating a past historical experience (which ultimately never occurred in the terms indicated by the HT leadership), is definitely a revolution, which could take place only by uprooting existing institutions and abruptly taking over power. Finally, this does not represent an effort to have an impact and to change Western politics toward the Middle East and the 'Islamic world': it is a blatantly new foundational act, which requires the complete erasure of previous 'strata'. This leads me to comment that the widespread idea of HT as a political movement, which aims to bring back medieval political structures (*The Times* 2004) is clearly flawed. I argue that the exact reverse is actually true. HT's plan resembles a drastic innovation: its political

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

discourse, semantics and practices are totally innovative, as they are performed by a Muslim minority in a European country. The HT members themselves reject the label of innovators as well,⁴⁵ since their declared intention is to finally restore an indigenous political system that has been contaminated by centuries of foreign interventions and occupation in the 'Muslim world'. According to their view, the Khilafah system is the only political structure which permits them to 'respect, protect and promote the moral and spiritual values of Islam, by forming an integral whole with its political viewpoint'.

As the interviews and conversations mentioned above have shown, the ultimate dimension of the Khilafah (Islamic state) is politics and the struggle for power, both within the party and in the supposed-to-be Khilafah state. Ironically, such an effort would definitely promote a strong 'secularization' of Islam. This is firmly denied by the political actors themselves, and finally, missed by their detractors who categorise them under the label of 'religious fundamentalists'. Thus, both representation and self-representation are affected by a mirroring effect, and as such, the images represented are the same but turned upside down: loyalty to the past becomes backwardness. Besides, both parties overlook the fact that they -- in a similar manner -- project the exact opposite of what happens in reality, by being the reflecting surface of the Other's representation and the negative of what actually occurs outside their discursive practices. This process happens under specific constraints and repression, which I call the fetishism for politics: it *deflects* the interaction between the two parties (the dominant and the dominated) and it leads to a political stalemate and the persistence of a security threat.

Al Ghurabaa and the Saved Sect

The mirroring effect within the practice of representation and self-representation (as explored with HT) finds a further expression in the case of two other Islamist parties: Al Ghurabaa and the Saved Sect. They, similarly, reject the British system but they plan instead of overtaking it.

Al Ghurabaa and the Saved Sect are both offsprings of Al-Muhajiroun, a group founded by Omar-Al-Bakri and then disbanded in 2004. The two groups openly support Al-Qaida and the 9-11 and 7-7 suicide bombers, by hailing them as the 'Magnificent 19' and the

⁴⁵ This was the reaction when, during a personal chat with Dr. Wahid, I pointed out that perhaps they were innovators and revolutionaries, and not 'preservers' of the Islamic system of the Khilafa.

'avenging heroes' respectively. Their leaders Anjoum Choudari and Abu Izzadin are both part of the team of 'Muslim lawyers' defending Omar Bakri together with the Saudi born lawyer Muhammad-al-Massari, head of the CDLR (Commission for the Defence of the Legitimate Rights), now based in London.

Mr. Choudari and Mr. Abu Izzadin follow the ASWJ (ahl-al-Sunna-wal-Jamaa), that means to follow only the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* in accordance with the understanding of the Companions and the family of the prophet Muhammad. They both adopt this approach by basing its stance on a *hadith* that emphasizes the purity of the first three generations:

- 1) The first generation -- the Messenger Muhammad and his companions;
- 2) The second generation -- those who followed the first generation (known as the Taabi'een);
- 3) The third generation (ended 240-260AH) -- those who followed the Taabi'een (Thesavedsect, 2004).

It must be stressed that they emphatically dissociate themselves from those traditionally seen as Salafis: the Wahhabi scholars collaborating with what the Sect sees as the 'Kafir Saudi Regime, who do not enter any struggle against Kufr, shirk or the Tawaagheet. However they are just happy and content with just speaking about Allah's names and attributes all day and always dig on the mistakes of Muslims' (Thesavedsect 2003).

The ban imposed on Omar Bakri in August 2005 and him being disallowed from returning to Britain after a short visit to Lebanon prompted an exasperated response from Choudary and Izzaadin. Choudary described the move as a 'Kangaroo system of justice...they say that there is freedom of expression here but he has been banned because he was a voice of dissent'. The Al Ghurabaa website issued a release saluting Bakri, now 'freed from this prison of Britain...while his flags are at half mast, Mr Tony Blair cannot spend his days in power without fear from your promise of the black flag of Islam flying over 10 Downing street' (Alghurabaa, 2005).

Likewise, the related 'Saved Sect' website issued a message referring to Bakri as our 'beloved teacher and scholar', and spoke of the divine favour that allowed them to learn Islam with:

'a scholar al-Sunna-wal-Jamaa'ah such as yourself...in a time when we used to be clean-shaven, listen to music, smoke, freely mix in colleges and universities, disrespect our parents, wear designer clothes, swear, betray our covenants, not pray and knowingly disobey our lord; you were the only one, who was out there challenging the Western, non-Islamic way of life openly and publicly, not fearing

from the blame of the blamers and the propaganda of the media' (Thesavioursect, 2005).

These topics, voiced in a more belligerent and loud tone, were exactly the ones discussed in a meeting held to 'celebrate' the first anniversary of the 7-7 London bombings. I had the opportunity of attending this meeting as a 'distant' non-participant observer. 'Distant' is the best way of describing my actual 'geographical' position in the room, in relation to the members of Al Ghurabaa and the Saved Sect. The fact that I was not wearing any hijab (I did not think it disrespectful or essential to have one as I was not inside a mosque) meant that they relegated me to the back of the room, on the exact same side as the other 'Westerns', namely, some journalists from the BBC. Among them, there was only one lady,⁴⁶ who was wearing the head-cover. She was allowed to sit in front of me, but behind her male colleagues. At the end of the session, Abu Izzadin pointed at me, as the 'naked woman' in the room.

The meeting, which was chaired by Abu Izzadin and Anjoum Choudary, started by first mourning the departure of 'our beloved teacher and scholar' Omar Bakri, who was praised for speaking the truth and for having resisted the attacks of the disbelievers. To be more precise, Choudary declared that 'the more we used to see the disbelievers and hypocrites attacking you, the more it increased our faith and belief that you were speaking the truth...as this is something which the messenger of Allah used to face on a daily basis from the enemies of Islam'.⁴⁷

Omar Bakri was addressed as a sort of divinity, represented there as a transcendent entity, a spiritual guide, whom Choudary was invoking and supplicating, by speaking directly to him, in front of all the other party members and disciples. As if to confirm this perception, he continued by saying that 'you will be pleased to know that we will continue with our work here in order to distinguish ourselves from the disbelievers and fulfil our

⁴⁶ Apparently, as Peter Taylor confirmed to me, the BBC always prefers to send male journalists, as they consider the presence of a female journalist counter-productive to the job. On that day -- he explained me -- there had been an emergency and they had to send a woman to take the place of her male colleague. He also complimented me for my courage in attending that meeting as a lone young woman. Ironically, the basic idea of reflecting stereotypes works perfectly in this case.

⁴⁷

Those quotes, and the ones that follow, are excerpts from a meeting that I recorded, on 7 July 2006 in Leytonstone, East London. The theme of the meeting (jointly organized by the Saved Sect and Al Ghurabaa) was: 'Are we ready for another 7-7?'

duties and obligations wherever we are...you will be greatly missed here...May Allah unite us again, if not in this world, in the Hereafter'.⁴⁸

After this sort of invocation, the meeting started and the theme was '*Are we ready for another 7-7?*'.

The first convenor was Abu Izzadin, who opened his intervention by defining 9-11 and 7-7 as a 'wake up call for the whole world, to signify that the idea of integration is flawed and unrealistic'. In his words, the attacks have had the important role of dividing and defining the two camps: the Ummah of the believers and the camp of the *Munafiqiin* and hypocrites headed by the likes of George Bush and Tony Blair'. The reactions to those attacks had been the beginning of a 'Crusade against Islam and Muslims, which forced Muslims to make a choice between the two fronts, either support Bush or support al Qaida and Osama Bin Laden'. The notion of two separated camps was strongly stressed by Abu Izzadin, to the point that Muslims collaborating with the UK government were called 'the secularist and hypocrites from the MCB, MPAC, IHRC', and regarded as 'chimpanzees who sold their beliefs in order to achieve positions and power as MP, judge, doctors or police chiefs'. The core argument of his speech -- which was rhythmically marked by the same rhetoric question (are we ready for another 7-7?) -- was that the events of the terror attacks were simply acts of retaliation, which were directly caused by the occupations and wars waged by the West against the Muslim World in the last centuries. In this connection, Abu Izzadin shockingly declared 'not to feel sorry for the 52 victims', as they were not Muslims and they constituted such a small percentage 'in comparison with the millions of children killed in Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan...besides, the Muslim community is experiencing 9-11 and 7-7 everyday, at the hands of the Western Powers'.

So far, his discursive approach had shown an exact resemblance to what he was strongly criticizing, for example, Bush-Blair's bipolar division of Humanity between Christians and Muslims, Right and Wrong, Good and Evil, all reinforced by the notion of a forthcoming Crusade to wage against the Enemy (Muslims in one case and Christians in the other). The same attitude is also embraced by the culturalist-orientalist framework, which is based on the idea that the Other is the *different*, and as such, the *inferior*, the unacceptable, in need of being ousted and ultimately dominated and destroyed, for being inadequate. Here again, representation and self-representation mirror each other; specifically reflecting the negative of the Other's image, as it were, through diverging lenses. Moreover, this occurs

⁴⁸ Ibid.

within the domain of a struggle for power and it is driven by the desire to have the upper hand.

Mr Izzadin continued by saying that, 'Muslims humiliated feel the need to defend the honour of Islam and of the Ummah, to the point of sacrificing their own life. As such they are martyrs'. Abu Izzadin was also explicit about Democracy, which he rejected because it enshrines popular rather than divine sovereignty and is built on lies and the 'greed for Power'. He therefore envisaged Britain becoming an Islamic state, by means of both da'wah and jihad, which he regarded as a *fard* obligation. He then declared: 'I want Britain to become an Islamic state. I want to see the flag of Islam raised in 10 Downing street...Islamising Britain is a divine duty'. At this specific point, members of Al Ghurabaa and the Saved Sect started chanting from the audience: 'Islam in Downing Street! Islam in Downing Street!', as if it were a war motto to exorcize the forthcoming battle or the beginning of a Crusade to defeat the enemy and to pave the way for a new 'Islamic' system, regardless of the existing political, social, indigenous structures. It is obvious that a project like this very closely resembles the 'imperialistic', 'colonial policies' of the West in the Muslim world (the same ones which led to the 'humiliation and suffering of the Ummah for centuries and which have to be stopped').⁴⁹ My point here is that the dynamic connecting the practices of representation and self-representation is based on a mirroring process, where the 'self' reflects the Other's image, but denies its representation. This happens under the constraints of a repressed desire for power, and the denial of a strong enamourment with politics: namely, fetishism.

The second part of Izzadin's speech was focused on the 'evil' role of the media in demonizing Muslims by waging a propaganda war to support the UK government and the 'Evil forces'. The example taken to support the argument was the episode of the killing of the Brazilian electrician Charles de Menezes,⁵⁰ which was 'initially welcomed by the media as the elimination of another Muslim and therefore a triumph'. In Abu Izzadin's view, the same event also stood as a clear proof of the incapacity of all the '007 danger mouse [sic] working for the English Government, who committed a gross mistake and desperately tried to cover it up'. The idea of the incompetence of the Government and its flawed policies was used to explain the 7-7 attacks in themselves, and to predict more similar episodes in the future. In his reasoning, the terror attacks constituted a reaction to the Western policies

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ The reference here is to the unfortunate and dramatic event of the killing of an innocent Brazilian electrician who was mistaken for a terrorist. This happened inside the Stockwell tube station in London on 22 July 2005.

in the Middle East and therefore the culprit had to be envisaged in the likes of Bush or Blair. He showed a schizophrenic attitude toward the events, which, at times, were regarded as victories for the 'Islamic front', and at other times, regarded as the outcomes of the West's mistakes. The positive connotations were always attributed to the Islamic side (the Us group) and the negative to the West (the Other/Enemy). To conclude his speech -- with an outspoken rhetorical attitude -- Abu Izzadin reiterated his question on whether we are ready for more events like 7-7. This time, his answer was a loud affirmative yes, which was hailed by the audience.

Anjourn Choudary's intervention came next. His speech was characterized by powerful oratory; he opened by asking the same rhetorical question. He focused on the political aspects of the anti-Terror war that -- in his view -- was mainly 'meant to weaken Islam and to disband the Muslim community'. In his words, the driving force 'behind the draconian anti terror legislation is fear of the superiority of Islam as a religion, as an ideology, as a political system, fear that one day Islam will dominate the world'. Likewise, the events of 7-7 were addressed as an unmistakable sign of the strength of Islam and of its believers and of the weakness of a decadent British society, founded on alcohol, drugs, casinos and dysfunctional families'. According to this view, the total lack of values and moral conduct has always been a fact of English history to the point that Choudary loudly affirmed: 'British values are basically fish and chips and nothing more'. This resembled an excessively 'reductionist' approach; belittling the 'Other', and trivializing him/her in order to justify his/her submission. The English lack of values was presented as a main factor that would lead to the Islamic flag and the Islamic state to be 'one day dominant and established in the whole world'. This also sounded like a brutalized and reversed version of the colonial concept of 'the white man's burden' (Kipling 1899), with the 'educational' and 'developmental' purposes being *unmasked* as sheer domination, justified by a supposed Islamic moral superiority, in place of Western technological advancement.

As in the case of Mr Izzadin, Choudary's discursive approach was established on a bipolar division between Islam and the rest of the world, between the forces of Evil (West) and the forces of the Good (Islam), so that Islam would ultimately triumph over the Enemy who is ridiculed and reduced to a few insignificant features. In the same way, at the level of self-representation, there was an interesting reification of Islam. It was presented as a monolithic block, characterized by unchanged and unchangeable moral values, but at the same time, deprived of human agency, of history, of geographies: a sort of inanimate entity which would destroy the Other, the West. That is to say, the self-representation was

mirroring the representation offered by the culturalist-orientalist approach. In the culturalist-orientalist case, the main aim is to deprive the Other (the Islamists) of his/her agency and political credentials, in order to prevail over and subdue him/her; in Choudary's case, *paradoxically*, the aim is substantially the same. To put it another way, the personal fascination with power, and mainly the preoccupation with taking power, could reasonably lead to a belittling of the Other; not just the Other on the 'enemy' front, but also the Other 'among Us' (to prevail over and to get absolute control, even among the rest of Us). Here again, one possible explanation of such a mirroring process between representation and self-representation could be found in a sort of fetishist fascination with politics, power, and ultimately, leadership.

To conclude his intervention, Mr Choudary -- again, in a rhetorical fashion -- asked whether we were ready for another 7-7, and like Mr Izzadin, his answer was a triumphant and loud yes for the Islamic flag in Downing street.

The 'contextual' aspect of the meeting, its contents and paradoxes can be better illustrated by collating them with some extracts from a personal chat that I had with Mr Choudary a few days after Al Ghurabaa and the Saved sect were both banned, having been accused of glorifying terrorism.

It is particularly useful to analyse the interview contents in comparison with the arguments and the discourses put forward during the meeting on the 7-7 terror attacks. This is because -- as I said before -- by collating different sorts of fieldwork experiences and ethnographic data, the subjects of study are better observed in their performing practices and discourses (according to the different contexts, interlocutors or audience).

My first question to Mr Choudary was about his reaction to the decision taken by the then Home secretary John Reid to ban the two parties (Al Ghurabaa and the Saved Sect). His view was that the action represented a clear example of a total:

'failure for the British government and the capitalist ideology and the principle of freedom and Christian liberalism. Al-Ghurabaa and the Saved Sect are ideological movements and political movements...[the Government] rather than engaging in dialogue and discussion...they have sought to try to silence any voices...I think this is a victory for Muslims'.⁵¹

My next question was strictly related to my surprise at hearing the event being described as a victory, and learning that Al Ghurabaa and the Saved Sect were *ideological* and

⁵¹ This is an extract from the interview with Mr Choudary that happened on 18 July 2006 in East London. It is contained in the appendix.

political movements. Those attributes are novel and mostly 'extraneous' to the vocabulary and discourses of Salafist Islamist movements, whose core fundament is that Islam comprises all, it is an all-encompassing model and conduct for life, 'the true path and it is not absolutely a mere ideology or vulgar politics' (Bakri 2002). Choudary's answer elaborated on why that was a victory, but it was vague and inconsistent in relation to the political and ideological aspects of the two movements. According to his reasoning, 'when someone does not have a counter argument and they cannot deal with ideas and thoughts which people carry, then the easy thing is try to ban the other voice'. Interestingly enough, instead of explaining -- as I had asked him to do -- the use of the terms *ideological* and *political*, he reinforced that conceptualization by affirming that 'if you start to stop people propagating their *thoughts* and *ideas*, then you will push them underground...Ultimately I think this will just quicken the victory for Islam because when you try to ban something, people become more interested in it'. My reaction to such phrasing was stupor as -- once again -- Islam was depicted as an ideological system, whose final victory would be prompted by the fact of being banned and prohibited, and not by the assumption that it was in fact the 'best, true model of life' as emphasized by Mr Choudary himself, during the meeting held a few days before, with the rest of the members of Al Ghurabaa and the Saved Sect. One could see that there was a 'discursive practice' and a 'signifying practice' (Foucault 1981), which was ultimately conforming (or adapting) to the different contexts and audiences; surprisingly schizophrenic in its content, to the point of utterly denying what was previously held as an absolute 'truth'. This was an open play of sheer fascination with power, and the aspiration or preoccupation with the taking of power. It also indirectly demonstrated the process of secularization of 'religion' each and every time that it was conceptualized, discoursed, performed and signified as a totalizing system and conduct of life for the whole community. The proof of the fact that my interlocutor was affirming what he would have then utterly denied -- his contradiction in *terminis* -- came when I asked whether he would have appealed against the Home Secretary's decision. His response was definitive and contained. He stated that: 'We are not interested in appealing, in going to court. At the end of the day, the courts and the appeals process is all part of the same system. We believe in Islam as an alternative'. That -- he meant -- as a substitutive system, which would eradicate and take over the existing and previous one. It sounded paradoxical, especially as he was criticizing the British government for not allowing any dissenting voice. Here again, there was a slightly schizophrenic behaviour: a projection of a series of converse images, self-reflecting and inversed representations. But, above all,

there was an intense *enamourment* with power and, also, a strong desire for taking over power, and this irreversibly aspires to a new foundational political act. It is far from being a retreat into dark Mediaeval systems of governments (Zakaria 2001), as Islamists programmes are often depicted.

My point is that the signifying practices analysed here have been developing in this way under the constraint of a denial of what was ultimately desired but not expressed. What I call the *fetishism for politics*: a greed for final supremacy and absolute power which also leads, sometimes, to a temporary and convenient suspension of the *fundamentals* of the original discourse. This stands as a further paradox in relation to groups which are represented by the dominant culturalist-orientalist discourse as *fundamentalists*, and which represent themselves as *Salafi* or the true followers of the primitive, pure and *true* form of Islam.

To conclude, my ethnographic work has clearly shown that the practices of representation and self-representation in relation to Islamist parties are deeply affected by a mirroring dynamic, within the domain of a fetishism for politics and power.

My argument is that the Islamists' project of establishing the Khilafah, in order to implement the Sharia Law and a truly Islamic system of life where politics is inherently embodied in religion, will paradoxically prompt the secularization of that religion, where the final and ultimate dimension is politics, and within that, the struggle and the preoccupation with taking Power.

What has emerged from my fieldwork, is that the political actors (Islamists) themselves share a powerful fascination, a fetishism for politics and power, short of any so-called 'Islamic' connotation. Ironically, they declare that their struggle is aimed at instituting an Islamic system, where the 'political' is at the service of the Spiritual, as it was under the Prophet's community. This is the reason why they describe themselves as *Salafi* or followers of the primitive and pure form of Islam. Such a description is received and discoursed by the 'Powerful' (Marranci 2006, 56) culturalist-orientalist representations as implying *Fundamentalists*: fanatic religious mullahs ready to plot terrorist attacks against the West and the Western systems of life. The outcome is that both parties reflect the Other's representation. This representation neglects the political dimension and deflects the interaction between the two parties, with negative results: the loss and lack of political relevance for Islamist parties, and the persistence of a security threat, which ultimately also weakens the political legitimacy of the dominant (i.e., the UK Government).

CONCLUSIONS

The tragedy of Islamism in Britain: a fetishism for politics

'Let's face it. We are undone by each other. And if we are not, we are missing something. This seems so clearly the case with grief, but it can be so only because it was already the case with desire'.

Judith Butler

The present dissertation has been an account and an analysis of the discourses and practices of a large number of Islamist parties in the UK over a period of nearly 20 years (1989-2007). This was a period when they came under increased public attention during the debates over multiculturalism and the supposed threats to security from the rise of 'radical Islam'.

The preceding chapters have dealt with stereotypes, epistemological categories, and practices of representation and self-representation. I have argued against the commonplace culturalist-orientalist approach, a dominant discourse, which denies and rejects any 'political' in relation to the Islamists. Within such a framework, Islamism does not even exist as a concept: either it is a matter of a private professed belief (Islam), or it is a terrorist disruption of the Western democratic systems, which needs to be eradicated.

My answer to this Manichean framing has been both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, my choice is to adopt the constructionist approach, which sees 'cultures' and 'religions' as political acts, within the terms of a power-relationship. And practically, I decided to carry out two years of fieldwork amongst British Islamists.

My ethnographic work has been fundamental in unearthing a very interesting element in relation to the political actors themselves: their sheer fascination and *enamorment* with power and politics. This refers to their strong desire to have the upper hand, not just over their antagonists, but also over their acolytes and their imaginations and fantasies of self-representation.

Besides, the fieldwork findings have also suggested that there is a perverted dynamic that one needs to take into consideration: a mirroring effect between the dominant culturalist-orientalist representation of Islamists and the Islamists' self-representation. Further, the resulting images (representations) are similarly affected by a *fetishism* for politics, which

leads both parties (the dominant and the dominated) to fail. It is a 'tragedy' -- as I see it -- of frustrated political actors on one side and a persistent security threat, on the other.

There is a recurring paradoxical 'leitmotiv' in the debate on 'Islam' and the West. Discussion (including those on policy matters) on such a topic schizophrenically complicates the boundaries between fairly diversified and opposing political and religious schools of thoughts, even though the parties involved seem not to notice the inner anomalies involved. Let me give some examples.

Secularists and feminists strongly oppose the so-called fundamentalists, and although they are mostly from the Left, they often end up supporting authoritarian but secular regimes against the Islamists (from Algeria to Saddam's Iraq). Other leftists, as secular as the former group, but who defend the Third World and promote multiculturalism in the West, nonetheless campaign to see the headscarf allowed in European schools. Many anti-imperialist militants, although supposed to promote women's rights, supported the Taliban when it came under US attack. A rightist French essayist might write a book claiming that radical Islam is a plot to destroy Europe (Del Valle 1997), while others on the right would claim that President Chirac opposed the war in Iraq to placate the French Muslims. Likewise, in a country like France, the extreme right National Front can call for the expulsion of Muslims, but also call for supporting for Saddam Hussein against the United States (Roy 2004, 327). That is to say, the usual faultlines (Left/Right, nationalist/universalist, secularist/religious) are very porous and not helpful in order to explain the current alignments in the debate on Islam.

An observation must be made here: we certainly live in a time of great intellectual *mongrelism*, when cultural, political and religious categories (mostly spurious) are used to construe complex and multilayered political discourses and practices. In this framework, the 'empty' category of Islam has become the focus as well as a culprit within a debate born after the collapse of the USSR (Del Valle 1997, Huntington 1997, Kepel 1997, Kramer 1996). It seems that there was a need to identify and locate a new Evil, while re-defining the borders and the identity of the West, at the same time. More specifically, there has been an impelling need to establish a relationship between a given society, a culture, a political system and a territory, in a strong attempt to re-map the world (Appadurai 1996, 32). And so, the need to define a new threat has been accompanied by the urge to locate it in terms of geography, territory and places. Sometimes (as in the case of Iraq and Afghanistan), it has been possible to potentially resort to a specific country chosen as a war target. In other cases, this option of finding a geographical location has been slightly

less available, since there was no foreign country where the enemy (the ill-defined Islamic terrorist) could be located. The 'Enemy', now, appeared to be in our vicinity, living in the same cities and countries as a Muslim minority. The solution is then offered by the discursive practices of the dominant culturalist-orientalist approach: the use of clear-cut terms such as 'terrorists', 'religious fundamentalists', 'jihadists' has been (and it still is) an example of this practice to define the 'Other' and build a metaphorical (discursive) 'wall' to exclude him/her.

The peculiar aspect of this story has been that this discursive 'Other' (Muslims and Islamists in the UK) did not belong to another country, far away from Us, and it did not speak another language, incomprehensible to Us. Surprisingly, this Other was born in the same country as 'Us', speaking the same language with the same local accent: he/she was in our 'proximity' (Levinas 1996, 45). But he-she discoursed a discourse, which appeared to be made of *other* symbols, which could not be immediately recognized or harmonized with our own. My thesis has stressed that this has been a fundamental moment in the history and genealogy (Foucault 1977) of the practices and discourses of Islamists in the UK, as represented by the dominant culturalist-orientalist approach. To acknowledge the vicinity of the 'Other' as such resulted in (led to) us feeling threatened by him/her who was different, irreducible, but not so distant from Us, in terms of space. It is the rupturing, disrupting and suturing point at the same time (Butler 2004, 130). It separates while it creates the 'Other', stemming from our own fears, insecurities, inadequacies and ultimately desire *to prevail* over it. This is a simple way of explaining the 'Other', the Islamists, as represented by the culturalist-orientalist approach, which is analyzed and criticized in this dissertation. Moreover, this Other has been also made the object of fetishism: it has been depoliticized, antagonized and ostracized.

The so-called popular debates on 'Islam' as the enemy within or the Public enemy number one, are ultimately debates to define and strengthen our identity as 'Us', or the 'West'.

Olivier Roy gives an apt example of this in relation to the 'headscarf' affair in France. The issue arose from some hundred individual cases of girls wanting to wear headscarves (or veils) to schools (Roy 2004, 336). It became a national debate with the creation of a commission, a vote in Parliament, weekly debate on television, and several passionate opinion pieces in the press. By contrast, the headscarf is not an issue in Britain, where even policewomen are allowed to wear it. This easily demonstrates that the issue of Islam and the West is actually linked to discourse and a practice of French 'soul searching' about the meaning of laicism in the creation of national identity, and about the relationship

between the state, church and civil society. In other words, the French model of the nation-state seems to be in crisis due to several factors such as European integration and globalization, but the 'debate on Islam is a way to externalize and intellectualize the issue' (Roy 2004, 337).

However, as argued in the course of this dissertation, the dominated (Islamists) hold a relevant role in this 'play'. They have been counteracting the dominant discourse in several ways, and the quest for a strict application of the *sharia* (this is invoked by several Islamist groups based in different European countries, Dassetto 1996, 89 constitutes an example. My argument has been that such an attempt arises from an effort to present, represent and inhabit a 'self' which strives to be absolute and totally disconnected from the 'Other' (in this case the West); opposing and fetishizing it at the same time.

Nevertheless, this self is just the 'other' face of the same coin -- the same supposedly unaltered absolute, which tries to be delinked from the 'Other' and from his/her being. Through the mirroring practices of representation and self-representation, it is unaware of the fact that it is connecting with the Other, while longing for separation from it (Butler 2004, 141).

This happens under the constraints of fetishism: the denial, the repression, and the antagonizing of a strong *enamourment* with politics and power, nurtured by both parties (the Dominant and the Dominated) within their power-relations. The idea of a fetishist relation to power and politics (as nurtured by the Dominant and the Dominated), helps in analysing the discourses and the practices of the UK Islamists facing and confronting the UK Government on Islamic and Islamist issues. Such a conceptualisation helps us understand the political hiatus and the 'political' misunderstandings between the UK government and the Islamists. It allows us to advance the hypothesis that both parties are leading actors in a *tragic play* (Barker 1997) of a fetishism for politics, which drives both to a negative end.

In fact, this fetishist dynamic has been fundamental in understanding that, the often claimed⁵² inseparability of religion and politics in Islam is not a truism (Varisco 2005, 45), but a topic for investigating the relations between the categories of Islam, religion, and politics. As in so far as speaking in terms of if it is still makes any sense to talk in terms of 'categories' makes sense, (Burchell 1991, 87). As I elaborated before, the conceptualization of both religion and politics is the context and the contest over the 'discoursing' and 'practicing' of symbols, the social construction and inhabitation of their

⁵² The reference here is primarily to the ethnographic findings, interviews and personal chats contained in chapter 5-6 and in the appendix.

meanings, and conversely, their reuse in a subversive and 'abusive' way. Furthermore, instead of religion, I have spoken of *religiosity*, or the way the believer lives his/her own relation to religion; this has constituted the main discursive practice of Islamism and Islamists in Britain. My argument has been that the notion of politics as centered on power-relations and interests needs to be spelt out better and more comprehensively. In this framework, Kyosty Pekonen's definition of politics as a 'struggle about people's imagination' (Pekonen 2009,200) can be seen as a corrective to the more conventional thinking. Broadly speaking, I have conceived politics as a competition and struggle over the management of the discourse and practice of symbols (Geertz 1973, 193-233); politics as a Leviathan has been thus transformed into politics as a symbol-maker.

Another important point that I have tried to develop in the thesis is that, no one group or political actor possesses 'the monopoly on the management of the sacred' (Kane 1992, 9), i.e., its discourses and practices. Thus, while Islamist leaders assert their values and visions to be timeless and immemorial, it should not obscure the fact that they are subject to modification and change, re-use, subversion and abuse (Butler and Scott 1992, 45).

As I have emphasised often in the dissertation, this process specifically occurs in contexts where Muslims live as a minority, in the West for example. My argument is that being part of a minority group is a matter of feelings and perceptions (*alienation*), and not of numbers and statistics. Furthermore, living as a Muslim minority also means experiencing the delinking of Islamic 'culture' and 'religion'. Because of this, Islam is experienced only as a 'religion'. Religious norms have no relationship with social and political spheres; religion is *de facto* confined to the private sphere (Roy 2004, 148). This implies a growing process of individualization of religious practices. It is a straightforward, and practical way of explaining the concept of *religiosity*, i.e., how believers experience and formulate their own relationship to religion, as well as the discoursing, inhabitation and practice of that meaning as a 'lived' relation to the 'real'.

In this framework, Eickelman and Piscatori's concept of the 'objectification of Islam' proved to be very helpful. To be able to define Islam becomes a prerequisite for any Muslim living with a 'minority' status, because Islam is no longer embedded in a culture and a social practice (Eickelman-Piscatori 1996, 38). My point has been that the answers to questions like 'What is Islam', or 'What does Islam say about this and that'? are less important than the actual processes that they trigger. Everybody who asks and answers those questions, participates in the process of *objectification* of Islam, where the meaning

created is by -- formulation and discursive practice, more than by the content (Asad 1993, 68).

In other sense, the passage to the West functions as a good opportunity to rethink an Islam rid of cultural and national particularities. The new communities can work at a reconstruction, or a re-formulation of 'Islamic' discourses and practices. Some of my interviewees have acknowledged immigration to be a positive factor; as a means to uproot Muslims from pseudo-Muslim cultures and to promote a return to the true tenets of religion. My argument is that the 'Islam' taking shape in the West is an 'Islam' *in vitro*, a new experiment, something of a novel development, which is 'de-cultured' and 'de-territorialized'. As such, it is not a territory, but an *environment*, a platform for a political and social future.

In my work, I also felt the urge to clearly spell out my subjects of research. My research is not generally about Muslims living in Britain, mosque-goers, children of Muslim parents or people with a specific ethnic background (an Arab, a Pakistani). My subjects are those among them who place their Muslim identity at the centre of their political practices: Islamists. Islamists are people who use and discourse the vocabulary of Islamic metaphors to think through their political destinies; who see their political future in Islam. Islam is not a monolithic edifice and, there are several different shades of discourses, discursive practices and formations within it. I strongly argue that Islamism is a political discourse, and as such, it is akin to other political discourses like socialism and liberalism. My point has been that just as it is possible and valid to speak of political discourses such as socialism, even when it includes many varieties and many differences; it should be similarly possible to speak of Islamism. Islamism is a discourse that attempts to centre Islam within the political order. Islamism can range from the assertion of a Muslim subjectivity to a full-blooded attempt to reconstruct society on Islamic principles.

Some authors (Kepel 1997; Mandaville 2001; Roy 1996) distinguish between Islamism and fundamentalism. According to their view, fundamentalists are those who aim to see the establishment of an Islamic state while Islamists are those who aim for the Islamization of society. (which does not necessarily means the capture of the state and the political power). My position has been that I definitely see Islamism as a political project but my notion of the political is not limited to projects which aim directly at seizing power through a singular founding act (El Zein 1977, 110). The political is the moment of the institution of the social (Laclau 1990, 31; Varisco 2005, 8). It may involve a capture of the state apparatus by a dedicated vanguard, but it may also include a more diffused strategy of

reform of civil society (Sayyid 1997, 17). Thus, within my broad definition of Islamism as a political project, there is room for very different strategies of Islamization. Likewise, I do not agree with the authors (Kepel 1997, Mandaville 2001, Mamdani 2004, to name but a few) who distinguish between Political Islam and Islamism on the basis that the first notion indicates movements simply aiming at reforming the society according to Islamic principles, but without planning the seizure of political power, while the second notion indicates movements planning to institute an Islamic state. My thesis has considered both agendas as political, regardless of the actual or planned targets. I did not speak of 'Political' Islam mainly for the reason that doing so presents and stresses the concept of the *political* merely as an attribute stemming or juxtaposed with a professed faith called Islam. Of course, the political discourse is related to some core assumptions and tenets of Islam, but they are lived, discoursed, mobilized, practiced and inhabited in the realm of the political (Varisco 2005, 16). This is the realm of power struggles and the symbol-making, therefore, it is not, just an appendix to 'Islam', as the reductive and simplifying expression 'Political Islam' might suggest. The political discourse is represented, shared, elaborated and disputed within a different context and its discursive nature and formations are different from those of a private professed belief. On the other hand -- as explained before -- my main interest has not been particularly centered on any specific strategy of Islamization. Rather, I am keen to understand how, over the last twenty years in Britain, Islamism has come to occupy an increasingly prominent place within Muslim imaginings, dreams and expectations.

Within this framework, I found it necessary to examine the main events that signified the birth of an Islamist identity in Britain: the Rushdie affair, the Gulf and the Bosnian crisis, the Oldham, Burnley and Bradford riots, 9-11, the Iraq war and the 7-7 bombings. My principal aim was to comprehend the genealogy of the process that British Islamists have 'coursed' in order to graft their practices and discourses on a 'transplanted' set of Islamic tenets, and what totally new shoots emerged there from. I have strongly opposed the culturalist-orientalist assertions that the answer to the 'Al-Qaeda type of violence' is in the *Qur'an* and in Islam, as a set of beliefs. My argument has been that the Al-Qaeda type of violence is not an isolated phenomenon. Suicide attacks became a standard of guerrilla warfare in the 80s through the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, who supposedly practiced Hinduism. Hence, it is difficult and rather misleading to link suicide attacks to specific religions or cultures. My interpretation has been that the real genesis of Al-Qaeda violence has more to do with a Western tradition of individual and pessimistic revolt for an

elusive ideal world, than with the Quranic conception of martyrdom (Asad 2006, 41; Gray 2007, 5). Recall that the figure of the lonely metaphysical terrorist who blew himself up with his bomb appeared in Russia at the end of the 19th century (Malraux 1934). Al-Qaeda's type of 'jihad' could be more related to the ethos of a Western terrorist; it is significant that Al-Qaeda's pool of recruitment has more to do with the West than with the Middle East (Asad 2006, 29). It follows, then, that the discourses and practices of British Islamism, (of Islamist parties in the UK) to be located and 'discoursed' within the specific British context and geographical space. The reference to the global 'Ummah' is the rhetorical vocabulary of a political discourse. The political groups can certainly discourse through the vocabulary of religion, but this does not make them 'fundamentalist' or terrorist. In other words, the analysis ought to focus on, and consider their political aspect, without censoring and degrading it behind 'religious' and 'secular' categories (as is done within the culturalist and orientalist frameworks).

To develop this argument, I considered it useful to examine the main sources of the Islamist discourses (*Qur'an*, *hadith*, *sharia*). I wanted to show how these sources are differently discoursed and practiced by the British Islamist groups who are the subjects of my analysis. I focused on the several different and interpretations and practices of jihad, leading to the point that Jihad is what the Islamists say Jihad is (Marranci 2008, 24). I summarized the main points of the endless debate on the compatibility of Islam and Democracy, concluding that -- as a system -- Democracy is compatible with different sorts of political discourses and practices, and, as such, with Islamism too. My argument has been that there is no need to ossify the debate around 'Democracy and Islam', by adopting a 'foundational' approach which turns Democracy into the Dominant discourse and treats the 'practices' of Democracy as 'technologies' of Domination that discipline individuals into docile bodies (Foucault 1969).

I have been bold enough to state that a democratic Islamic state is possible, thinkable and implementable, by taking Democracy as a tool, a sort of *somatic* practice (Foucault 1988, 18), which can be used according to *Islamic* guidelines. Beyond this, there are human agencies, discourses and practices to take into consideration; there are political discourses and discursive practices that ought to be examined in light of their *coursing*, cooperating, clashing and finally failing to interact. By neglecting this dynamic, we refuse to address both -- the analysis in itself and our possible analytical mistakes. My analysis has not been just the product of my own reading and perusal of written texts. I have felt the need to expand, question, *inhabit*, displace, and unsettle those same reflections by

entering the 'discourse' and practice to share the 'experience' with the British Islamists themselves. Two intense years of field-work helped me to analyse the discourses and practices of self-representation offered by the Islamists themselves. The Islamists' representation discoursed by the culturalist-orientalist approach (chapter 1 and chapter 4) has been placed metaphorically in front of the Islamists' self-representation (chapter 5 and chapter 6). The outcome of this analytical strategy has been to see the mirroring dynamic between the practices and discourses of representation and self-representation.

On the basis of my ethnographic enterprise, I have divided the Islamist parties into two groups: the participationists and the rejectionists. The first are groups willing to participate in the British political and public life and -- as such -- intrinsically 'willing' to take part in the political practice but less outspoken in terms of a 'political' discourse (the Islamic Human Rights Commission, the Muslim Association of Britain, the Muslim Council of Britain, the Muslim Public Affairs Committee). The rejectionists are those who refuse to take part in the British political system; they either plan to move abroad in order to establish a Khilafah, or alternatively, plan to take over power in Britain (Hizbu-Ut-Tahrir, the Saved Sect and Al-Ghurabaa). Their approach toward the UK Government is confrontational and outspoken on the discursive and practical levels. They are very political and entangled within a power-relationship, but they fetishize their 'political' by affirming that their efforts are aimed at establishing an Islamist system where the political is overshadowed by, and at the service of, the 'Spiritual'. and overshadowed by it. I content that the exact reverse is true.

The Islamists' quest

As I have tried to show with the findings of my fieldwork, the parties discussed as participationists are mostly characterized by a firm desire to change the UK Government's approach toward Muslim (and Islamist) issues.

In other words, behind and beyond ideological affiliation and discursive constructions, what clearly emerges is a mostly *political* practice, which lacks, however, a political discourse; I have labeled this as the unpolitical discourse of being political. A common trait of their agendas is a plain and strong emphasis on political activism and interaction with the wider British civil society to convey and let the message of 'Islam' (read Islamism) be heard and known. However -- quite interestingly -- the majority of these groups have refused any political label, opting instead to remain in the category of 'faith groups', thus taking a

collaborative and non-confrontational approach. They take refuge in the realm of 'religious groups', claiming a disinterest in politics, which they characterize as a 'struggle for power, dictated by human greed'.⁵³

It is difficult not to question such a discoursing and practising of 'politics', when these same groups campaign for, and strongly, support Palestine as a *liberation* struggle. The Palestinian struggle can hardly be construed through the category of 'religion'; its origins and developments suggest that it is a conflict of the ilk of national independence wars or a 'post-colonial liberation struggle' (Massari 1979, 82). One possible reading of such a depoliticized attitude (as of these parties) could be that of the 'colonized' being the exact image of the colonizer's imagination (Memmi 1969-2003, 189). In this case, the participationist parties (unconsciously) mirror the culturalist-orientalist approach toward Muslims and Islamists which explains everything through the category of Islam, either in negative or in laudatory terms. In any case, both parties are locked in the same culturalist-orientalist representation, which depoliticizes political actors, dismisses political discourses and reduces political practices to the functions and needs of a multicultural society, where 'cultural', 'religious' 'ethnic' clusters and ossified communities (Burak 2002, 134) need to be integrated.

My argument has been that the participationist parties' approach is very damaging for the Islamist quest. It has been responsible for undermining and delegitimizing their political role and relevance. The outcome is that they allow the Government to allow them to speak. At the same time, they have let culturalist-orientalist misrepresentations and 'terrorist', 'fundamentalist' outcries speak on their behalf.

It is also relevant to see how these parties are mostly formed and supported by second or third generation British-born Muslims, and how this element contributes to a very specific (British), local expression of Islamism. This is because their practices and discourses do not happen in a vacuum unfettered by context and the constraints of surrounding discourses. Technologies of domination and technologies of the self are always interrelated and contribute to construction, reconstruction and subversion of the self in the world, and within dominant discourses and practices (Fortin, Vieira, Tremblay 2009, 49).

⁵³ Excerpt from the interview with Emdad Rahman, contained in the appendix.

This 'British-ness' is also characteristic of the other groups featured in the present thesis, but their political discourse and Islamist practices are focused instead, on the rejection of the UK political system and on the *need* to subvert it (i.e., the rejectionist parties).

It might also be stated that, paradoxically, the very British-ness of the second and third generation Muslims, combined with their specific choice of embracing Islamism as their political identity and discourse, paves the way for a more 'decisive', sometimes 'radical', action (McRoy 2006, 123), together with the constant need of remarking, re-coursing, discoursing and fantasizing (*fetishizing*) about that choice, by projecting its outcomes and representing its tenets as unchangeable.

I found the representation offered by the culturalist-orientalist approach, and the self-representation of their discourse and practice, to be strictly related. My argument has been that similar to the participationist parties, there is a 'mirroring effect' between the essentialized representation of Islam and Islamism proposed by the culturalist-orientalist approach and the self-representation voiced by the 'radical' Islamists themselves. In other words, there is a sort of paradoxical dynamic, which means that categories imposed from above, become unconsciously internalized from below. Moreover, both parties nurture a form of fetishism for politics: the repression of a strong desire for it, on the one side, and the exorcism of a political discourse and practices, on the other.

I argue that dismissing this element of the analysis could mask a refusal to address our own failure to make a serious (read political) examination of the phenomenon of Islamism. The construction and *fetishization* of the Other is the main discursive practice at the base of, both the blowback-inducing Islamophobic anti-terrorism policies employed by the Government, and the flawed actions carried out by the Islamist parties in the UK.

My dissertation has examined this dynamic and its negative implications. Finally, I will use a poignant tale to commence concluding. The strategy of the War on Terror reminds me of an Iraqi story of a Baghdad Caliph's tailor. The Caliph wanted to punish a tailor who had overcharged him. He ordered a henchman to hang the tailor at the gate of his house. The henchman came back saying that the tailor was too big for the gate, to which the caliph answered 'Find a smaller tailor and hang him'. Likewise, it is the Dominant discourse, the discourse of the establishment, of the state and the defense apparatus, which 'tailors' and discourses the enemy. In addition there is a kind of blindness in acknowledging our own role in 'tailoring' the enemy.

The ill-defined 'Islamic terrorism' is related more to the de-territorialization of the 'Muslim world', than being strictly connected to the Middle Eastern conflicts. Unfortunately, the

strategic responses to it -- as emerging from the state -- have continuously missed or misinterpreted this point, by downplaying or neglecting the discursive formations and practices of the Islamist groups. These are born from, and discoursed through, a *political* genealogy: terrorism and violence are just contingencies within it.

The Government's approach has had two major bearings. The first is that the fight against terrorism has been understood and elaborated in terms of territory and states, as embodied in the expression 'war on terrorism'. The campaign in Afghanistan might have made sense, to the extent that Bin Laden had 'a territorial sanctuary' that had to be destroyed (Gregory 2004, 11), but once he became de-territorialized, what was the logic behind the occupation?

The second strand is as follows. The culturalist-orientalist representation of Islamism, which has imbued the strategic policies towards 'Islamic terrorism' and Islamist parties, has never taken into consideration, elements such as the passage to the West, the de-territorialization of Islam, and its transformation into a new environment. Therefore, the policy responses have been, at best, irrelevant, when they are not politically misleading and backfiring. The culturalist-orientalist approach misses the point of the 'westernization' of Islam. The fact is, Islamist groups in Europe are established by, and comprised of, a Muslim minority of second and third generation people who live, inhabit and discourse Islam as their political future: the Islamists. As my thesis proves, most members of the Islamist parties in the UK are born and bred⁵⁴ in the UK and they speak perfect English, even as they discourse values, codes and practices, which are not visibly recognized as 'indigenous' but resemble other's (meaning that they were formed outside a certain dominant Western discourse). Therefore, they have either been relegated by the Government into the non-confrontational, depoliticized domain of the 'faith' groups (a domain that some of the Islamist parties themselves have been willing to belong in), or they have been witch-hunted as 'religious fundamentalists', 'terrorists', and finally banned and ostracized from British public life.

As my dissertation suggests, this attitude from the dominant is most damaging in the long term, for the democratic process itself and for national security as well. On the one hand, it debilitates the democratic process as it depoliticizes some political actors behind 'faith group' categories of representation; it sees them as just the representatives of the 'community' that they were born into. They are viewed as standing for the preservation and

⁵⁴ Personal chat with Maajid Nawaaz contained in the appendix.

conservation of some 'innate' traits: not as actors advancing something 'new', but instead as defending something 'ascribed' to them by birth. In this way, they are not discourses as 'political' actors, struggling and competing over power, within a power relationship (Varisco 2005, 11).

On the other hand, the same culturalist-orientalist approach ostracizes some other political actors, by representing them as 'religious fundamentalists' and 'terrorists'. Paradoxically, by doing so, the final effect is their empowerment; by discoursing and representing these political actors as 'outsiders', they become a special threat (ibid., 16). They are ascribed a status of 'exceptionality', which translates into their being ousted from the power struggle, which they could simply lose by taking part in it.

But this story has two sides as there are two leading actors to play its tragic plot.

The Islamist activists themselves (as my interviewees have declared) nurture a certain apparent 'disgust' for politics and power (my thesis has discoursed this within the vocabulary of a fetishist relationship). In other words, they utterly deny and despise (as if it were a taboo) what they secretly desire (fetishism). They declare that their struggle is aimed at instituting an Islamic system where the 'political' is at the service of the Spiritual. My argument has been that, paradoxically, the exact reverse is true. Their efforts would definitely promote a strong 'secularization' of Islam; which is denied (repressed) by the political actors themselves, and exorcized by their detractors (the dominant discourse) under the label of religious fundamentalism.

Thus, the 'fetishism' for politics *deflects* the interaction between the two parties, and is ultimately responsible, both for the political 'failure' of Islamist parties, and for the string of past and future terrorist attacks. The novelty of my approach has been to analyze the hiatus between the two parties -- the political stalemate and the security threat -- through the convex mirror of repression and exorcism; politics, as discoursed and practiced through the emotional, the visceral, the allegoric, and the de-sacralization of the secular and the religious at the same time.

There is no space or talk of a terrorist strategy here. Nevertheless, terrorism is still a 'real security threat' (Borradori 2003, 92) that could be dealt with, more effectively, by using intelligence and more accurate, less Islamophobic policy tools; without waging wars.

There is nothing called a 'geo-strategy of Islam' (Samaddar 2001, 43), because Islam is not, and it has never been, a territory or a state. Instead of a land of Islam, there are Muslims, who are negotiating *new* identities in a de-territorialized Islam, discoursing new discourses, and experiencing new practices. When these same subjects think about their

political future by using an Islamic vocabulary, they represent and inhabit their discourses as Islamists.

The so-called (and misspelt) politicization of Islam -- Islamism -- is a phenomenon that should be recognized, addressed and dealt with politically, within the political arena, while remembering that terrorism is a marginal phenomenon that reveals a lot; it obliges everyone to go beyond misinterpretations, misgivings, culturalist and orientalist categories of thoughts.

I may have spent too much time dealing with the differences between Islamism and terrorism, but political violence can always occur within the different interacting, provoking, and clashing political discourses and practices, regardless of the genealogy they are discourses through. This happens within the larger framework of the relationships between: modern religiosity and secularization; dominant discourses and the strategies of opposition; status quo and the will to subvert it; powerful desires and fetishist repressions. My hope is that the present thesis will contribute to an 'awakening', that will -- open up the political horizon to signifying representations; encourage dialogue with *otherly* discourses; push forward the interaction with practices of contestation, rejection and subversion; and limit the uses, abuses and re-uses of fetishist mechanisms of oppression and exorcisms of power and politics.

Finally, this should impel us to reinvigorate a process of critique, of questioning, of coming to understand the difficulties and demands of 'cultural translation and dissent', and to create a public space in which 'oppositional voices are not feared' (Butler 2004, 151), neglected, degraded or ostracized, but valued for instigating a functioning, meaningful democracy that they occasionally -- even if by default -- perform. In that case, we will definitely do the same, indeed.

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APPENDIX

In this section, I provide a transcript of the interviews conducted as part of my ethnographic research. The Islamist activists and party members indicated here are those who have agreed to be interviewed and have their names disclosed. The interviews lasted between one and two hours and one lasted 5 hours (interview with Mr. Taji Mustafa) and took place in their houses or in public places like tea rooms.

There are other 'personal chats' with Islamist activists which cannot be reported here for various reasons.

Sometimes, the interviewees themselves asked not to be reported, quoted or referred. I have definitely fulfilled their wishes and I retained something of that experience in terms of understanding the reasons behind such choices. At other times, my interviewees were under-aged, therefore I am compelled by ethical and moral reasons not to report or quote our exchanges. More than interviews, we exchanged 'informal chats' at the Islamist parties' meetings that I attended as a participant and non-participant observer.

These ethnographic data are all reported and referenced in the main text of my dissertation wherever appropriate.

Interview with Taji Moustafa, media representative of HT. The interview was conducted on 6th June 2006 at the London Continental Hotel, Gloucester road, London.

Q: Could you please give us a brief biography.

A: I was born in London but my parents are originally from India. I am an IT support engineer by profession. I joined the circles of Hizb ut-Tahrir in 1992 at the age of 16. I became a member in 1994 after completing studies in the three core books of the party. At that stage I took the Qasam (the oath) of the party.

Q: When did you become the media representative of Hizb ut-Tahrir in the UK?

A: In the year 2000.

Q: How did this come about?

A: I was elected to the Executive committee of the UK party. Throughout the party globally, HT holds elections for its Executive Committee. As you may know HT is divided into Vilayas (provinces). In our case in the UK, we are not strictly speaking a Vilaya, but we are a branch that is entrusted with its own administrative affairs. There is an executive committee charged with executing these tasks and elections are held to determine the composition of this committee. The elections take place every two years and the entire membership of the party in any given province takes part in these elections. I was elected as media representative in 2000, 2002 and 2004

Q: Are you coming up for re-election this year?

A: We have just had the elections and I was again elected together with 8 other members onto the UK Executive Committee.

Q: Give a brief account of HT's activities in the UK.

A: In the UK, HT works on 2 levels. Firstly with the Muslim community, explaining the duty to work for the Khilafah (Caliphate) state, living by Islam in the West without losing our identity and projecting a positive image of Islam in Western society. Secondly with the wider community, by articulating the cause of the Muslim world, presenting a case for the Khilafah state as a valid model for the Muslim world and explaining Islam as a political and intellectual system. We have had numerous conferences, seminars and debates to achieve this, as well as opening up a line of dialogue with Western thinkers.

Q: Give an account of how HT assesses 9/11 and its consequences.

A: As far as the events are concerned, in particular the assaults on the World Trade

Center and the Pentagon, we said that such attacks are not condoned by the Shari'ah. We immediately declared that this is not the proper or even effective method of fighting Western imperialism. We do see Western imperialism as the key factor in the continuing decline of the Islamic world and we do impress upon Muslims that they have to confront this imperialism. However that confrontation should be well planned and should not involve actions that are not only against the Shari'ah but are in fact self-defeating. The correct method is to establish a strong, modern and viable Islamic state, i.e. the Khilafah state, and the manner by which we can achieve this is to remove the rulers of the Muslim world.

Q: How do you assess the consequences of 9/11; do you think America has benefited from these attacks?

A: The immediate reaction of course was the declaration of "War on Terror" by America which is in reality a cover for a war on Islam and Muslims. After 9/11 America invaded two Muslim countries and imposed its own sovereignty on these countries through the might of its military. America has been working hard to remove any semblance of political Islam. The Americans have put forward policy initiatives that engage with Muslims at one level but only in a way that dilutes Islam and reduces the Islamic ideology to a mere religion that is compatible with Western capitalism. The sum of these actions has mobilized Muslim opinion decisively against America and the West. Muslims are acknowledging more and more that the governments of America and the West are enemies of Islam and do not wish to see them prosper.

Q: Therefore do you not concede that in this sense, i.e. by establishing a consensus against America in the Muslim street, the attacks on 9/11 serve the long-term interests of Islam?

A: I don't like to put it in those terms. I would like to say that the consequences of 9/11, in particular the invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, have harmed Muslims and led to the brutal death of thousands. But it has also raised the levels of concern and awareness of Muslims regarding the true nature of America and her allies.

Q: You mentioned the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq; how do you see the resistance in these countries? Is this resistance legitimate according to HT ideology?

A: We say that such resistance is condoned by Islam. Islam permits Muslims to resist the occupation of their land. The American invasions of these 2 Muslim countries are no different than the Serbian war against the Muslims of Bosnia back in the 1990s.

Q: How do you conceptualize this resistance; do you just call it conventional resistance against occupation or do you in fact see it as Jihad?

A: It is important here to describe what we understand to be Jihad. We say that the work required for establishing the Khilafah state does not involve in any of its stages the concept of material struggle or Jihad. We say that this work must emulate the Prophet

Mohammad's (PBUH) method, which was essentially peaceful. However there is a difference between establishing a Khilafah state and defending one's land. It is the duty of Muslims to defend their lands from invasion.

Q: So resistance here is different than Jihad.

A: No, we say that any form of material resistance comes under the rubric of Jihad. The subject of Jihad has very clearly defined rules and there are specific rules relating to targets, methods and the humane treatment of prisoners of war. The West often likes to distort Jihad by depicting it as acts of random violence.

Q: According to some sources, in the instructions to its followers before 9/11, HT recommended the use of flying objects against Western targets, is this true?

A: It is categorically not true. This is the first time I have heard it and it comes across as a clumsy attempt at propaganda and disinformation. There is a lot of this nonsense around. For instance, the Uzbek government has recently produced papers describing what I would call phantom articles accredited to members of HT. I don't think even Western commentators take these shoddy propaganda campaigns seriously.

Q: Do you think most of these disinformation campaigns originate in Central Asia where some of the governments face a serious threat from HT?

A: Recently, yes. But the Jordanian government has also in the past decades disseminated disinformation about the party. We think that most of the Arab governments and the Muslim governments strive to discredit the party. Their people though are highly supportive of the Khilafah and HT. HT branches have conducted a poll in the Middle East where it emerged that 87% of the population wants the institution of the Khilafah.

Q: HT maintains that Jihad is only permissible if it is sanctioned by the Khalifah (Caliph). How does this square with violence undertaken in the name of Jihad in various Muslim countries, particularly those recently invaded and occupied by the Americans?

A: I should elaborate more on the concept of Jihad. Jihad as a defensive enterprise can be undertaken with or without an Amir and with or without an Islamic state. This is because it is the duty of every Muslim to defend his land and property. Therefore the defensive Jihad requires no authority to sanction it.

Q: Are you making a distinction here between defensive and offensive Jihad?

A: I am yes.

Q: Can we reduce this distinction to improvisation and planning? In other words, in the case of defensive Jihad, Muslims can improvise and resist the invaders, whereas offensive Jihad requires the authority and planning apparatus of an Islamic state.

A: Yes, absolutely. In an offensive situation, where there is an Islamic state that possesses the appropriate political and military capabilities, it is the only authority that can sanction and undertake offensive Jihad.

Q: Where does HT's doctrine of non-violence come from?

A: HT works to re-establish the Khilafah state. In this endeavor we are obliged to emulate the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in his struggle to establish the first Islamic state in Medina 1425 years ago. The Prophet established this Islamic state without resorting to violence against the Quraish. Instead he worked to mobilize public opinion in favor of Islam and endeavored to sway the political and intellectual elites of the time. This was despite the provocations, the persecutions and boycotts of the Muslims and the threats to his own life. We adhere closely to this struggle because we believe this is the correct and effective way of reviving the Islamic state. None of the recent historical experiment has anything to do with an Islamic state and cannot be considered as an example of a Khilafah.

Q: So you believe that mobilization of public opinion amongst these Muslims around the world is an effective way of reviving the Caliphate?

A: Absolutely! The only manner in which an Islamic state can arise is for public opinion to be in favor of it. We are not interested in imposing a state on the people. We wish to engage with the public, the thinkers and the elites and build a powerful support base for the return of this state. Once the state will be established, all HT members will move there and encourage all the other Islamists across the world to move there as well as they can finally live in a state freed from imported political structures, alien to the values of the Muslim world.

Q: What I understand of your analysis of Jihad and violence is that there is no clear cut and tightly held belief in non-violence. For instance you say that attacking American forces in Iraq is justifiable, but the problem is that you can easily take that a step further and claim that attacking U.S. interests in Saudi Arabia is justifiable in the same vein.

A: No, in fact we say that attacking U.S. interests in Saudi Arabia does not resolve the main problem of the Muslim Ummah (Community). It does not address the real issue, which is in this case the Saudi government. The way to deal with that is to mobilize Saudi opinion against the House of Saud and not to engage in rash and ultimately self-defeating acts of violence.

Q: Do you mean that attacking U.S. interests in Saudi Arabia would inadvertently bolster America's regional hegemony?

A: Possibly. The problem is that America has created a climate where the overwhelming majority of Muslims—even those one could consider secular—are strongly anti-American. In this climate there are bound to be sincere Muslims who wish to take direct action

against America. HT advises these Muslims to hold back and think about the causes of American interference in the internal affairs of Muslim countries. The main cause is the rulers over the Muslims and the priority must be to remove them.

Q: Let us discuss the specifics of HT ideology. One of the striking features of your ideology is that you reduce politics to a tight relationship between the state and the Ummah, thereby drastically narrowing the scope of politics.

A: I disagree with your statement. We say that politics in Islam is about looking after the affairs of the people. The state looks after these affairs by implementing the Islamic system. The people in turn have a duty to account the state by forming parties and joining the Majlis al-Ummah (the Ummah Council) that represents different constituencies.

Q: Okay, the key question here is how the people account the state; surely they must be organized.

A: Absolutely. These institutions which I mentioned are not to be organized by the state. We say that political activity must be the preserve of all the people and not just a select few.

Q: You say the Islamic state will allow the formation of political parties. Will they have to be exclusively Islamic?

A: The society we envisage is a one where political parties should be formed. HT literature makes the point in no uncertain terms that one of the key factors behind the decline of Islam and its civilization was the gradual eroding of the checks and balances needed to account the state. Parties have a long tradition in Islamic history and in the early periods were an effective method for holding the rulers to account.

Q: But is it the case that these parties will have to conform to Islam and there will be no scope for parties and interest groups that fall outside the confines of what you would call Islamic?

A: Absolutely. These groups will have to be formed upon the tenets of Islam and parties that are not based upon Islam will not be allowed. However this does not mean that if they held a valid Islamic opinion that was premised on a legitimate interpretation of the Islamic texts they would be persecuted in the event of this opinion conflicting with the opinion of the Caliph.

Q: How about if they wanted to reform the structures of the Islamic state and perhaps even reform it beyond recognition?

A: We have to make a distinction between structures that have been ordained by the Islamic texts and those that perform a purely administrative function. We say that the state has to modernize administratively according to the needs of the day. For instance Omar

Ibn al-Khattab, the second of the rightly guided Caliphs of Islam, borrowed the Diwan administrative system from the Persians. Therefore as far as the reform of the administrative organs are concerned there is plenty of scope for change. However when it comes to institutions that have been ordained by Islam, there is no scope for alteration.

Q: In effect the fundamental features of the Caliphate are perennial, right?

A: Yes, that is correct because they derive from sacred texts.

[...]

Q: Okay a few questions on Aqeedah (doctrine). Would you say HT has reduced Aqeedah to a form of organizational control in the party?

A: No, HT does not adopt an Aqeedah. HT is a party and thereby allows all Muslims to join the party as long as they believe in the core beliefs of Islam. HT is above all interested in being a platform for all Muslims in their endeavor to create the Khilafah state.

Q: How do you interpret Aqeedah?

A: Aqeedah is the core creedal concepts that Muslims believe in. Aqeedah is distinct from Ahkam Shari'ah which constitutes the rules and regulations that are based on Aqeedah. The differences of opinion arise from different interpretations of Ahkam Shari'ah. Aqeedah constitutes the basic tenets of Islamic belief which then leads to different branches and these have caused legitimate differences of opinion and contentions throughout Islamic history. HT does not subscribe to any particular view when it comes to these branches; rather we make sure that our members adopt the core basis of Islamic belief.

Q: How about your constitution for the future Islamic state which has 186 articles. Is that based on a combination of Aqeedah and Shari'ah?

A: The Islamic state should not adopt an Aqeedah. It should not adopt one of the branches I alluded to earlier. For instance, when HT members met with the late Ayatollah Khomeini before he took power in Iran and presented him the proposed constitution, they impressed upon him that the Islamic state should not promote a particular branch of Aqeedah.

Q: Is your constitution derived from all shades of Islamic Fiqh, and opinions?

A: Absolutely. The Islamic state should embrace and defend all Muslims, irrespective of their idiosyncrasies. Moreover, the Islamic state should not even adopt a particular state Mazhab (school of thought), rather it should strive to represent the diversity inherent in Islam.

Q: Is this constitution really the definitive blueprint for the future Islamic state?

A: We call it a proposed constitution because the future Caliph may not be a member of HT. In that case we will propose this constitution to the future Caliph and present it as the sum of all the work and research we have done in this field, in the form of a working document which he can accept, amend or indeed reject in favor of his own opinion and Ijtihad (interpretation).

Q: Then is there scope for radical alterations in this constitution? In other words, it is not set in stone?

A: This constitution is based on Ijtihad. It is based on a comprehensive and robust interpretation of Islamic texts and traditions.

Q: Then the core of this constitution is likely to survive, is it not?

A: We would hope so. Nevertheless one of our functions today is to present this constitution to various Islamic groups around the world. We draw them into a debate and ask them to comment on this constitution. On many occasions, critical feedback has convinced us to modify certain aspects of this constitution.

Q: What is going to happen to HT once this Caliphate becomes reality?

A: We say that there is a great danger in the Islamic state being closely aligned to political parties. We have written in our book "Ruling System in Islam" that there needs to be a clear separation between the Islamic state and political parties. However HT and other parties need to exist to create checks and balances and accountability in society. The party will work to consult and account the state. HT will never assume the role of a vanguard party.

Q: How does HT ideology coincide and conflict with Wahhabism and Salafism?

A: HT is not a Mazhab. It is a party. Both Wahhabism and Salafism are schools of thought. We debate with these schools of thought as we debate with others.

Q: Has there been some penetration from these Mazhabs, in particular from Wahhabism?

A: No, this is not the case when it comes to these particular schools of thought. However we present a unique model when it comes to adopting ideas, we are not interested in the origins of a particular view as long as it comes from authentic Islamic sources. The scholars within HT scrutinize these views and adopt them based upon what is strongest. So when formulating the constitution we adopted from the main schools of thought, such as Shafi' and Hanafi and also from opinions accredited to individual scholars.

Q: What is the HT's position on Salafism?

A: We have debates with other groups and schools of thought and we really prefer not to

publicize the content of these debates due to the Islamic etiquettes of debate and discussion.

Q: Do you have these kinds of debates with Shi'as?

A: Yes, as I mentioned, for example, before Nabahani interacted closely with Baqir al-Sadr.

Q: That is ancient history now! What about more recently?

A: Recently we met with the late Ayatollah Khomeini and we have also met Shi'as from the Ahl ul-Bait society in London. Once they allowed one of our speakers to address their audience and we actually discovered that a lot of the differences that exist were debated in an amicable fashion. We are not really interested in flaming sectarian and Mazhab type differences.

Q: But more broadly your methodology of unifying the thoughts, doctrines and opinions of Muslims has been a failure, has it not? I mean more than 50 years after the emergence of HT you have not achieved any of your core aims.

A: This is a very interesting point. The West is probably in a constant state of denial when it comes to assessing the mood of the Muslim street. Today the overwhelming opinion among Muslims is for the implementation of Islam and the Shari'ah. Just look at the situation in Iraq where both Sunnis and Shi'as have united to call for Islam following the downfall of Saddam Hussein. We see a situation where the overwhelming majority of Muslims reject their rulers and are keen to seek Islamic solutions to their problems.

Q: This may be the case but that does not mean they share your ambitions to create a Caliphate.

A: Most Islamic groups today openly state in their constitutions the need to have a Khilafah state as their ultimate goal, albeit with differing methodologies. This is a reflection of the mood of the Muslims who have tried all ideologies and political systems but failed to better their situation. The central point to be made here is that the concept of the Khilafah state is not rejected by Muslims.

Q: So what is stopping the onward drive to revive the Caliphate? Is it the regimes in the Muslim world that, according to you, are propped up by the West?

A: Absolutely. If one of these regimes fell and an Islamic state came in its place this would create a domino effect and every puppet state in the Muslim world would crumble.

Q: You really believe that once this state emerges all the nationalistic, sectarian and ethnic divisions that have been in the making for centuries, if not millennia, would just disappear?

A: As long as these sectarian and national identities are obstacles on the way of a unified Ummah, yes they will wither away. This does not mean however that different national characters and allowable customs will simply cease to exist, as long as these existed for the purpose of recognition not division.

Q: Given the wretchedness of the Muslim world today and the ease with which it is overwhelmed and dominated by outsiders, don't you think what Nabahani called the gloom and decline of Islam and its Ummah is continuing unchecked?

A: I have to correct you here. Nabahani did not say Islam is in gloom and decline, but rather it's Ummah and society is in gloom and decline. Islam itself is intact. The decline of Islamic society started with intellectual stagnation and the closing of the gates of Ijtihad. However this gloom is beginning to lift insofar as Muslims are more optimistic of their own capabilities and potential.

Q: And you really think the future for the Muslim world is political Islam?

A: That is not only its future; it is in fact the only way out.

Q: I say this because some analysts contend that the fortunes of political Islam reached its peak in the late 1980s and in recent years it has been declining. Presumably you reject this notion outright.

A: I absolutely reject this analysis. This assessment is based on superficial factors.

Q: Their analysis is mainly based on the inability of Islamic opposition groups to dislodge these so-called corrupt regimes. The Algerian example is often cited insofar as the Algerian Islamists had the best chance to seize the state but were ultimately foiled through a mixture of military, security and political measures.

A: Algeria is an exceptional case since the Islamic movement, in spite of being a sincere movement, had not studied the correct method of establishing the Islamic state. They undertook actions, namely joining the democratic process, which ultimately proved self-defeating.

Q: Okay, let us discuss the history of HT and its organization. Please give a brief account of HT's history since its inception in the early 1950s.

A: HT was established in 1953 by Taqieddin Nabahani. It was established in al-Quds (Jerusalem) and in the 1950s it spread all across the Sham (Levant) region. In the 1960s it moved further a field, encompassing Turkey and North Africa and soon thereafter it spread all across the Muslim world.

Q: Can we still speak of a single, coherent HT today?

A: Yes we can. We have one leadership, one global strategy to revive the Khilafah state and we are all unified in that objective.

Q: How are your different branches coordinated? Would you say HT is a centralized party with a central executive directing all the Vilayas?

A: Yes we have one central leadership or Qiyada headed by the scholar and thinker 'Ata Abu Rishtah. He used to be our spokesman in Jordan throughout the 1980s and was imprisoned by the Jordanian regime for being critical of it. Our central leadership sets the agenda and strategy internationally. That strategy is in turn interpreted and implemented by the various Vilayas around the world. The regional executive committees subscribe fully to the opinions and decisions of the central executive.

Q: Where would you say HT was strongest in the world?

A: I actually don't have that information.

Q: Would you say it is still strongest where it all started, i.e. the Levant region?

A: Wherever HT can operate openly and free of severe repression, you can see the overt existence of the Party and its activists. For instance, recently a judgment was passed in the Turkish courts ruling that HT is not a terrorist movement. Following that in the last month we have been holding demonstrations in Ankara and Istanbul and other cities...

Q: HT has a strong presence in Turkey?

A: Yes, footage from Turkish media would attest to this. In Central Asia we have made major inroads in the past 2 decades. According to external commentators we number at least 7,000-8,000 in the prisons alone.

Q: This presence in Central Asia has only come about in the past 2 decades?

A: Actually I can't confirm that. All I can confirm is that post-Soviet era HT was able to publicly promote its ideology and hence gained massive support as a result of it.

Q: Was the party severely repressed by the former Soviet Union?

A: Yes. My understanding from some external sources is that many members were even exiled from their home countries. The Soviets ferociously repressed any Islamic activity.

Q: Why is HT strong in Central Asia?

A: You have to look at it from two perspectives, namely the history of the peoples and the call of the party. Regarding the history of the peoples we find that the Soviet Union brutally suppressed Islam for many decades. As a result of that brutal suppression Islam became

a hidden religion. Following the demise of the Soviet Union there was a genuine and sincere resurgence of Islam. HT began to address these societies and educate their masses in the ideology of political Islam.

Q: This is perplexing since there are local alternatives to HT. For instance there is a robust national/Islamic movement in Tajikistan. In the same vein the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan is a local rival to HT. Moreover for a people who have recently been freed from the shackles of a super state it would seem odd to long for joining another super state, albeit an Islamic one.

A: But the Khilafah state will reflect the beliefs of the people. This is the key difference insofar as the Soviet Union did not reflect the beliefs and culture of the people. On the contrary it represented values that were wholly alien to Muslims.

Q: So you think there is a genuine yearning for the politics of pan-Islam in Central Asia?

A: There is a genuine yearning for the establishment of the Khilafah state and the Islamic system amongst Muslims all over the world. The Muslims of Central Asia are not an exception to this.

Q: Do you think the Central Asian governments are making inroads in their disinformation and propaganda campaigns against HT and discrediting it in the process?

A: They have been conducting far more than just a disinformation campaign! When Karimov said that he will fight ideology with ideology and thought with thought, he actually meant boiling some of our members alive and punishing them with the most barbaric of punishments. However this brutal strategy—which Karmiov is taking to extremes—has been the mainstay of the Arab regimes for many decades and hitherto it has failed to discredit or diminish the party.

[...]

Q: Okay, let us discuss broader issues. You mentioned the late Ayatollah Khomeini earlier, what were the nature and intensity of contacts between Khomeini and HT?

A: We met Khomeini in France before he took power and impressed upon him the need to rule by Islam, establishing a state for all Muslims and not subscribing to a narrow school of thought which creates division. The initial discussions were positive. Consequently we sent a delegation to Tehran led by the late Ahmed Daur, the famous Jordanian member of HT and former member of the Jordanian Parliament. On that occasion, we were unhappy with the response we received from Khomeini, and understood after discussions, that Iran was on its way to becoming another colorless Muslim state.

Q: I had heard that an HT delegation from Pakistan had met with Ayatollah Khomeini immediately after the victory of the Islamic revolution and had offered to make him the

Caliph.

A: No this is incorrect. The delegation initially met him in France, consisting of our members in Europe and then met him in Tehran, headed by Ahmed Daur.

Q: What does HT make of the Islamic regime in Iran? After all, some commentators in the Muslim world contend that it has presented a successful model of political Islam for the past 25 years.

A: We don't regard it as an Islamic state. Its model for political Islam does not go beyond empty rhetoric and sloganeering against America when it is politically expedient. It is a nation-state based on sectarian principles, a mockery of an Islamic state devoured by the greediness for power. The ruling system that is implemented, contradicts the concept of the Khalifah running all the political affairs of the Ummah. Instead it establishes on one hand a theocracy and on the other a republican system – both concepts are alien to Islam. Unfortunately the past 25 years have distanced some people in Iran from Islam, not endeared them to it.

Q: So you believe it is just as bad as the other regimes in the Muslim world?

A: Islam calls all regimes that do not implement Islam Dar al-Kufr (unbelievers' countries). Therefore from this perspective, the Iranian regime, like the other regimes, needs to be replaced by the Khilafah system.

Q: But compared to the other two models of political Islam in recent times, namely Afghanistan and Sudan, many would say the Iranian example has been much more successful.

A: How could it be successful when it has failed to win the support of its own people? We hear reports these days that the some Iranian people are even turning away from Islam because of the conduct of their rulers, especially in the ineptitude of these rulers to address the problems of the people and regulate their economic and political affairs. No, I think we can safely say the Iranian regime belongs to the aforementioned camps.

Q: How about Sudan? Back in the early 1990s many Islamic groups in the West, particularly here in London, hailed Sudan as a genuine Islamic state.

A: Except HT. We explained to the supporters of Sudan that the 'Islamic experiment' of Sudan was no more than some rulers playing to the popular demand for Islam to be implemented in state and society. The Sudanese experiment hinged upon implementing Islam gradually because it was falsely believed that implementing the whole of the Shari'ah would be impractical. What occurred was a selective implementation of some Shari'ah rules, without the necessary frameworks that Islam gives when implemented completely, including the checks and balances required to account the state. It is interesting to note, the supporters of Sudan no longer praise it with such enthusiasm.

Q: What about the Taleban?

A: Unfortunately the Taleban were not in a position to establish a viable and secure Islamic state due to the security situation at that time in Afghanistan. We also had some problems with their conceptualization of what an Islamic state is, and feared that the necessary research and study were not undertaken. However the reality is, the Taliban no longer rule Afghanistan. Instead America does.

Q: Are you adamant that HT has never accepted financial or logistical support from any of these three regimes or from any other government in the world for that matter?

A: Absolutely! HT has always kept its distance from the rulers in the Muslim world. Our record of struggle and sacrifice testifies to this. HT is banned virtually everywhere in the Muslim world and almost everywhere our members are thrown in jail, tortured and even killed. Our message has never changed over the past 50 years, we oppose all governments of all shades in the Muslim world – and value our independence. Accepting any form of support from any of these governments contradicts our very existence, namely to re-establish a Khilafah state free from colonialist interference.

Q: Going back to the question of violence, please provide a final critique of Islamic groups that have taken up arms against their governments, particularly in Algeria, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

A: Islam mandates that the method to re-establish the Khilafah state is to establish it through intellectual and political work. The Prophet (PBUH) never raised up arms to establish a state, rather he worked according to a fixed method in emulation of this. To raise up arms against the regimes contradicts the Islamic method, in our opinion. Furthermore it does not address the problem correctly, as the regimes are one component, albeit very critical, to the present set-up. We need to convince the sincere members of the elites of the viability of Islam so that the Islamic state arises upon a strong powerbase.

Q: What were the circumstances behind the arrest of 3 HT members in Egypt?

A: These members went from Britain, for a mixture of reasons ranging from furthering their language to business. The Egyptian government at that time cracked down upon the Party in Egypt and arrested a handful of our members including the 3. One of our members, Reza Pankhurst, was tortured by electrocution and they all suffered sleep deprivation and coerced confessions. After a farcical judicial process, which was continuously adjourned due to the judge going on vacation, all defendants received a jail sentence ranging from 1 to 5 years. The members from Britain received 5 years. Far from being demoralized, we see this as part of the work to establish the state. In fact they are seen as heroes by most in the Muslim community in Britain.

Q: What about the British-Asian suicide members who attacked a bar in Tel Aviv in April

2003; is it true that they were affiliated to HT even though it is widely accepted they were acting individually?

A: No, this is not true, and in fact as far as I know no one has ever stated this. They were rather involved in other groups.

Q: How do you see the patterns of al-Qaeda style terrorism developing in the medium to long term future?

A: I have very little information in this regard, so cannot comment on how it will develop. But America and her allies have to realize that with every military onslaught against Muslim countries, they are creating a hotbed of discontent. Today, you merely have to visit the home of a Muslim and they will elaborate on their hatred for Bush and Blair.

Q: Do you think an attack equaling or exceeding 9/11 is likely in the short to medium term future?

A: If you mean in the Western world, I really can't say as I don't know. But I suspect due to the absence of the Khilafah state, the Muslim world will witness attacks far exceeding 9/11 at the hands of the American military. Such is the injustice we face.

Interview with Anjourn Choudary, leader of Al-Ghurabaa and ex member of al Muhajirooun. The interview was conducted on the 23rd of June 2006, in his house, Ilford, East London.

Q: I would like to start with your personal history. When did you join Al Muhajirooun?

A: I studied Islam from the age of 5. In the following 10 years I came across many Islamic teachers, ranging from Sufis, Usuli's, Ahl-ul-Hadith and Muslim Brotherhood (MB), I joined al Muhajirooun in London, later on in my life.

Q: Could you give me some dates?

A: I was born in 1967 in London. I pursued my Islamic studies alongside my support for the Muslim Brotherhood until the age of 17, and then I briefly joined Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT) before co founding al Muhajiroun and later on, al Ghurabaa.

Q: Where?

A: I supported the Sirian MB and joined Hizb ut-Tahrir in London and, after that, al Muhajiroun and then I founded al Ghurabaa..

Q: Did you ever meet any of the Muslim Brotherhood from Syria? I am referring to people like Adnan Saad al-Din and Issam al-Attar.

A: No, I heard about them, but I did not meet them. I use to know Sheikh Sa'eed Hawa (ra), Sheikh Marwaan Hadeed (ra), Sheikh Omar Jawad, and Sheikh Adnan Uqlah.

Q: How would you assess the Islamist challenge to the Baathist regime in Syria today? I say this in light of the fact that many exiled Brotherhood leaders have now gone back to Syria and seem to have made their peace with the Baathist regime.

A: There is still some opposition, but the Brotherhood itself can no longer be regarded as a true opposition force.

Q: Because they have extensive surreptitious links to the regime?

A: Yes, they have now entered into dialogue and discussion with the regime. They are becoming a state party. I was proud of my affiliation to the old Muslim Brotherhood, but the Muslim Brotherhood today really disgusts me. They are becoming co-opted into the political systems of the countries in which they operate. In Egypt, the Brotherhood even wants to change its name to receive greater recognition.

Q: How active is the armed Islamic opposition in Syria?

A: The Jihadists in Syria have now become proper Salafis and are basically linked to al-Qaeda.

Q: How come we don't hear about them, there has not been a dramatic attack on the

Baathist regime for many years?

A: That is because they are busy elsewhere, particularly in Iraq.

Q: Did you ever study anywhere in the Middle East

A: Yes, I spent 6 months studying in Al-Azhar, but I was not able to complete my studies since conflicts arose between the tutors and me. Therefore I went to Saudi Arabia in December 1983 where I first heard of Sheik Omar Bakri . I re-started my education in Mecca in an establishment called The Islamic School of al-Saltiyah.

Q: When did you hear of the Al-Muhajiroun and where it was established?

A: It was established in Mecca by Sheik Omar Bakri, our teacher and guide. Al-Muhajiroun first came on the scene on March 3, 1983. Our sheik Omar Bakri had links with Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT) in Beirut and maintained contacts with it in Cairo. But in Saudi Arabia, there was virtually nobody affiliated to HT. Sheik Omar Bakri started forming HT cells in Saudi Arabia, and by 1983 he had built a team of 38 brothers. Some of these people were previously affiliated to Juhaiman al-Utaiba and some were Salafis. However, HT was banned in Saudi Arabia; at the same time HT leaders in Kuwait were reluctant to form or organize any activities in Saudi Arabia. A serious dispute broke out between Bakri and HT organizers in Kuwait who subsequently suspended his membership in the party. Therefore on March 3, 1983 — the 59th anniversary of the destruction of the Ottoman Caliphate — he launched a separate organization with the help of these 38 brothers and called it Al-Muhajiroun.

Q: In a way, Al Muhajiroun were formed by default?

A: Yes, in fact Sheik Omar Bakri had worked hard for three years to build a platform for HT in Saudi Arabia, and the upper echelons of the party did not appreciate his efforts. From an Islamic perspective, there was no choice but to organize the dedicated cadres he had built up under the aegis of Jamaat al-Muhajiroun.

Q: Do you know why it is called 'Jamaat' (Community) because it is a benign term as opposed to 'Hizb' (Party), which has obvious political connotations? Were there any political calculations behind the selection of this name?

A: Yes. If our teacher had chosen the prefix 'Hizb', i.e. 'Party', the organisation would have fallen foul of the Saudi authorities. He chose 'Al-Muhajiroun', as this means 'Emigrants' and refers to the early followers of the Prophet Muhammad (saw).

Q: I want to speed up the chronology, so after al-Muhajiroun were established in 1983, when did Sheik Omar Bakri leave Saudi Arabia and come to the UK ?

A: He came here to Britain in January 1986.

Q: Do you know why he decided to transplant al Muhajiroun to Britain? Was he expelled from Saudi Arabia?

A: Yes. When he became independent of HT, he got bolder. They started a stickers and

leaflets campaign in the major cities, attacking all Kufr systems (i.e. man-made regimes), including the al-Saud Regime.

Q: Al Muhajiroun and Omar Bakri seem to have been openly challenging the Saudi regime with these activities.

A: Not openly. They pasted and distributed stickers and leaflets in an underground manner. The regime was not able to trace the massive sticker campaign to Al-Muhajiroun as they worked furtively and were skilled in these activities. They built up dedicated cells. Our people studied Islam during the day and engaged in distributions and other activities during the night.

Q: How would you define the nature of the Saudi regime. I say this in light of the fact that many of the Islamic activists that eventually ended up in Afghanistan and formed Jihadi-Salafi groups, were initially sponsored by the Saudi regime.

A: I always believed the Saudi regime was Kufr. This is because I subscribed to the HT ideology which condemned all regimes in the Muslim world as Kufr.

Q: Do you know whether Omar Bakri 's expulsion from Saudi Arabia was conducted in a civilized manner?

A: Not at all. He was first arrested in Jedda in 1984 and he was subsequently released on bail. They found nothing on him apart from some glue and leaflets, which were going to be distributed around Mecca. They were not able to link him to any recognizable organization like HT. He and the other member simply presented themselves as Muhajiroun (emigrants) who had left their countries in the hope of securing sanctuary in Saudi Arabia. The next time they arrested him was in December in 1985 in Riyadh. They raided one of his houses at a time when he was teaching from the subversive book, "The Money Circulation under the Khilafa System", which had been written by Abdul Qadeem Zalluom, one of the early leaders of HT. This destroyed his alibi, as they made a direct connection to HT.

Q: How did he end up in Britain and started al Muhajiroun there?

A: The reason he came to Britain was because he had a multiple-visa. He never planned to stay in Britain. His plan was to go to Pakistan or Malaysia.

Q: Why Pakistan?

A: Pakistan is the ideal place for Islamic activities, it has nearly 150 million Muslims, and it gives you access to hundreds of millions of Muslims in India, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. People in the Indian Subcontinent believe in Islamic nationalism and hence it is easier for them to digest the Khilafah message.

Q: And why Malaysia?

A: It has a dedicated Muslim population. There are links to Muslims in Indonesia, Central Asia and China. Anyway he could not go anywhere else. He was wanted in Syria, and the Syrian security services in Lebanon had raided his house and killed one of his brothers.

Q: Before we discuss the development of the Muhajiroun organization in the UK and elsewhere, could you provide a brief insight into the history of HT since its inception in Palestine in 1951?

A: It was obviously founded by Sheikh Taqi-ud-deen Al-Nabahani in Palestine in 1951, who believed firmly that the malaise of the Muslim Ummah was rooted in the destruction of the Khilafah (Caliphate) in 1924. In the beginning the group founded by Nabahani was known as al-Hay'at al-Tahrir al-Islami [3] and spread to Lebanon and Syria in the period 1951-53. Its early leaders were Ibrahim Hamdan, Shuqeiri and, of course, Sheikh Taqi Nabahani. They tried to establish themselves legally in al-Quds (Jerusalem) but the authorities refused to recognize them. Consequently the core group became more confrontational and began to tout itself as Hizb-ut-Tahrir (The Liberation Party). The authorities then began to arrest the active membership and the party subsequently went underground.

Q: When exactly did Hay'at al-Tahrir become Hizb-ut-Tahrir?

A: In 1953.

Q: So initially, the core membership was based in Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, basically the Levant area and its periphery?

A: Yes.

Q: How did HT spread beyond this region and into virtually every country in the Muslim world?

A: Sheikh Nabahani married in Lebanon and his wife's family happened to be wealthy. They lent him considerable financial support and he used the inflow of funds to develop robust units in Lebanon, Jordan and that area in general. Then it spread to Iraq and Egypt, and in the 1950's, 1960's and 1970's, it spread to all corners of the Muslim world.

Q: Okay, so by the 1960's and 1970's HT had become a universal phenomenon?

A: Yes, they were everywhere.

Q: But not in Iran?

A: Actually HT sent some teams to Iran. They did not believe, like I do now, that Shias in general and Khomeini in particular, are Mushrik (Polytheists). They saw Khomeini as a Muslim, but viewed his regime as Kufr (non-Islamic).

Q: So what happened?

A: They sent some teams to Iran after Khomeini came to power and offered to make him the Khalifah (Caliph) of all the Muslims.

Q: I had read something about this, so were those guys from HT?

A: Yes.

Q: And of course Khomeini rejected their offer?

A: Khomeini rejected their offer despite the fact he was a champion of the Velayat al-Faqih system.

Q: But Velayat al-Faqih is another form of caliphate, would you not agree?

A: Yes. But the mainstream Shias reject Velayat al-Faqih.

Q: But do you accept Velayat al-Faqih as legitimate Islamic discourse?

A: Before I became a Salafi I believed that Velayat al-Faqih as a principle can facilitate the unity of the Shias and the Sunnis. However at that time most senior Shia leaders, people like Ayatollah Al-Kho'ee, rejected the principle and this undermined its potential.

Q: Okay, going back to HT, they have never had any serious organization in Iran, have they?

A: They don't have any membership in Iran.

Q: Is this rooted in the Shia-Sunni split?

A: Yes. Also the HT insists on 'adoption', basically you have to adopt their principles and of course the principles of HT diverge significantly from the beliefs of Jaafari Shias.

Q: Okay, let us put all this into perspective. Are you saying that HT looks at itself as some kind of mother organization or holding company and in order to become part of it you have to accept certain rigid pre-conditions — and once these have been accepted you are co-opted as some kind of franchise?

A: Actually they don't believe that. They believe they are a distinct theological and juridical school. They have developed sophisticated principles and ideas regarding economic systems, social systems and legal systems that need to be adopted. This is why Shias could not really join HT, because they believe in 12 infallible Imams and hence have multiple sources of reference as far as the practice of Islam is concerned.

Q: Why is it that HT has such a strong presence here in the UK?

A: Because our teacher and guide Sheik Omar Bakri established it (smiles). When he first came to Britain, half of him was Ikhwani-Jihadi and the other half was Salafi-Tahriri, in short, he was the perfect combination of different modes of knowledge and he channelled all this energy into developing networks here in the UK.

Q: Did he operate under the name of HT?

A: Not initially. At that time, the Amir of HT in Germany visited him and said that he had heard about his departure from the party in 1983 and expressed his regrets about that. He offered him the chance to operate as a 'member' of Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT). This effectively divorced his organization from the Party's leadership and allowed us to operate

autonomously.

Q: Was there no HT structure here in the UK before Sheik Bakri arrival?

A: There were two brothers only. Together, they set upon developing the party here in the UK. They built basic units and in time these units multiplied. Of course we could not call ourselves HT proper. I had been following Sheik Omar Bakri teachings from the time I was in Saudi Arabia then met him again in London and decided to join him.

Q: How did the Al-Muhajiroun fit into all this?

A: We kept this as a separate platform. We contacted our brothers in Saudi Arabia and instructed them to pursue their underground activities as part of the global HT network.

Q: Basically you are saying that Muhajiroun was under the aegis of HT.

A: Yes.

Q: What made you leave the HT umbrella entirely in 1996?

A: Our teacher Sheik Omar Bakri had built the teams from nothing in this country and had been their leader in the UK for 10 years before finally resigning on 16 January 1996 in response to a violation of Islamic rules by the worldwide Amir of Hizb-ut-Tahrir.

Q: What had brought this about? Was it due to lax organization and the penetration of undesirable elements?

A: Our activities in the UK (from 1987-1996) awakened all the sleeping cells of HT around the world. After Sheikh Nabahani's death in 1977, the party experienced severe persecution by all Arab regimes, and this led to retreat and stagnation. It also sparked internal disputes between various members of HT in Jordan and the leadership committee. However, after our departure from HT in 1996, the old internal disputes arose again and this time around caused an official split in the party. I am not saying that the official split of 1997 was caused by our activities; in fact it could not have been as we had left a year earlier to re-launch Al-Muhajiroun independently from HT.

Q: Did the split have global ramifications?

A: Yes. A man called Abu Rami and his followers dismissed the Amir of HT, Abdul Qadeem Zalloum, who at that time led HT from a secret location, and established a separate organisation. The Zalloumis became HT Camp 1 and the followers of Abu Rami, the so-called Nakithoun (renegades), became known as HT Camp 2.

Q: Which one is stronger?

A: HT Camp 1.

Q: Because they are the original HT?

A: Yes.

Q: How significant is HT Camp 2?

A: They are big in Jordan.

Q: And this original split manifested itself in all HT organizations around the world?

A: Yes, the split was everywhere. But the splits multiplied. HT Camp 1 split again, and the new faction became known as Hizb Waed (Party of Promise) and is led by Mr. Muhammad Showeiki. There was yet another split, and HT Camp 4 are known as the Reformers of Hizb-ut-Tahrir and are led by Iyad Hilal in America and Dr. Tawfiq Mustafa in Germany.

Q: How do you assess the individual strengths of these four camps?

A: HT Camp 1 remains the strongest. The next strongest is HT Camp 2. The third one, Hizb Waed, is only present in Jerusalem. As for the reformists (HT Camp 4), they merely constitute a few individuals who aspire to re-unite Hizb-ut-Tahrir.

Q: How are camps 1 & 2 represented geographically, especially in places like Central Asia?

A: In Central Asia they are all HT Camp 1. There are very few HT Camp 2 people in Central Asia.

Q: You cited violations of Islamic laws as the main reason behind your and Omar Bakri's departure, briefly explain these violations.

A: It related to the methods involved in establishing the Khilafah system and many other Aqeedah (ideological) and Fiqh (Jurisprudence) issues.

Q: Please elaborate on this.

A: Muhajiroun and HT disagreed on three points.

1- Muhajiroun engage in the divine method to establish the Khilafah wherever they have members, whereas HT works to establish the Khilafah only in a specific Muslim country (they called it Majal—i.e. geographical area in any part of the Muslim world) and restricted their members' activities outside the Majal.

2- Muhajiroun follow the Aqeedah of Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah (ASWJ) and the path of Al-Salaf Al-Saalih (companions and family of the Prophet), whereas HT subscribe to a different Aqeedah.

3- Muhajiroun believe in twinning Da'wa (the call to Islam) and Jihad, whereas HT does not believe that Jihad can be waged by agents not affiliated to the Islamic state.

Q: Please elaborate on the Aqeedah of Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah (ASWJ).

A: The followers of ASWJ, in summary, follow only the Quran and the Sunnah in accordance to the understandings of the Companions and the Family of the Prophet

Muhammad. We follow the Nahj-ul-Salaf (the path of the pious predecessors). The central theme is Al-Talazum (Correlation), which forbids divorcing Shari'ah from Aqeedah. In the Salafi worldview there can be no separation between Aqeedah and Shariah; they have to be moulded together. Moreover Iman (faith) is no longer an issue of the heart, Iman must automatically entail action. It goes further than this, insofar as there must be a union between Koran and the Sunna as core constituents of Wahy (revelation).

Q: What you are outlining here is, in its simplest form, a merger between theory and praxis.

A: Indeed, thought determines action.

Q: The idea of combining theory and praxis has Marxist overtones, would you not agree?

A: This is the Salafi approach, and the difference is that Marxist theories are man-made whereas Islamic ideology is divine insofar as it is derived from the Quran and Sunnah.

Q: The worldview that you are outlining has broad implications, particularly insofar as it makes the agency of the Ulama (religious scholars/clerics) superfluous.

A: We want Ulama as long as they promote the pure concept of Islam with complete Talazom between Al-Baatin (the inner) and Al-Zaaher (the outer). There is no scope in Islam for divergent schools of thought or sects. Who can understand Islam better than the Prophet and his companions? Who aided the Prophet in the major battles of early Islam like Badr and Khandaq? The Hanafis, Shafi'is, Tahiris? Of course not! The Prophet fought alongside the Sahaba (companions & family).

Q: Presumably this elaborate Salafi ideology that you are describing is firmly established in your organization.

A: Anybody who does not follow the path of the Salaf cannot join al-Muhajiroun.

Q: Apart from these theological and ideological disputes, did the fact that Mr Omar Bakri and yourself were maintaining a parallel organization in the form of al-Muhajiroun cause any friction between you and HT?

A: The real dispute was over the methodology to establish the Khilafah, they did not like us attacking man-made laws here in the UK, and they did not like the fact that we were condemning the policy of John Major and the British government.

Q: Okay, I want to move on now and address some of your recent activities. You told the Birmingham Sunday Mercury in December 2000 that Muhajiroun recruits people for Jihad in places like Afghanistan, Chechnya and Kashmir. Did you have the organization in place to recruit and direct these people to those theatres of conflict?

A: That is not true. I never recruited people to go abroad and fight against anyone. However, people used to come to us if they wanted to join Jihads abroad but soon discovered that we are merely Jihad sympathisers. Anyway, legally speaking, all our activities were permissible during that period. We did not breach any laws as we were helping suffering people overseas.

Q: Were you involved in sending young men to theatres of conflict?

A: No, I was not. I used to encourage people to go to Bosnia to help their Muslim brothers and sisters, when the law in the UK permitted that type of intervention. But when the law forbade it, we stopped these activities altogether.

Q: To which law are you referring here?

A: The new law against terrorism.

Q: The one introduced straight after September 11, 2001?

A: Yes.

Q: To which location did you direct most of the young men who came to your organization?

A: We used to help mostly in Bosnia and Kosovo as part of a broader humanitarian effort.

Q: In another interview with Milan's Il Giornale your teacher and mentor Mr Bakri said that the 'International Islamic Front' (IIF) is the political wing of Osama Bin Laden's 'International Islamic Front for Jihad Against the Jews and the Crusaders'. What were the implications of this statement?

A: Another fabrication and distortion from the media! Sheik Omar Bakri and myself did set up the IIF in August 1990 as a political platform to oppose the stationing of American forces in the Gulf and Saudi Arabia. This was designed to act as a broad umbrella for a range of UK-based organizations.

Q: Therefore there are no connections to the 'International Islamic Front for Jihad Against the Jews and the Crusaders' set up by Bin Laden in 1998?

A: Of course not. But certain people exploited this coincidence. They tried to portray us [as] the political wing of Bin Laden's military structure and this used to make me laugh. I wish we had a connection, as there is no shame in being linked to Sheikh Osama Bin Laden.

Q: But there was clearly an ideological link.

A: If you mean devotion to the sect of ahlus-Sunah wal-Jama'ah it is true, but I have never met Sheikh Osama Bin Laden in my life.

Q: Al Muhajiroun, Omar Bakri and yourself are even known in Thailand. The Bangkok Post once reported that training camps for Thai Muslim separatists were partly financed by your organization; is there any veracity to these allegations?

A: Another fabrication from the media! All that happened was that some Chinese Muslims came to Britain seeking financial help to build mosques and schools and we obliged.

Q: Who helped them, Al-Muhajiroun?

A: Yes, as a charity organization we used to raise funds for Muslims in need to ease their suffering just like any charity would do.

Q: How did you raise these funds?

A: We held public talks and mobilized our followers to undertake fund-raising activities on behalf of fellow Muslims abroad within the framework of the law.

Q: Did you run any commercial enterprises and businesses to raise money?

A: No, we have never done that.

Q: How do you raise your money now in light of the recent anti-terrorism legislations?

A: Al-Muhajiroun has always had three sources of income. Firstly, every member has to contribute a third of his salary if he is working.

Q: And if he is not?

A: Then he will have to make commitments to the activities of the organization. Secondly, we sell audio cassettes, videos, CD's, and thirdly, we receive donations from Muslim businessmen here and abroad.

Q: Which of these constitutes your biggest source of income?

A: Donations.

Q: Going back to your activities now, was Bin Laden really scheduled to send a video cassette to the rally for Islamic Revival in September 1996?

A: In 1996, a letter from Bin Laden was published in the Independent and the Quds al-Arabi, and we simply made a copy of it and said we were going to read it in public. The media simply sensationalized this. In the same vein there was to be no tape from Sheikh Omar Abd al-Rahman.

Q: But where do the media get all these sensational stories?

A: You know very well that the media loves to sensationalize these things.

Q: But is there anybody in your organization who is helping them in this process?

A: Not at all. You know very well that they used the same tactic against Marxists and Communists.

Q: You are alluding to psychological warfare here, right?

A: No. All I am doing is making people aware of the other side of the story.

Q: But you are not doing a good job of this; cynics would say that you simply make it

worse by making sensational statements.

A: We try to counter their propaganda. We always issued denials at first, but then there came a time when we just grew tired of making denials. We figured that if they want to give us publicity we should just leave them to it.

Q: What caused the cancellation of the Islamic Revival Rally?

A: It was MI5 (British Intelligence Service). They intervened with the London arena and suddenly the arena increased the costs and the insurance by astronomical amounts. They were trying to force us to cancel but we would not oblige them. In the end they refunded our money.

Q: Did MI5 approach you directly about the event?

A: Yes, they contacted me first as Sheik Omar Bakri's solicitor. They told us there would be a security risk as we had invited different organizations and speakers.

Q: Did MI5 interview you personally?

A: Yes as Sheik Omar's solicitor.

Q: From the meetings you had with them, did you ever get the impression that they had an in-depth knowledge of your organization?

A: We knew we were being continuously monitored by Special Branch; they even said this to us on many public functions.

Q: But Special Branch does not have the analytical and political skills to make proper sense of Islamic organizations. They are good at conventional security work like surveillance and monitoring of communications, but the analytical work is carried out by MI5.

A: Even none of the senior people from MI5 who met us asked me the kind of complex questions that you are putting to me in this interview.

Q: This does not mean that they don't have an in-depth understanding of where you are coming from and where you could be heading.

A: I don't think so. Anyway I will let you [in] on an open secret. We never published any leaflet in the UK without sending a fax to all media organizations, including the Police press officer. This foiled the machinations of anyone who might have been tempted to distort what we were saying.

Q: So you are part of Sheik Omar Bakri's legal team? What's its name?

A: The Society of Muslim Lawyers. We are Sheik Omar Bakri's student. He teaches us Islamic law and we help him to make sense of English law.

Q: Are you all British Muslims?

A: Yes, we all are as most of the Islamists in the UK, born and bred here.

Q: How come you have never sued any publication for libel?

A: How can we do that? You know very well that in this country, major publications have unlimited budgets. In any case we would not stand a chance in front of a jury because there are likely to be people there who disagree with my views.

Q: Like who?

A: Homosexuals, Jews etc. Owing to the jury-based system of libel adjudication in this country, we would not stand a chance of winning as we have to present our case in a public arena, and of course we have been consistently demonized in this public arena.

Q: What do you make of English law in particular and Western jurisprudence in general, is it not an effective way of organizing society and guaranteeing some justice?

A: I believe Islam is superior. The law here does not protect the average person – it only protects the one who understands it. This is very unfair from an Islamic perspective as the law is designed to be an intrinsic part of social welfare.

Q: Why is Islamic law superior, because it is simpler?

A: Exactly, besides it is divine.

Q: Okay, let's discuss 9/11 and its aftermath. How do you see 9/11?

A: The fact that Americans were attacked was no surprise, what was surprising is that they came under such a devastating attack in their own country. The attacks were really a magnificent operation in every way. They were magnificent terrorists.

Q: "Magnificent Terrorists"? This strikes me as a classic oxymoron!

A: What they did was an act of terrorism no different from what the US forces have been doing in Iraq, Sudan and Afghanistan both before and after 9/11.

Q: Were their actions Islamic?

A: Islamic or not, it was an act of terrorism.

Q: Were their actions Islamic?

A: The Prophet Muhammad once said to the enemy: I have come to terrorize you; he said: "O, people of Qureish I have come to slaughter you"; in another quote he said: 'I am the Prophet who kills while laughing'.

Q: Are you sure these traits are attributable to the Prophet Muhammad?

A: I can quote to you the authentic references. Anyway for me "terrorism" is not

necessarily a bad word; it depends on the context and whether it is based on the commands of Allah.

Q: Do you believe there will be another attack equalling or even exceeding the 9/11 assaults?

A: I believe this phenomenon of al-Qaeda is not going to stop. The phenomenon of martyrdom operations is contagious as the Prophet Muhammad correctly said.

Q: What do you understand by the term al-Qaeda?

A: Al-Qaeda for me, are people who revived the memory and traditions of the Messenger Muhammad (saw) and his companions, and follow the path of the late Salaf such as Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahab (ra), Sheikh Ibn Taimiyah (ra). But of course we do not encourage Muslims in Britain or in any other Western country to copy al-Qaeda as we are all bound by the 'Covenant of Securities'.

Q: Okay, all this is beginning to sound somewhat bizarre, you stress the importance of this Covenant and yet maintain that it is Islamic to slaughter thousands of innocents.

A: Of course nobody cares about the untold number of Muslims slaughtered by the Americans, but when Kafirs are killed it is different.

Q: Okay, would you concur with the analysis that from a Western perspective the only solution to the challenge posed by the Salafis is a security one?

A: There is a solution, hands off Muslim lands!

Q: That entails concessions in foreign policy—concessions that are unlikely to be made.

A: Then they (Kafirs) will go to hell, and we will go to paradise. The Magnificent 19 did not come to negotiate.

Q: Are you absolutely sure there will be more attacks like it?

A: The phenomenon of fighting the occupiers has now become an overriding wish for millions of Muslims.

Q: You are neglecting the practical dimensions of all this—after all, what allowed these 19 to strike so efficiently? The Taliban regime in Afghanistan facilitated the convergence of what one notable researcher has referred to as the 'three elements of al-Qaeda' and of course the Taliban are no longer dominant in Afghanistan.

A: That plan was concocted in the U.S. and it had nothing to do with Afghanistan....

Q: But most of the support networks emanated from Afghanistan-based operatives and planners.

A: The operation was not that sophisticated; a group of men seized planes with knives, and they could have planned this anywhere in the world, even in a room in Zimbabwe.

Q: But al-Qaeda has been severely weakened since the war in Afghanistan.

A: Come on! Al-Qaeda is still intact.

Q: How come we have not seen a dramatic attack in the West since 9/11?

A: Al-Qaeda is not interested in small attacks. Of course al-Qaeda freelance supporters carry out such attacks in places like Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, but the real al-Qaeda is not interested in these minor attacks, they go for massive operations. When they want to strike they will strike. Also bear in mind that the Americans are not holding any al-Qaeda people in Guantanamo Bay.

Q: Really? What about Abu Zubaida?

A: Abu Zubaida was killed in Pakistan according to sources close to al-Qaeda.

Q: Are you sure about this?

A: They want to fool the world.

Q: What about Khaled Sheikh Muhammad?

A: He has been arrested, but he was never part of the hard core of al-Qaeda.

Q: What about [Ramzi bin al-] Shibh, he was arrested and taken away by the Pakistani ISI agents in full view of the cameras. You will be hard pressed to get better proof than that.

A: That was somebody else.

Q: You are saying that al-Shibh is still at large?

A: You need to ask these questions from al-Qaeda, I am not al-Qaeda. All I am saying is that you are seeing everything from one side and that is the propaganda disseminated by the CIA. The CIA knows exactly what they are up against; they are up against the most determined Salafi-Wahabis who have come together in al-Qaeda. That is why the Americans are trying to stop the dissemination of works by Sheikh ibn Abdul Wahab. They are also trying to change the curriculum in some countries. But by starting the war against Islam they have imperilled their own future.

Q: Okay Mr Choudary let us move onto other things, what do you make of the name 'Londonistan'?

A: Nobody wants to establish an Islamic state here in the UK, but we will continue to work for Islam.

Q: I was not referring to that, the name is used to characterize the high concentration of Islamic activism here in the UK's capital.

A: I believe Britain is harbouring most of the Islamic opposition leaders of the Muslim

world.

Q: Why?

A: Because the British elites are very clever, they are not stupid like the Americans. Remember these people used to rule half of the world.

Q: Okay, but why are they specifically harbouring so many Islamists?

A: I believe the British recognize that the Khilafah will rise again one day, and they are anxious to influence this process.

Q: Do you really believe this?

A: The British are not like the French and the Germans, they don't slap you in the face, they stab you in the back. They want to buy some of these Islamic groups.

Q: Has there ever been, to your knowledge, a secret deal between some Islamists and British security whereby radical Muslims would be left alone as long as they did not threaten British national security?

A: I believe all the people referred to as "moderate" Muslims have at one time or another struck deals with the British government. But the British have been unable to corrupt radical groups like the HT.

Q: Who are these moderate Muslims?

A: The Muslim Brotherhood in the UK, UK Islamic Mission, Gammaa Islamiyah, Muslim Council of Britain, Islamic Human Rights Commission, Muslim Association of Britain, Muslim Public affair Committee and the Iranian opposition groups, the so-called Ahlul Bait groups,

Q: The Ahlul Bait societies are not Iranian opposition; on the contrary they are aligned to the Islamic regime in Tehran.

A: Whatever! All the Shia groups enjoy excellent relations with the British government, and this includes the Kho'ee foundation in London. Abdul-Majid Al-Kho'ee, who was killed in Iraq, is reported to have pledged allegiance to the Queen, and look at the punishment that Allah meted out to him in Iraq. Also this man Baqir Hakim.

Q: You are referring to Ayatollah Baqir al-Hakim, the former leader of Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI)?

A: Yes. He used to make typical Shia statements against the Sahaba (companions of Prophet Muhammad); in particular he used to make the greatest insults against Aisha and look at what happened to him; Allah sent somebody who blew him into a thousand pieces.

Q: Who killed Hakim, al-Qaeda?

A: Al-Qaeda has no time for people like Hakim. They are minor players in the wider

scheme of things. They are focused on America. The Shias themselves or the Americans could have killed Hakim. If you look at the history of the Shias since the dawn of Islam you will see that it is full of splits, internal conflicts and betrayals. The Shias themselves killed Imam Hussein in Karbala and then said it was Yazid who committed the atrocity.

Q: Okay, let us discuss the security situation here in the UK; it is often said that you are under constant surveillance, are we under surveillance right now?

A: To be honest, I think everything I say and do is monitored.

Q: How many times have you been interviewed by MI5?

A: I cannot really differentiate between MI5, Special Branch or the Police; they all represent the same authority as far as I am concerned—and I have been questioned by these people on at least 16 occasions.

Q: I have noted a discrepancy in the way you assess the British; on the one hand you maintain that British security is poor, while on the other you assert that the British are comparatively clever as they used to rule half the world, so what is your real position?

A: I meant that their understanding of Islam is poor. But I believe the really clever people are the elites in this country, as they know how to divide Muslims.

Q: Who are these elites?

A: The landlords, think-tanks and the decision makers.

Q: Have you ever had any reason to suspect that your organization has been penetrated?

A: I believe they have tried to do this, as the British are desperate to buy intelligence.

Q: Do you have security procedures in place to prevent this?

A: Yes, through teaching intensive theology to all new recruits. If they find it boring they will run away after six months.

Q: But competent spies can be very persevering.

A: Okay, if they persevere then they will become Muslims.

Q: I see. Would you then consider using this new convert as a double agent?

A: No. Why would I want to penetrate them? It is forbidden in Islam to have contacts with non-Islamic authority. Anyway, I believe their intelligence is not efficient, as they have arrested people on several occasions and subsequently let them go. I have heard some of them were important figures.

Q: Had they inadvertently come across senior figures in the Islamic underground?

A: I heard that they arrested two people who had come from abroad and subsequently let them go, and they just disappeared from the country.

Q: Who were they?

A: I don't know! The point to deduce from that random arrest is that the British have poor intelligence.

Q: But would you say that they are now making a much more concerted effort to crack down on underground Islamic activism?

A: I believe so, yes.

Q: Are you not afraid that one day they will arrest you or other members of al Ghurabaa?

A: No. It will never happen

Q: Okay, you mentioned Abu Qatada earlier, what do you make of this man?

A: He is a great Ulama and committed Salafi insofar as he subscribes to the ethos of Ahlus Sunna va al-Jammaa.

Q: When exactly did he come to the UK?

A: I think in 1994. He came from Jordan.

Q: Why was he arrested?

A: He was arrested for no reason as the new anti-terrorism law enables the authorities to detain suspects without charge.

Q: They are detaining 16 people altogether under that law, correct?

A: Yes.

Q: Are they mostly Algerian?

A: Yes, they are mostly Algerian. There is also Khaled Fawwaz, the Saudi oppositionist.

Q: You don't think Fawwaz is linked to al-Qaeda?

A: No, he is not; in fact he left Bin Laden's office in London in 1995. The point is, that these people have been interrogated heavily, but the British have nothing on them.

Q: Why are they being held then?

A: Because they have enacted this new law, and they have to show something for it otherwise they will come across as ridiculous.

Q: Okay, mr Choudary..Where is all this heading, is it a fight to the finish between the

United States and the Salafis?

A: Allah knows best, however, our main concern is to please Allah, and to die in the cause of Allah and go to Jannah (Paradise). If the U.S. continues with her policy against Islam and the Muslim world, Muslims will be more inclined to strike blows against America.

Interview with Mr Anjoum Choudary after al Ghurabaa and the Saved Sect were banned. The interview took place on the 18th of July 2006, in Ilford, East London.

Q: Have you had time to hear what John Reid has said?

A: I think this is a failure for the British government and the capitalist ideology and the principles of freedom and Christian liberalism. Al-Ghurabaa and the Saved Sect are ideological movements and political movements. We have been very vociferous in opposition to the governments foreign policy, the Draconian laws which they have introduced over the years and the corruption in the Western system manifest in the judicial system, the economic system. We have always propagated an alternative blueprint for the way that society should be run, in accordance with Sharia law. But, it seems to me rather than engaging in dialogue and discussion, which would be more fitting for a government which propagates democracy and freedom, they have sought to try to silence any voices which present sound, alternative arguments and I think this is a victory for Muslims and I believe that is how it will be seen around the world.

Q: How can you describe it as a victory?

A: When someone does not have a counter argument and they cannot deal with the ideas and thoughts which people carry then the easy thing is to try to ban the other voice. That is what has happened here. The government haven't come up with a cogent argument concerning their foreign policy. They have no rational and logical reason for introducing so many Draconian laws in this country which violate their own concepts of human rights and civil liberties. There is no evidence to suggest we are anything other than an ideological and political movement. We have been functioning here for the last ten or 15 years and nobody has ever been arrested for any terrorism related offences. You'd be hard pushed to find anyone who has any convictions short of fly posting or placarding. This is a failure of the capitalist ideology. I believe Islam will continue to be the fastest growing ideology in the West, the Muslims will never stop propagating what we believe and what this will do is it will militarise many people because if you start to stop people propagating their thoughts and ideas then you will push them underground and, obviously, after that you have no control over them. Ultimately, I think this will just quicken the victory for Islam because when you try to ban something people become more interested in it.

Q: You would deny glorifying terror?

A: We don't glorify terrorism any more than Tony Blair and George Bush glorify the terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan. I do believe that the people in Iraq and Afghanistan have a legitimate right to defend themselves. I believe that anyone who dies defending life or property dies a martyr. I believe that people have legitimate grievances as opposed to what Tony Blair would have you believe. If that's a crime, then I'm a criminal.

Q: What's next?

A: I think the Muslim community here are willing to sacrifice everything they have to please Allah. This will never stop anyone propagating Islam.

Q: Will you set up a new group?

A: I think people will continue propagating Islam and if you are unhappy with the name, then you won't know what people are doing from now on. They will do it differently, they may not do it under any organisation. We have a right and an obligation to propagate Islam publicly and openly. If it reaches a situation when the life and the wealth of the people is violated then what happened on 7/7 could very well reoccur. People like us trying to prevent another 7/7, but it seems to me the government are fuelling more of a frenzy within the Muslim community. They are banning people who have a purely ideological and political opposition to their policies and ultimately they are fermenting more of the same of what took place on 7/7. I think that the government are sitting on a tinderbox and that it's liable to blow up in their face as it did on 7/7. It's a real shame that if the Muslims cannot fulfill their responsibilities then we will go somewhere else. As I said, I do believe it's a failure of the capitalist ideology, of the government. It's very easy to ban someone, it's hard to put forward counter arguments.

Q: Appeal?

A: We're not interested in appealing, in going to court. At the end of the day, the courts and the appeals process is all part of the same system. We believe in Islam as an alternative. The courts are just the right hand of the British government. If the government thinks it is going to silence us, then it is not going to succeed. I am a spokesman for al Ghurabaa, but I believe my sentiments will be shared by the Saved Sect

Interview with Dr Abdullah Sufi, Imam of the North Finchley mosque and member of the London-based Saudi opposition group, Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights (CDLR). The interview was conducted on the 31st of May 2007, in his house, North Finchley, London.

Q: What kind of Islamic ideology does the Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights promote? Do you consider yourself a Wahabi organization?

A: The word Wahabi has become a misnomer. The U.S., for example, uses it to denote Jihadists. They called the Taliban Wahabists, but this was not true. Wahabism has several essential ingredients, and we don't consider ourselves to be Wahabi. We do, however, share the Jihadi spirit.

Q: Then in what way does your version of Islam differ from the official religious establishment in Saudi Arabia?

A: The official clergy are basically a government party. They are well organized. Their view is that the regime has flaws but these can be corrected from the "inside." They basically believe that the regime is Islamic and thus legitimate.

Q: How about the dissident clerics. Do your views differ from theirs?

A: The radical forces can roughly be divided into two branches: First, there are the Jihadists, who say the regime is Kufr (i.e., belonging to the realm of the disbelievers), therefore it has to be fought and destroyed.

Secondly, there are people who say indeed the regime is Kufr, but this does not mean that everybody who serves the regime is a disbeliever. They say the regime has to be overthrown but not necessarily through violent means alone. This is the view of the CDLR.

Q: I take that to mean you believe violence is needed to engineer the collapse of the regime.

A: We believe that any way to remove the regime is legitimate. However, we are more inclined to move the masses toward some kind of revolt or popular uprising, perhaps along the lines of the French and Iranian revolutions. We also do not rule out winning over powerful factions in the military and subsequently convince them to move against the regime. This will minimize bloodshed. But I should add that the legal and moral issues are exceedingly complex!

Q: There are of course dissident forces both inside and outside the country who do not want the regime to go in its entirety.

A: There is an in-between group. They are mostly from a Salafi background, who have been influenced by the "Muslim Brotherhood." Most of them take inspiration from Mohammad Sorour and hence they are called the Sorouri Group. They are reluctant to move against the regime. They believe it has many faults, but they hesitate before calling for its overthrow. They possibly have the best intentions, but they lack any coherent program or efficient methodology. I do not believe that they will ever be a real threat to the

regime.

Q: There are of course those who say the Saudi royal family has become so embedded as an institution that it now represents Saudi national consciousness. Therefore, getting rid of it would cause an enormous amount of harm to the country. How do you respond to these people?

A: It is mostly an issue of symbolism. And of course, symbolism is important in understanding the behavior of the wider masses towards the political realities. But never forget that the al-Sauds were once a small and irrelevant tribe. By aligning themselves with the Wahabi movement they evolved, over two and a half centuries, into the powerful establishment we see today. The legitimacy of the regime has always rested on its claim to be Islamic. That has been undermined, so everything else is coming under question. And most people are aware of this. The whole structure of the regime is now in peril. What you call Saudi national consciousness never existed although the regime tried to create something in that direction in the last thirty years, albeit to no avail.

Q: Are the people really that critical of the regime?

A: There was a recent poll in Kuwait, which is regarded as much more secular and pro-Western than Saudi Arabia, in which 74.5 percent of respondents said that they sympathized with bin Laden and consider him to be a hero. If a similar poll was conducted in Saudi Arabia, I am sure that over 85 percent would register approval with bin Laden.

Q: What tactics does CDLR use to engineer the collapse of the regime? Do you follow the so-called Horizontal Trend Movement of Movement of Islamic Reform in Arabia?

A: Yes we are very strong horizontally. But we have also developed strong theoretical and scholarly capabilities. We admire Hizb al-Tahrir because they have developed a constitution of the Islamic state. They have worked out all the characteristics of the Islamic state, from women's rights to elections. Clearly their constitution contains certain scholarly and theological biases, but the important point is that nobody else has done this before. Of course we disagree with many aspects and details of Hizb-al-Tahrir's constitution, but at least they have put something on the table. So we are very strong theoretically. We do have some vertical capabilities, but our activist network and organization is not properly structured. We are hoping to improve this in the future through the formal establishment of a properly organized and well-structured political party.

Q: How do your views differ from those of Osama bin Laden?

A: Osama bin Laden is a military leader. He was appointed by the Afghans as Amir of the Arab Mujahedin. Because he has been engaged in fighting for decades, OBL and his followers have not had time to study recent developments and innovations in Islamic politics and philosophy. They have no detailed theory of the Islamic state in whose cause they are fighting. They believe in the Islamic state in a very general sense, and they have no real program. This is the essential difference between OBL and CDLR. Moreover, bin Laden's obsessive concentration on the U.S. is not really wise. Bin Laden forgot or neglected for tactical reasons that the U.S. did not invade Saudi Arabia. It was invited in by the Saudi royal family. The regime invited the U.S. and it has to pay the price.

Q: There are some people in the U.S. who claim that bin Laden receives support from certain quarters in the Saudi regime.

A: There are two types of people in the regime who support bin Laden:

- 1) Some are sincerely fed up with the corruption and lack of respect for Islam.
- 2) The others hope to use the Jihadis for their "power game" inside the royal family. Turki Al-Faisal, the ex-intelligence chief and current Saudi ambassador in London, is one of the prime suspects.

Q: There have been suggestions that CDLR is increasingly promoting a pan-Islamic agenda and is no longer exclusively focused on Saudi Arabia. How do you respond to these charges?

A: Any Islamic movement worth its salt has to become international. When the Saudis passed the Saudi citizenship law in 1932, the regime ceased to be an Islamic order. An Islamic state has to be internationalist and inclusive. Islamic tenets demand nothing less. But really we at CDLR remain focused on Saudi Arabia. We may publish an article against Musharraf or any other leader from time to time, but on the whole our focus is on Saudi Arabia.

Q: You have mentioned Hizb-al-Tahrir and said you admire them. Is it not the case that Hizb-al-Tahrir is primarily a British Islamic party?

A: No, this is a misconception. Hizb-al-Tahrir is still a prime party in Jordan, Palestine and even Pakistan. The Pakistanis are so terrified of them that they have recently moved against the party. In fact they are thinking of banning it. The party is also very strong in Uzbekistan. And of course Hizb-al-Tahrir was the mother of most Jihadi groups in Egypt.

A: Now, focusing back on Saudi Arabia, do you think the Saudi regime has been able to orchestrate a peaceful transition after King Fahd's death?

Q: Well, the U.S. pressure on them is enormous. In fact, American pressure has been so great that the possibility of internal squabbles escalating into open fighting has been reduced. The Saudi regime is basically made up of five pillars or entities. These are:

- 1) Al-Jawharah bint Ibraheem, the youngest and favorite wife of King Fahd. She guards her influence zealously for the benefit of her son, Abdul-Azeez. She controls the royal office and the seals. She is well-educated and sophisticated.
- 2) Abdullah. He is the Crown Prince and exerts control through the National Guards and has relatively good tribal connections.
- 3) Sultan. He controls the Defense Ministry in addition to enormous financial assets.
- 4) Nayef. He controls the internal police apparatus. This is a considerable force numbering hundreds of thousands.
- 5) Salman. He controls the media and has a strong presence in intellectual circles and

some middle class factions.

Q: So there is a fine balancing act between all these factions.

A: Yes!. The regime has no vision, no program, no strategy and no long term planning. They just manage tactically from day to day with one sole objective: To stay in power at any price.

Q: What impact will the jailing of Sheikh Aki Bin Khudeir have inside Saudi Arabia? How popular is he?

A: Khudeir was very popular in Jihadi circles. He is hostile to Shias since he is a classic Wahabi. Therefore Khudeir appeals to some of the strongest and most relevant sections of the society. But there are other forces out there and for them he has little or no appeal. But Khudeir has discredited himself by recently repenting and endorsing the Saudi regime. This has undercut his appeal within the Jihadi constituency. But in a way his "repentance" has weakened the regime because:

1) Some Jihadi circles are now free to recruit from other sections of the society. Especially now that they are no longer under Khudeir's influence or the influence of other clerics of "classical" Wahabi persuasion.

2) Khudair's "repentance" was most likely elicited through torture and was broadcast a few days after the Al-Muhayya compound bombing. This depicts a weak and desperate regime trying to get intellectual support from anywhere and by any means!

Q: Mamoun Fandy notes in his book on Saudi opposition movements that Saudi opposition leaders are more interested in maintaining their separate voices as critics of the regime rather than engaging in coordinated action. Is this a fair assessment?

A: It is only fair in a comparative sense. Saudi opposition politics is a very recent phenomenon. Comparing Saudi opposition to places where there have been modern organized political activities for 100 years is unfair. You need to have a well-established political culture to realize the possibility of "separate voices" engaging in "coordinated action". Such culture is historically lacking in Saudi Arabia and we have to develop it.

Q: Are you referring to other Arab countries here, places like Lebanon and Egypt?

A: Yes.

Q: What implication will this lack of political maturity have for the survival of the regime?

A: The regime has survived until now, not due to any real internal strength--it is as stable as a house of cards. However, the winds of popular political maturity are not yet there, so the house of cards persists. But this is now changing, and I am sure the regime will go in my generation. It may take some time, but eventually the regime will disappear.

Q: I want to focus on the wider region now. What do you make of the United States' war on terrorism?

A: (Chuckles)

Q: Do you believe it is a war against Islam?

A: Yes, there is no question about that. But they will sooner or later realize that their aggressive policies will fail. They will kill a lot of Muslims in the process because they have advanced technology and they bomb from high up in the air, but they will blink first. Take Iraq for example; everybody is surprised that the resistance has started so quickly. I thought it would take a year or two before the resistance would start in earnest. But it has happened much more quickly than that. And in Afghanistan as well there is now rigorous resistance.

Q: Do you think the U.S. will eventually fail in Iraq?

A: It will take a few years but they will fail. They will begin to make blunders, like bombing whole cities, the kind of things they are doing in Afghanistan right now. But of course Iraq is much more sophisticated and they will not be able to cover up their crimes there.

Q: Was al Qaeda behind the London bombings?

A: Al Qaeda has now become a jackass suitable for carrying any load. They are blamed for everything. There may be a hard core group called al Qaeda, but most of these bombings are by local groups.

Q: But don't you think there are connections between these local groups and a wider international network?

A: The connections are ideological and mostly informal. It is very difficult to forge operational connections. The real point is that Western intelligence can not penetrate these groups. We are talking about two divorced worlds with diametrically opposed cultures. Western intelligence is used to using bars, prostitutes and dancing clubs to entrap people, and of course the Jihadists have nothing to do with these things. Even Saudi intelligence, many of whose officers are devout classic Wahabists, has a hard time penetrating these groups. I knew someone in Kabul, and he told me that almost every one in Kabul knew, just before 9/11, that something big was going to happen in America. But of course Western intelligence had no clue. The best way to think of al Qaeda is by using the cluster bomb analogy. A large bomb is aimed at a target but before it hits the target, it divides into hundreds of small and independent bomblets.

Q: And the targets are Western interests and corrupt local governments?

A: Exactly!

Q: That is very interesting!. Now do you think the Islamic regime in Iran could serve as a model for the future Arabia?

A: No, I don't.

Q: What are your views on the Islamic Republic?

A: That regime has never been able to surpass nationalism and sectarianism. I also find the Velayat al-Faqih doctrine abhorrent. It smells and tastes like the Catholic Church!

Q: But some say the Velayat-e-Faqih doctrine is Sunni in origin.

A: No, it is not. It is a principle to substitute for the infallible hidden Imam during his "great absence" and now it has just become a tool to ensure the continuation of that regime. The regime in Iran is much better than the others in that region, but ultimately it is, strictly speaking, not an Islamic state. It is an Iranian and sectarian state with some Islamic orientation and plenty of empty Islamic rhetoric very much similar to Saudi Arabia. No wonder that Iran and Saudi Arabia have become friends!

Interview with Majiid Nawaaz, conducted on the 12th of July 2007 upon his resignation from Hizbu ut Tahrir. Majiid was imprisoned in Egypt for 5 years as member of HT. I met and interviewed him for the first time in 2006 when he was released from this terrible ordeal and still a very active member of the party, part of the Executive Committee. The following are excerpts of our second interview and meeting.

Q: It is possible for you to explain the reason why you joined Hizbu ut Tahrir in the first place and when.

A: I joined HT when I was 17. My family is from Pakistan and I was born in Essex. I joined the party as I was desperately looking for some motivations and answers in my life, some points of references. My family is Muslim and I was Muslim myself but I never liked or felt close to the kind of Islam my father and my mother were professing. Their Islam was to me synonymous with tradition and therefore it was outdated and lacking in spirituality and relevance for me by then.

I was an angry teen-ager and events like the Bosnian war or the second Gulf war made me realize that there was the need for an Islamic renewal and HT seemed to offer that.

Q : The first time I met you, you had been just released from prison in Egypt. The reason why you were imprisoned is because you were a member of HT. Do you regret that?

A: No I do not regret anything. The time in prison made me stronger and I had the chance of reading the Quran and understanding the 'true' sources of Islam, which they have been skillfully 'dressed up' during the time I was part of HT. This had led me ultimately to resign.

Q: That's very interesting. So before we go into more details, what- would you say- was the main reason that led to your resignation. If you had to describe it, by using just one word.

A: If I had to use just one word to explain it, I would say that the primary reason was a substantial disagreement with the leadership of the party.

Q: What kind of disagreement? Which one was the issue at stake?

A: From inside, on a very spiritual level, I started to analyze my entire life journey and I started to understand that I was actually staining my true beliefs, by coming to numerous compromises for reason of power and politics.

In prison I had the chance of reading several books and mostly commentaries by 'ulama. The interesting aspect is that none of them would ever speak of 'Political Islam' or 'Islamism' or of an Islamic state to be re-established in the present conditions and times. That situation has to be placed within a specific historical context with specific historical settings and political needs. Thinking of repeating the same experience crossing centuries of history and cultural changes is an orientalist approach, not dissimilar from that one employed by people like Samuel Huntington, Bernard Lewis, Daniel Pipes.

Q: How would you define an Islamist?

A: An Islamist for me is someone who decides to make Islam as his-her political identity. An Islamist is totally different from a Muslim. A Muslim is a person, who follows the teachings of Islam in his-her everyday life but this does not mean that he-she wants to mix his-her own private religion, spirituality, set of beliefs with politics. That would imply to deny the sacred, the spiritual aspect of religion. That would mean to reject religion and Islam.

Q: Do you define yourself as an Islamist?

A: Not at all and anymore. I am just a Muslim now and definitely I reject my past as an Islamist. I am a Muslim who tries to apply and employ Islam in his everyday life and I do not want to mix Islam with politics. This is dangerous, anti-Islamic and it damages enormously the Muslim communities in the entire world.

Q: Would you agree with me if I say that the idea of 'dyn ua daula' is very difficult to implement in a secular context and in the Middle East too?

A: Yes! To be honest with you, I think that nowadays it is impossible. It is all about politics and the political dimension will always prevail. People (Islamists) who declare the possibility of establishing an Islamic state are deceitful as they use religion in order to achieve political gains. It will always end up in a power struggle defined by man-made decisions and drives.

Q: Do you still think that H.T's plan is plausible?

A: Not at all and it never was but I was too weak and blind to realize it during my time with them. The only way they can actually realize their political plan is if the US (or another super power) backs and finances them. They will never conduct a peaceful revolution in the Middle East as they want us to believe. The only way to achieve power for them is through ferocious and violent conquest: not peaceful and definitely not Islamic. They are dangerous. No one really likes them in the Middle East, as they can clearly foresee the threat they represent.

Q: Have you heard that David Cameron in the first 2 PM questions last week asked Brown to ban HT?

A: Yes! I have heard that but they should not as they will give them more reasons to feel marginalized and therefore they would feel more powerful and driven.

Q: Do you think that there are different kinds of Islamism as there can be different and disparate interpretations of the Qur'an?

A: To me, Islamism is a way of variously mis-interpreting and using the Qur'an and the Islamic message, according to different political interests and gains. But it is definitely a manipulation of a religious text. And as I said earlier on, it is not a matter of religion but of politics.

And what I'd like to emphasize is that such a policy is not agreed upon within Islamic theology. I think that what I taught when I was a member of HT has not only damaged British society and British Muslim relations and damaged the position of Muslims in this society as British citizens, I think it's damaged the world. What I had been propagating was far from true Islam. I began to realize that what I had subscribed to was actually Islamism sold to me in the name of Islam. Now I am involved in trying to counter the black and white mindset that I once so vehemently encouraged. Although I was young when I was recruited to HT I take full responsibility for my actions. I made the decisions that I did and I am responsible for undoing them. With this in mind I hope to publish a series of papers reevaluating certain core Islamist ideas that are essential to their message.

The following are excerpts of an interview with Mr Emdad Ramdan, ex member of IHRC and sympathizer of Tablighi Jamaat. The interview was conducted on 15th of September 2007 in his house, Bromley by Bow, East London.

Q: Where were you born? Could you please give me a brief biography?

A: I was born in London, in Newham but my family is from Lahore, Pakistan. My mother and my father came to England after they got married in 1958. My wife is original from Pakistan too but she was born and raised here in the UK. So we are both British.

Q: Could you tell me a bit about your political experience as ex member of IHRC and now a Tablighi Jamaat supporter, if I can define you in this way?

A: Yes you can definitely define me as a Tablighi Jamaat supporter. First of all, I do not like to talk of politics as my past and present is Islam and not politics which is just struggle for power dictated by human greed. I joined IHRC at the end of the 1990s as I liked the fact that they were not a confrontational party and they were fighting for Muslim rights around the world, with a special focus on Palestine. They were not just using some sort of political propaganda but actually engaging with the issues at stake.

Q: I understand. But do not you think that the Israeli-Palestinian war is definitely political and not a matter of religious belief?

A: If you are Muslim, a practicing Muslim as I am, everything related to Muslims anywhere in the world is a matter of concern for the Muslim community, too. Islam is a total and encompassing entity, which includes what the West would call politics. The only difference is that a Muslim living in a non Muslim society, has to be careful of every step he-she takes. They must be conscious of what they are doing at all times.

Q: How would you then describe politics?

A: I told you earlier on. Politics to me is a matter of greed and desire for power. If you are a true Muslim you cannot be interested in that. It is not Islamic at all. I am not interested in politics but in the well being of the Muslim community, anywhere in the world.

Q: That's fine. Did the IHRC fulfill your expectation in terms of lack of political activism?

A: Yes. It did. The IHRC started when it split off from the Muslim Parliament of Great Britain and its power struggles. It has always had a collaborative attitude with other faith groups. This is what I liked more. It does not have any political affiliation or programme. Its main concern- as I said- is the rights of Muslim in the world. So it could organize events with other faith groups, Jewish groups, Catholic ones without any problem or division that politics would otherwise create.

Q: I understand. So when and why did you leave IHRC and joined Tablighi Jamaat ?

A: I joined TJ in 2004. The reason why I left IHRC is very simple and not related to my lack of support for IHRC. At that point of my life I felt that an organization like TJ was just closer to my own spirituality and my way of living and interpreting Islam. It was not a

political choice, as neither IHRC or TJ are political at all.

Q: There have been 'rumours' that TJ is an organization to recruit 'jihadist' in Europe on the behalf of Osama Bin Laden. I am here referring to an article by Alex Alexiev appeared on the Middle East Quarterly, Winter 2005. What do you think of that?

A: I support and have meetings with members of TJ and we are definitely not terrorist or recruiting terrorists on the behalf of Osama Bin Laden. Quite the opposite. TJ is a very spiritual organization, not interested in the outside world of politics, economics or power struggle. Its name means 'Proselytizing Group', that is its main purpose: to spread Islam. There is not talk of terrorism in spreading Islam. We try to live by the Qu'ran, following the teachings of Muhammad (pbuh).

Q: But if I remember right, Muhammad community was inherently political. Religion and politics were bound together. So how could you justify the statement that there is no politics in TJ proselytism or action? Are you not contradicting yourself?

A: Not at all. During the time of Muhammad, politics was at the service of religion. In the Western world, politics is just desire for control and power. Therefore a true Muslim should just reject politics as such.

Q: That's very interesting and now it is clear to me. So what do you think of the act of blowing himself up, of being a suicide bomber? Is this act Islamic? Like the 7-7 bombers?

A: Not at all. Suicide bombers are first of all very ignorant of the Islamic teachings and they are not Muslims when they kill other people, themselves and leave their family behind. My believe is that those are men and women with serious mental and behavioural problems and they should be treated and cured (if possible) as such. They are Western in their ideology and product of Western problems. They have been created by the West and the Western politics in the Middle East: a sort of Frankenstein monster. There is not an exact cure for them and the current war on Terror surely is not one. But my point is that Islam and the Muslim community should not be blamed for the terrorists' actions and should not be paying for their mistakes.

Q: I totally agree with you. So what do you think of people like Anjoum Choudary from Al-Ghurabaa or Omar Bakri who call the 9-11 bombers the 'Magnificent 19'?

A: I do not think much of them as people and as Muslims. To me they are a group of clowns, attention seekers. They are bogus men. They just do not understand that they are serving the West and the media interests. To me they are the worst enemies of Islam, not their champions as they want to depict themselves. But Muslims have already ridiculed them and not recognized them as their leaders. To me, they will not last much and soon the young minds that they have corrupted will realize what kind of people they are and mostly that it is not Islamic what they are trying to propagate and teach. Actually quite the opposite.

Q: I understand. Why do you think that TJ members are unwilling to release interviews and meet journalists? Don't you think that this increases the suspicion around them?

A: Not at all. TJ is a spiritual group and not interested in the outside world or in any of the current political problems or world affairs issues. Why they should share their views, opinions, way of life with people who are very dissimilar to them.?

Q: That is called communication, dialogue, exchange that should be encouraged in a society, not avoided or demonized, in order also to dissipate false allegations. Last question before closing. Do you think that Muslims in the UK have been marginalized and made objects of racism?

A: I do not think so. I am a Muslim and I was born here so I am a British Muslim. I think that Muslims in the UK benefit of great freedom and enjoy many opportunities that they would not have otherwise, if they lived in any of the Muslim countries. I think that there is not racism or Islamophobia in this country. Muslims that they say so are those who are creating the problem and who are happy to stir up troubles in order to get some recognition and power. As I said before, this is not what Islam requires you to do. Islam is synonymous with peace, love and not divisions and hate. Who is propagating those kinds of feelings is not a Muslim to me and does not deserve any credit.