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Muslim Councils in Britain and Russia

Challenges of cooperation and representation in contrasting institutional contexts

Ekaterina Braginskaia

The candidate declares –

(a)   that the thesis has been composed by the candidate alone, and
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Signed (the candidate)

Ekaterina Braginskaia

Date

Abstract

Over the past two decades, both the British and Russian states have sought to institutionalise relations with their Muslim communities through Muslim councils. However, such attempts at institutionalisation raise challenges for these organisations, which need to balance state demands for incorporation into religious governance and Muslim community expectations for more inclusive representation. Challenges of integration and representation have received considerable coverage in Western and Russian studies. However, little comparative research has focused on the behaviour of Muslim councils and how this is affected by different institutional settings. In particular, theories of social movements and interest groups suggest that strategies for dealing with this tension between integration and representation vary between more corporatist and pluralist state-religion relations. Russia and Britain are taken as exemplars of the two traditions, and thus help us to understand how these tensions manifest themselves and are responded to in the two different contexts.

The project provides a comparative analysis of the strategies and discourses used by the Muslim Council of Britain and the Russia Council of Muftis in 1997-2013. It explores the conditions under which the councils engage with or disengage from the state. It also examines how the two organisations respond to criticisms from Muslim communities and undertake internal reforms to improve their legitimacy. A detailed analysis of the councils' engagement with state authorities and Muslim communities is used to unpack the challenges of Muslim collective representation. The thesis contributes to research by providing new empirical data and theoretical insights on Muslim national organisations. It offers an innovative analytical framework by revisiting the concepts of pluralism and corporatism and applying them to the institutional context of state-religion relations in Britain and Russia. It draws on social movement theories and institutionalist approaches to understand how Muslim organisations deal with the dual pressure of co-optation and representation. It examines how Muslim councils behave like interest group organisations and offers theoretical insights that can be extrapolated to other kinds of institutions. Finally, the thesis integrates Western and Russian scholarship on the role of interest groups in general and religious institutions in particular.

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

DUM	*Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musul'man* –Spiritual Board of Muslims (or Muslim Spiritual Board)
DUMAChR	*Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musul'man Aziatskoi chasti Rossii –* Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Asian part of Russia
DUMER	*Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musul'man Evropeiskoi chasti Rosii* Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Central European part of Russia
DUMNO	Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musul'man Nizhegorodksoi Oblasti – Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Nizhny Novgorod Region
DUMRT	*Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musul'man Respubliki Tatarstan –* Spiritual Board of Muslims of Tatarstan
DUMSO	*Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musul'man Saratovskoi Oblasti –* Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Saratov Region
DUMTsER	*Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musul'man Tsentral'no-Evropeiskogo regiona Rosii –* Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Central European Region of Russia
HMD	Holocaust Memorial Day
KTsMSK	*Koordinatsionnyi Tsentr Musul'man Severnogo Kavkaza –* Coordination Centre of Muslims of the North Caucasus
MCB	Muslim Council of Britain
MINAB	Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board
NICMU	National Interim Committee on Muslim Unity
RAIS	*Rossiiskaya Assotsiatsiya Islamskogo Soglasiya –* Russian Association of Islamic Accord
ROC	Russian Orthodox Church
SMR	*Sovet Muftiev Rossii –* Russia Council of Muftis
TsDUM	*Tsentral'noe Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musul'man –* Central Spiritual Board of Muslims
UKACIA	UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs

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Introduction

The Empirical puzzle of Muslim collective representation

The presence of Muslim immigrant communities in Europe from the early 1960s onwards has been the subject of many national debates on state policies towards those minority ethnic and religious groups, who had arrived from the former colonies. A series of discussions focused on the ways in which immigrant groups adapted to different Western political systems of state-religion relations and the extent to which national provisions on accommodating minority representation have been fair to Muslim communities.

Over the last two decades, second and third generations of Muslims began to express a stronger desire for religious identity and belonging, questioning the state's ability to reflect their interests at home and abroad, particularly in light of the tensions in the Muslim world. Their global outlook on Islam and the increasingly transnational nature of internet communication also deepened the intra-generational gap and challenged the role of Muslim community elders, mosque committees and organisations traditionally engaged in dialogue with state authorities. Increased government concerns over security, coupled with young Muslims making louder claims for recognition of their political and religious rights, increased the salience of Muslim identity politics and collective participation in state-religion relations.

In this thesis, I examine the challenges of Muslim collective representation through the lens of national umbrella bodies acting on behalf of Muslims living in predominantly non-Muslim areas and mediating between Muslim minorities and state authorities. While the growing diversity of Muslim communities resulted in proliferation and differentiation of Muslim organisations, security and integration concerns in the aftermath of 9/11 created a series of similar challenges for those wishing to represent Muslim interests at the national level.

The 1990s-2000s witnessed the creation of national-based, umbrella organisations entrusted to regulate Muslim affairs and represent a variety of Muslim interests in different national contexts. In line with Islamic principles of consultation and Western rules defining the legal status of interest groups or civil society organisations, different Muslim institutions sprang up in various European countries, including Muslim Councils in Britain (1997), France (2003) and Sweden (1990), Islamic Councils in Italy (2004) and Spain (1992) or the Muslim Coordination Council in Germany (2006).

A similar Muslim organisation was formed in Russia in 1996, although, as we shall see, in a different institutional context. Russia's experience of Muslim representation has been a rather different affair. However, the Russia Council of Muftis (*Sovet Muftiev Rossii*, SMR), has increasingly played a key role in state-Muslim relations in Russia. In particular, it faced similar pressures to engage in public debates on integration, identity and religion, as well as address the threat of Islamic radicalisation and the growing tensions over religious provisions for Muslim minorities living in largely non-Muslim areas.

Why study Muslim councils?

It goes without saying that Muslim councils are very different institutions. They vary in their origins, compositional make-up, organisational structures and mobilisation strategies aimed at securing recognition of Muslim minority rights in different political and religious contexts. Their membership reflects not only the diversity of religious and ethnic groupings, but also some of the internal rivalries and political struggles. The ways in which their leaders have participated in state-religion relations have been shaped by different colonial legacies of the receiving or host states and a variety of historically contingent forms of Muslim representation. Whereas some may have been a direct product of state policies, such as the *Conseil français du culte musulman*, others were created at the grassroots level of self-organisation – for example the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB).

Notwithstanding their internal variation, Muslim councils in Europe and Russia share a common set of challenges in light of the increased security and integration concerns. On one hand, towards the end of the 1990s, they have occupied a central place in state-Muslim relations. They have been entrusted with representing interests of Muslim minorities and articulating their collective expectations for equal treatment and protection of their religious and political rights. On the other hand, in light of their close cooperation with the state, they have become increasingly associated with negative connotations of facilitating state relations with Muslim communities. Their leaders were criticised for perhaps going too far in supporting state de-radicalisation measures and encouraging Muslim political loyalty.

This thesis explores how Muslim councils have dealt with this inherent tension between representing Muslim interests while being co-opted by the state. Of particular interest is how such type of a Muslim institution reconciles community expectations for more nuanced representation with state pressures for security and integration. In different national contexts, these institutions have been endorsed by state authorities to act as official interlocutors between the government and Muslim communities. However, the councils have also put themselves in the service of Muslim communities and their primary aim is to articulate and promote Muslim religious and political interests. As they negotiate between state agendas and community expectations, their choices and actions are constrained by criticisms from both sides – government officials and Muslim communities. The government is not always happy with their contribution to preventing extremism and promoting integration. Different opinion polls and media reports confirm increasing doubts as to whether these institutions are the most suitable interlocutors to speak out on contemporary Muslim issues.

In the past, these institutions (or their precursors) played a similar role of negotiating with authorities and supporting Muslim communities. However, they had enjoyed more room for manoeuvre, as their actions faced less scrutiny from the government, the media and Muslim communities themselves. An increasingly securitised government approach to national integration raised the level of state intervention into

the life of Muslim communities, particularly over the last ten years. This added extra pressure on Muslim representative institutions. It also contributed to the more discerning political and religious assertiveness of Muslim communities, which led to a degree of reassessment of these institutions, particularly their engagement with the government.

The thesis examines how Muslim councils deal with this dual pressure in the national context of state-religion relations. Of particular interest is how this tension is affected by institutional features of different approaches to interest mediation. As will be discussed later in the thesis, literature on interest groups and their engagement with the state suggests a variation between pluralist and corporatist arrangements of interest representation (Berger 1981, Schmitter and Lehmbruch 1979, Wiarda 1997). Pluralist rules have been traditionally associated with a high number of competing organisations acting autonomously from the state. Conversely, a corporatist setting is characterised by a small number of organisations representing distinct group interests which cooperate with the state and are often incorporated into its decisional structures. A series of studies have drawn on this typology of societal interests to examine the nature of state engagement with labour, environment or migrant groups (Dryzek et al. 2003, Fulcher 1991, Odmalm and Lees 2006). A similar approach can be used to understand the challenges of religious minority representation in different national contexts of state-religion relations.

Why study Muslim councils in Britain and Russia?

The two countries share a series of similarities and differences concerning Muslim representation and the nature of state-religion relations. Both have sizeable Muslim minorities and face similar challenges of integrating Muslim communities. State authorities in the two countries are in search of successful ways of engaging with Muslim representative institutions and building bridges with Muslim citizens. Muslim communities in both countries have expressed desires for their religious and

ethnic interests to be articulated by organisations which are representative not only in name but also in actions.

A key expectation of the thesis is that corporatist and pluralist environments create divergent opportunities and constraints for Muslim minority representation in different political systems. In this thesis, the British context will be considered as an example of the pluralist institutional environment, while the Russian case discussed as a more corporatist one. While acknowledging that the nature of Muslim communities and their organisations in Britain and Russia are rather different, I expect to find the institutional mechanisms of state-Muslim relations to be primarily influenced by the two countries' political environment and their predominantly pluralist or corporatist approaches to interest mediation. In other words, the two cases will be differentiated in relation to the institutional arrangements of state engagement with religious organisations, including the organisational landscape of religious groups, their level of autonomy from the state, as well as opportunities for cooperation or competition between religious organisations and civil society actors.

This distinction offers a useful lens to gauge the influence of the contextual factors on Muslim representation in general and the ways in which they shape the behaviour of Muslim organisations in particular. Therefore, I will discuss how the Muslim Council of Britain and the Russia Council of Muftis undertake their intermediary functions in the two countries in the pluralist and corporatist contexts of state-religion relations. While I expect to observe divergence in how the two organisations engage with the state and (re)negotiate their role as community representatives in two different contexts, the thesis will also reveal some of the less obvious similarities in their institutional behaviour, in light of the changing nature of Muslim minorities, state approaches to religion and security landscape of state-Muslim relations.

A tale of two councils

Before outlining a series of research questions to be examined in this study, it is important to provide a brief illustration of the two Muslim institutions. Key differences and similarities between the two organisations will become more apparent as the thesis unfolds, particularly in relation to historical legacies and state policies towards Muslim minorities, a rather complex organisational landscape of Muslim representation and the changing nature of Muslim communities themselves. In this section, however, I will show the basic differences between the two Muslim communities in Britain and Russia and explain the process in which the two councils were created and acquired their dual status of community representatives and state partners.

The Muslim Council of Britain

Muslims living in Britain constitute 4.8% of general population in England and Wales and 1.4% in Scotland (see Figure 1). Compared to other religious groups, Muslims are more affected by socio-economic factors, particularly those living in the economically-deprived areas, such as Tower Hamlets in East London where they make up 36% of local population (2011 Census). Many find themselves disadvantaged in relation to health provisions, housing and education (Hussain 2008).

Figure 1. Religious affiliation in Britain[1]

Religious affiliation	2011 Census (England and Wales) %	Scotland's Census 2011 %
Christian	59.3	54
Muslim	4.8	1.4
Hindu	1.5	0.3
Sikh	0.8	0.1
Jewish	0.5	0.1
Buddhist	0.4	0.2
Other religion	0.4	0.2
Religion not stated	7.2	6.9
No religion	25.1	37

British Muslims belong to different ethnic and religious groups (see Figure 2), with a variety of interest-based organisations and associations (Ansari 2002, Peach 2005). The country's own colonial legacies and state policies of multicultural integration as well as global developments help account for different cultural traditions, religious practices and political perspectives. Different migration waves, driven by work and education aspirations, family reasons, as well as the search for asylum and better living conditions have contributed to Muslim diversity in Britain.

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[1] This breakdown is based on the data provided by the Office for National Statistics (2011 Census: 'Key Statistics for England and Wales', March 2011, Table 2: Religion) and the National Records of Scotland (Scotland's Census 2011, Table KS209SCb – Religion).

Figure 2. Muslim communities in Britain

Regional distribution[2]	
National Origin	The majority settled from South Asia (Bangladesh, India and Pakistan) and East Africa, but many have also arrived from Turkey and later Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan.
Ethnic and religious composition	Two thirds are Asian, with Pakistanis (38%) and Bangladeshis (15%) being the largest groups. 6.6% are of Arab origin and other white (e.g. Bosnian, Turkish or Turkish Cypriot) make up 4.8%.[3] In Scotland, Pakistanis constitute 50% and make up the largest Muslim group (Scotland's Census 2011). The majority of British religious Muslims are Sunnis (Barelvis are the largest group, followed by Deobandis and those inspired by the Islamist ideas of the Jama'at-i-Islami.[4]) Some are Shia's and a small minority identity themselves as Salafi.

By the late 1990s, generational and cultural changes in Muslim social and political aspirations, coupled with domestic reverberations of the Rushdie Affair of 1988-9

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[2] Adapted from 2011 Census in England and Wales; Scotland's Census 2011.

[3] Based on the analysis provided by British Religion in Numbers (2013).

[4] Barelvis and Deobandis belong to the two different movements of Sunni Hanafi Islam in South Asia, which originated in Bareilly and Deoband respectively. Jama'at-i-Islami is the Islamic revivalist party founded by Abdul A'la Maududi in 1941 in British India (modern Pakistan).

and British actions abroad, resulted in some Muslims feeling increasingly marginalised in British society and calling for greater representation of their interests (Ahmad and Evergeti 2010). While internal complexities and challenges of Muslim collective representation will be examined later in the thesis, it is important to note here that the rather fragmented nature of Muslim communities and the lack of official representatives encouraged community efforts to represent Muslim interests on the national level.

The MCB was formed in 1997 as a large voluntary umbrella organisation engaged in negotiating Muslim interests with the state and representing Muslim interests in the public arena. The publication of Salman Rushdie's controversial *The Satanic Verses* and the ensuing demonstrations throughout the Muslim World fuelled the debates in the British media on the freedom of speech, religious rights and the extent to which Muslim voices were being heard. The Council was created following a lengthy process of consultation with a number of Muslim associations and organisations seeking to provide collective representation of different Muslim interests and engage with British society on the issues of Muslim social exclusion and misrepresentation of Muslims in the media. The need for such an intermediary organisation was largely dictated by the previous failures of Muslim minorities to get their religious rights recognised in the public sphere, partly by the aftermath of the Rushdie Affair. Muslim community leaders inspired by the South Asian Islamic reform movements were particularly loud in expressing concerns that Muslims were unable to make their voices heard (Kepel 1997: 126-146).

The growing violence of the Rushdie events, coupled with uncoordinated attempts by the various Muslim spokesmen to lobby the Home Office led the Conservative government of the day to pay closer attention to the situation (Archer 2009). Not only did it show the need to identify and engage with moderate and qualified interlocutors, but it also led to the desire to impose a certain degree of order and coordination on state-Muslim dialogue. While the Rushdie Affair exposed the vulnerability of Muslim communities and particularly their religious identity, the lack of connections with the government and the media highlighted the need for

moderate figures who could articulate Muslim claims (Pedziwiatr 2007, Radcliffe 2004).

Some of the leading Muslim figures, who had emerged through the struggles over the Rushdie Affair, such as Iqbal Sacranie or Chowdhury Mueen Uddin may have had Islamist roots and somewhat militant visions of Islam. However, against more radical manifestations of Muslim claims such as a public burning of Rushdie's book in Bradford in January 1989, their middle-class background, professional nature and moderate discourse was welcomed by the government of the day. It was reported that Michael Howard, the Home Secretary, saw 'disunity and absence of effective leadership as the main obstacle to Muslims advancement' and called on Muslim groups to unite and speak with one voice (British Muslims Monthly Survey 1994a: 17).

During the first years of the Labour administration (in office 1997-2010), the MCB assumed the role of an interest group organisation mandated by the Muslim community (or at least those who supported the process of consultation) to articulate their grievances and fight against religious inequality. Alongside its more militant rhetoric on British foreign policy, it embarked on achieving social justice for British Muslims and developed a particular remit to engage with the government and the media on the issues of social exclusion, Islamophobia and legal protection for Muslim citizens. In the words of Pedziwiatr (2007: 273), the MCB acquired the status of an 'insider' in its attempt to influence the politics behind the scenes, while remaining an 'outsider' who, if required, was ready to take 'a stand in the public sphere' on Muslim issues.

Today the MCB enjoys the status of a national umbrella body which includes around 500 local, regional and national affiliates, such as mosques, educational and charitable organisations, women and youth group associations. The Islamic Society of Britain, the Muslim Association of Britain, the Federation of Muslim Organisations and the UK Islamic Mission represent some of its larger affiliates. The Council consists of different working committees and a board of counsellors, with

the General Assembly elected from the national, local and regional mosques and affiliated organisations every four years. In the British context of multiple organisations and pluralist forms of engagement which will be discussed in the subsequent chapters, the MCB is continuously challenged by a plethora of different Muslim and non-Muslim civil society organisations. Some of the more vocal competing organisations, including the British Muslim Forum, the Quilliam Foundation and the Progressive British Muslims have criticised the MCB's sectarian nature and Islamist legacies. In the thesis, I will examine how the Council has struggled to engage with the government by challenging its policies while remaining a legitimate voice of British Muslims.

The Russia Council of Muftis

Muslim communities living in the Russian Federation have had a long and complicated history of engaging with the Russian state (Hunter 2004). It is estimated that there are around 15-20 million Muslims in Russia, which constitutes up to 10% of population.[5] In 2012, the 'Levada-Center'[6] conducted a sociological study on religious beliefs in Russia (see Figure 3). It estimated that Muslims constituted 7% of Russian population.

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[5] These official figures are highly disputed, particularly because no questions on religious affiliation are included in the Census. As a result, Muslim population is calculated based on the ethnic dimension of the peoples who are considered to be ethnically Muslim.
[6] 'Levada Center' is a Russian independent, non-governmental polling and sociological research organisation.

Figure 3. Religious affiliation in Russia[7]

Religious Affiliation	Results for November 2012 %
Christian	76
Muslim	7
Jewish	1
Hindu	<1
Buddhist	<1
Other religion	<1
No religion	10
Atheist	5
Difficult to answer	2

A key difference between Muslims in Russia and Muslims in Britain is that in spite of the increasing numbers of migrants from Central Asia, the majority of Muslims in Russia are not migrants, but are peoples who have resided in their present territories for centuries (see Figure 4). They include Russia's ethnic Muslims who have traditionally concentrated in the Volga-Urals region, the North Caucasus, as well as large cities in the European part of Russia (Landa 2011, Yemelianova 2002).[8] While the ethnic Muslims are more integrated into Russian society, Muslim migrants from Central Asia are vulnerable to xenophobic and anti-Muslim attacks, as well as poor socio-economic conditions.

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[7] This breakdown is based on the opinion poll by the 'Levada-Center' (2012). A sample of 1,596 respondents from 45 regions was polled in November 2012. Although these figures are also contested, they provide a better illustration of Muslims as a religious rather than ethnic category. The percentage of Muslims population is lower than the national estimates not only because the question was specifically tailored to identify the number of believers, but also because it did not take into accounts Muslim migrants from Central Asia. For regional breakdown, see Research service 'Sreda' (2012).

[8] In Russia, the term 'ethnic Muslims' is used in relation to Russian citizens who were born into Muslim families and follow the Islamic tradition, in contrast to migrant population who adhere to Islam but are not Russian citizens. European part of Russia refers to the western areas of the country, bordered by the Ural Mountains in the east and Kazakhstan in the south.

Figure 4. Muslim communities in Russia

Regional Distribution	 Areas of high Muslim concentration
National origin	A vast majority of Muslims are Russian citizens, but migrants from Central Asia also make up a large proportion of Muslim population. While many come illegally, Russia' Federal Migration Service estimates that in 2011, 2 million arrived from Uzbekistan, 1 million from Tajikistan and 500,000 from Kyrgyzstan.
Ethnic and religious composition	Russia's ethnic Muslims live in the Volga-Urals region and the North Caucasus, but many are dispersed throughout the country. Key ethnic groups include: Tatars, Bashkirs, Chechens, Ingush, Kabardinians, Karachai, Balkarians and numerous Dagestani peoples (largest groups are Avars and Dargins). Other groups include Azeris, small number of Arabs as well as Russian converts. Russian Muslims are predominantly Sunnis, although 5% (mainly Azeris) are Shi'a. Tatars and Bashkirs, as well as Muslim migrants who come from Central Asia, belong to the Hanafi school of Islam. Shafi'i Sunnism and the Naqshbandi, Shadhili and Qadiri orders prevail in the North Caucasus.[9] More radical Islamic ideology (e.g. Salafism) also gained influence (particularly in the North Caucasus.

The federal nature of the Russian state, together with a wide range of regional variation in political and religious culture, has resulted in different levels of state intervention into the lives of its Muslim citizens. In the North Caucasus, economic

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[9] These are the Sufi orders which follow the teachings of the Sheiks: Bahauddin Naqshband, Abul Hasan Shadhili and Abdul Qadir Jilani respectively.

hardships, and regional instability in the aftermath of the two Chechen wars (1994–1995 and 1999-2000) and the ensuing Islamic insurgency resulted in more repressive state policies towards Muslim organisations in the region (Souleimanov 2007, Ware et al. 2003). The importance of the state's actions in the North Caucasus, its often repressive policies to counteract terrorist threats and its support for official Muslim organisations should not be underestimated. However, for the purposes of this study I will refer to them only indirectly, in as much as these developments have had an impact on the SMR's engagement with the Russian authorities. In the thesis, I will focus mainly on the challenges facing Muslim organisations in the regions of the Russian Federation where Muslims represent a minority, particularly in many areas of the European part of Russia and in large cities.[10]

The Russian context provides a curious setting for Muslim minority representation. On one hand, there is a long-established tradition of Muslim communities taking an active part in Russia's multi-cultural, multi-faith and multi-ethnic co-existence between different peoples. On the other hand, the state has traditionally played a central role in managing religious and political diversity. Consequently, Muslim groups and organisations have had to adjust their activities in line with state expectations and the existing institutional provisions to accommodate Muslim interests.

Traditional forms of Muslim representation through the system of Muslim Spiritual Boards (*Dukhovnye Upravleniya Musul'man*, DUMs) were officially institutionalised during the reign of Catherine the Great in 1788-89, particularly in respect of the Tatar and Bashkir communities. This system was subsequently modified under the Soviet Union and re-organised, following its collapse in 1991. While the late 1990s-early 2000s witnessed a proliferation of Muslim organisations, DUMs (also known as *muftiyats*[11]) have remained a key administrative unit for

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[10] On ethnic and religious complexities of Muslim communities in the North Caucasus, for example, see Bobrovnikov 2002, Makarov 2000, Yarlykapov 2010.
[11] *Muftiyat* is an administrative territorial unit under the supervision of a mufti.

regulating Muslim affairs (see Figure 5). The system of the DUMs does not include all Muslim organisations and many remain outside its centralised structures as individual units of administration and local organisations. However, over the years, the DUMs have served as the official channel of communication between state authorities and Muslim organisations. In particular, the DUMs have played the key role in Muslim religious governance in Russia, with over 60-70 of these self-governing, centralised institutions, currently organised in a series of larger regional bodies.

Figure 5. Administrative units of Muslim governance in Russia[12]
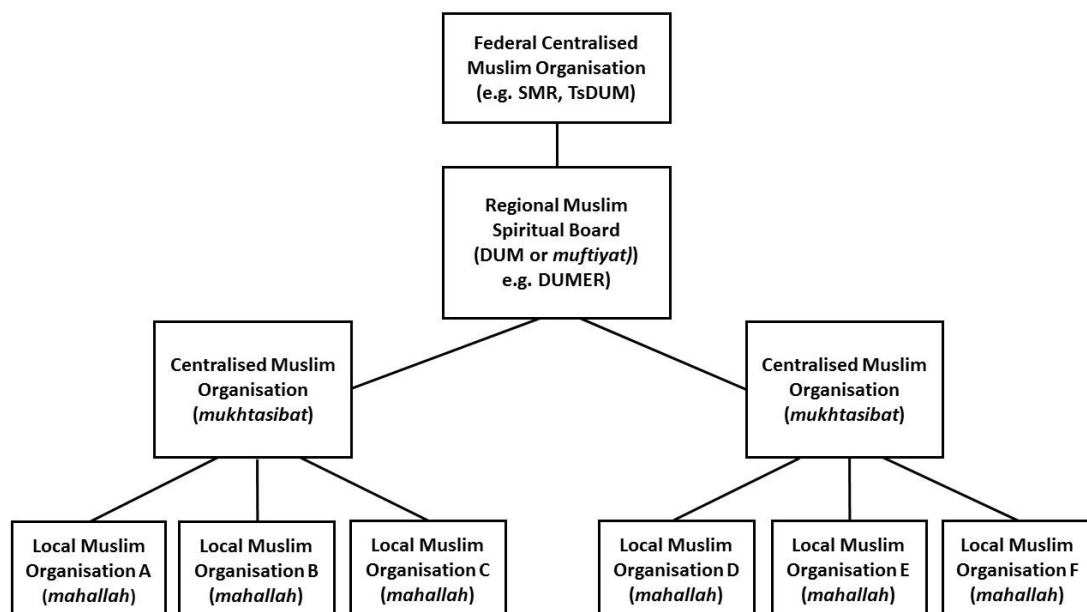
The problematic nature of such a system of Muslim representation and its legitimacy problems will be revealed later in the thesis. Bitter power struggles within the older

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[12] This is a rather simplified summary of the Muslim administrative structures in Russia, designed to illustrate how the different units of this centralised system fit together. Local community organisations (known as *mahallas*) are organised into larger administrative units (or *mukhtasibats*). Each *mukhtasibat* usually includes at least three local organisations. These larger organisations are brought together under the jurisdiction of the Muslim Spiritual Board (DUM) which is headed by a mufti or a council of muftis (*mejlis*). These centralised regional bodies form larger federal organisations, such as Russia's Council of Muftis.

and newer members of the Muslim Spiritual Boards, coupled with a limited number of centralised organisations with access to the government, reflect the complexities of Muslim representation in Russia (Kurbanov 2010). However, in spite of the inherent inefficiencies and outdated nature of these institutions and their centralised structures of administration, this institutional framework has created mechanisms for Muslim representation in Russia and constituted a platform for any official organisation wishing to exercise any degree of influence in contemporary Russia.

Russia's Council of Muftis was created on 1 July 1996, largely as a result of these internal rivalries.[13] Under the leadership of Ravil Gainutdin, a group of Muslim clerics from the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Central European Region of Russia (*Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musul'man Tsentral'no-Evropeiskogo regiona Rosii*, DUMTsER) had split from the oldest and most influential organisation - the Central Spiritual Board of Muslims (*Tsentral'noe Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musul'man*, TsDUM) and formed their own Muslim council. In 1998, DUMTsER changed its name to the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Central European Region of Russia (*Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musul'man Evropeiskoi chasti Rosii*, DUMER). DUMER's crucial contribution to the SMR's institutional and organisational affairs will become clear as the thesis unfolds.

From its early years, the SMR has distinguished itself from the TsDUM (and its leader Talgat Tadjuddin) by positioning itself as a more democratic Muslim interest group, seeking to protect the rights of Muslim minorities in Russia. Notwithstanding the personal ambitions of its senior leaders, the creation of the Council signalled moving away from the TsDUM's uncritical and often conciliatory position towards the Russian state and the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). The SMR's leaders were increasingly unhappy with the privileged role of the ROC on the issues of religious prayer spaces. They positioned themselves as strong advocates of Muslim minority

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[13] On divisions within the Russian *ummah* see Laruelle 2005, pp.163-168, Tulsky 2003. For more controversial accounts and internal conflicts within the Muslim senior clergy, see also Silant'ev 2007.

rights against what they believed to be encroachments by the ROC and the lack of provisions for Muslim citizens to exercise their faith.

Today it is a centralised religious organisation which brings together heads of different regional Muslim Spiritual Boards and represents a high proportion of the mosques and Muslim organisations in Russia. With the ongoing competition between the SMR and the TsDUM, it is difficult to ascertain the exact number of their affiliates. Based on the recent information on the SMR's in 2013, it has 1,400 organisations under its jurisdiction.[14] According to the Council's figures, it brings together 18 regional Muslim spiritual boards, including the aforementioned DUMER, but also the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Asian part of Russia (*Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musul'man Aziatskoi chasti Rossii*, DUMAChR) and the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Saratov Region (*Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musul'man Saratovskoi Oblasti*, DUMSO) as some of the larger affiliates. There are also a series of independent organisations and Muslim educational establishments which are currently affiliated to the SMR, such as the Moscow Islamic University and the newly created centralised Muslim organisation of the North-West (*Obschina Musul'man Severo-Zapada*).[15]

With its central office in Moscow, the SMR seeks to represent Muslim interests in the public sphere and participates in national debates on citizenship, national values, threats of extremism and Islamophobia. The SMR is one of the five officially-recognised Muslim centralised organisations, whose leaders are invited to official meetings with state officials and who participate in state-religion events. The other four organisations of Muslim representation in Russia are the TsDUM, the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Tatarstan (*Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musul'man Respubliki Tatarstan*, DUMRT), the Coordination Centre of Muslims of the North

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[14] This is according to the figures on the online portal created by DUMER (2013). In 2011, the SMR claimed to have 2, 500 affiliates under its jurisdiction (Gainutdin 2011d). This included the ones under the jurisdiction of the DUM of Tatarstan (previously affiliated to the SMR). The TsDUM claims it currently has over 2, 500 affiliates (TsDUM Website). These figures will become particularly important in relation to the ongoing competition between the SMR and TsDUM (see Chapter 6).

[15] DUMRF.Ru provides further information on the individual members of the SMR and the TsDUM.

Caucasus (*Koordinatsionnyi Tsentr Musul'man Severnogo Kavkaza*, KTsMSK) and the Russian Association of Islamic Accord (*Rossiiskaya Assotsiatsiya Islamskogo Soglasiya*, RAIS).

In the Russian context of centralised forms of Muslim representation, a strong role of the Orthodox Church and a growing gap between the state-endorsed official interlocutors and unofficial Muslim organisations, the SMR struggles to retain its privileged status in the eyes of the government and the support of Muslim communities. In the thesis, I will explore the ways in which it attempts to mobilise Muslim support and challenge the Russian government and society without overstepping the institutional boundaries of state-religion relations.

The brief presentation of Muslim communities and the two Muslim councils in their respective contexts suggests that they are quite different Muslim institutions, not only in terms of their respective constituencies and priorities, but also in terms of their organisational composition and past experiences. The MCB is an umbrella body which was created following a long process of consultation with a number of Muslim associations and organisations. The SMR is a centralised religious organisation which consists of regionally established Muslim Spiritual Boards in the European part of the Russian Federation but claims to speak on behalf of all Muslims in Russia.

At first glance, the different character of the two institutions might question the usefulness of comparing the two organisations and their representative strategies. However, over the last twenty years the two organisations have come to occupy a prominent, albeit similarly controversial place in state-Muslim relations. A series of converging challenges of engaging with state authorities and ensuring support from Muslim communities under different conditions of state-religion relations enhances the validity of such a comparison.

The Muslim councils provide a good example of public organisations acting on behalf of Muslim communities as representatives of their interests. In this capacity,

both councils have to make decisions on the extent to which they can afford to cooperate with the government and civil society actors. Similarly, both councils have to respond to criticisms from sections of Muslim communities which view them as undemocratic, out of touch, and organised in a way that does not reflect the diversity of Muslim interests they claim to represent.

While acknowledging the different rationalities in their representative activities, the project will compare and contrast the councils' attempts to legitimise themselves as key state partners on issues of preventing extremism, combating Islamophobia and dealing with integration challenges. Both institutions share similar administrative responsibilities in ensuring that Muslim practices and religious rights are protected within the changing framework of state approaches to religion. For example, both institutions have increasingly engaged in lobbying their respective governments on the need to accommodate Muslim practices and introduce provisions to train imams, regulate *halal* provisions, and prevent Muslim discrimination on religious grounds.

However, rather than examining the two institutions in the context of religious pluralism, the study will use a more differentiated framework of political, organisational and religious insights, designed to understand their behaviour under different conditions of cooperation and confrontation, collective representation and diversified engagement with different segments of Muslim population. Although a comparative analysis of different modes of religious pluralism emphasises the dynamic process of accommodating Muslim practices in the two countries, it is less helpful in uncovering the ways in which Muslim umbrella organisations respond to the challenges of co-optation and representation.

Therefore, in the thesis I will discuss the councils' engagement with the government and Muslim communities in relation to particular contexts of pluralist and corporatist approaches to state-religion relations. The study will explore the ways in which the two Muslim councils sought to provide more robust and differentiated representation of Muslim political and religious claims in the two countries. The interface between political, organisational and religious elements of Muslim representation will provide

a better understanding of the complex role the two Muslim umbrella organisations play in state-Muslim relations.

Research questions and the structure of the thesis

As was illustrated earlier, the two Muslim councils have acquired a rather complex status of being state-recognised partners on Muslim integration on one hand, while challenging the state on the issue of Muslim identity rights on the other. As intermediary institutions, they find themselves under pressure to reconcile their credibility as state interlocutors with being legitimate representatives of Muslim communities. With this duality in mind, the thesis explores how particular tensions between co-optation and representation influence the nature and scope of actions the Muslim councils have in mediating between the interests of the state and Muslim communities.

Without a degree of access to the state and working relations with the government, Muslim councils face the risk of their proposals being neglected or rejected by state officials, while the failure to push their initiatives through may also cost them support of Muslim communities. Conversely, without the support from Muslim minorities, the government may view these interest group organisations as unrepresentative of Muslim opinions and concerns. If the institutions are not considered to be the appropriate and relevant interlocutor to engage with, they can become marginalised.

Therefore, the central question of the thesis will address the interface of external and internal pressures on the two Muslim organisations, who have become firmly institutionalised in their respective contexts of state-Muslim relations, namely:

How do Muslim councils manage pressures of co-optation and representation under the different conditions of corporatist and pluralist interest mediation?

The overall question will be divided into a series of smaller questions:

1. In what ways are state-Muslim relations in Britain and Russia shaped by pluralist and corporatist forms of interest group mediation?

2. How far and under which conditions do Muslim councils decide to engage with or disengage from the state?

3. What challenges and constraints do Muslim councils face in securing support from Muslim communities and how do they deal with them?

4. To what extent are their relations with the state and their efforts to engage with Muslim communities interdependent?

Before examining the ways in which the two Muslim councils mediate between state authorities and Muslim communities, I will address the first question by outlining the institutional context in which this interaction unfolds. Drawing on the ideal types of pluralist and corporatist forms of interest group politics, I will reflect on the nature of state-Muslim relations in Britain and Russia in light of the institutional arrangements for state engagement with religious groups. This will allow me to subsequently explore the extent to which the councils' interaction with the state and their engagement with Muslim communities conform to the pluralist or corporatist conditions.

The study will then examine the influence of institutional arrangements on the councils' engagement with the state. My expectation is that under the pluralist conditions of state-religion relations, the Muslim council will face less pressure to cooperate with the government than under the corporatist setting, with the specificities of the two contexts influencing the scope of engagement in each case. The notion of the state will be understood in broad terms and refer to different institutions exercising political authority, including government officials, representatives from interior ministries and committees on security and religion.

State-Muslim relations will be conceptualised as the external institutional environment in which state authorities engage with Muslim communities and their institutions within a wider field of state-religion relations. The process of engagement will refer to having a direct access to the government through regular consultations and meetings with government officials, face-to-face or in the presence of other representative organisations, and actively using this access to lobby the state to bring about improvements to the lives of Muslim citizens.

The third question aims at exploring the ways in which the two councils engage with Muslim communities and identifying key factors influencing their efforts to build community support. Theories concerning the internal dynamics of interest groups or social movement organisations suggest that over time organisations may become increasingly concerned with maintaining their internal legitimacy and integrating themselves with their constituents. I expect to find a series of contemporary and historically contingent factors which may have created particular patterns of internal institutional arrangements and power-sharing practices in the two organisations from the days they were formed. Using the example of internal institutional reforms, I will compare the range of strategies the two councils proposed and implemented to legitimise themselves in the eyes of their affiliates and Muslim communities in general.

Therefore, the study will compare and contrast the internal and external dimension of the Muslim councils' role in the process of interest mediation. I will discuss the extent to which commitment to Muslim communities and cooperation with the state becomes an increasingly shared problem for the two very different organisations. The external institutional environment will be used to conceptualise the nature of the councils' relations with the state and civil society organisations (e.g. competing Muslim institutions and other confessional groups). The internal institutional environment will refer to particular organisational structures and patterns of historically entrenched power dynamics within these organisations (or their precursors). I expect to see some convergence in how the external environment of

pluralist and corporatist state-religion relations influences the nature of internal measures of self-legitimation undertaken by the two councils.

Before outlining the project's contribution to existing literature about Muslim representation and integration in Britain and Russia, it is important to acknowledge the project's preference for examining the behaviour of the two Muslim organisations on the national level. While discussing the intermediary role of the two institutions in the framework of Muslim participation in religious governance, the study can only offer a partial account of the local dimension of Muslim politics on the one hand and the transnational nature of Muslim communities on the other.

A stronger comparative focus on particular local challenges and regional aspects of Muslim representation in the two countries might have provided a more nuanced approach to contextualising the individual specificities of Muslim communities and their respective engagement with the councils. However, this would have obscured the overall task of comparing and contrasting the ways in which the two councils sought to reconcile the duality of being interlocutors of the state on the one hand, while remaining legitimate representatives of Muslim communities on the other. Therefore, without neglecting the ways in which the two national umbrella bodies engaged with their local and regional affiliates and embraced their internal organisational issues (as discussed in Chapters 4 and 6), a greater emphasis will be placed on the national arena of state-Muslim relations.

Similarly, a largely state-centric approach was chosen as a more practical way of tracing differences and similarities in the councils' efforts to achieve authenticity with Muslim communities under a particular set of nationally-bound conditions. For example, as will be illustrated in the thesis, the two councils used a similar strategy of incorporating universal discourses of Islamic teachings within the particular context of national approaches to organisational legitimacy and restructuring. Without neglecting the transnational element of Muslim populations, the project will make a series of references to specific efforts by the councils to connect not only with Muslims from different ethnic groups, but also to engage with young Muslims, acknowledging their global outlook on Islam and territorial belonging. However,

these references will be limited to emphasising key implications of the changing nature of Muslim communities and the councils' attempts to deal with it.

Thesis contributions

A series of challenges associated with Muslim integration and representation have received considerable coverage in Western scholarship. In the aftermath of 9/11, academic discussions focused on different ways of accommodating Muslim claims in state-religion relations, the existing institutional mechanisms of engaging with minority interests, security challenges and state policies towards radical Islam. Similarly, Russian scholars have discussed the challenges of state relations with Islam, Muslim diversity and the impact of Islamic radicalisation.[16]

The value of this project lies in offering an original comparative study of the two Muslim councils in Britain and Russia. Its distinct contribution consists of uncovering rather unexpected similarities in external and internal mechanisms of Muslim representation in the two different contexts, traditionally associated with pluralist and corporatist approaches to state-religion relations. Rich empirical data, combined with integrated theoretical approaches to examining institutionalised forms of mobilisation and organisational legitimacy, highlighted some of the less obvious convergences in the two cases.

Of particular interest are the two sets of findings relating to the councils' engagement with state officials and Muslim communities. As will be discussed in the empirical chapters, the data indicated that the councils' respective interactions with national governments were affected by the dynamic nature of state-religion relations and ideological shifts in government policies towards Muslim minorities. It also emphasised that in their relations with Muslim communities, the two organisations

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[16] Please see Maussen 2007 for a comprehensive overview of the Western academic research on Islam and Muslims in Europe. On Russian scholars and a series of past and recent studies on Islam, see Bobrovnikov 2007.

had embarked on the programme of internal reforms, notwithstanding their own organisational limitations and the growing criticisms of their activities.

Therefore, by providing the dual perspective of council-state and council-community relations, the research has sought to contribute to a better understanding of the linkages between Muslim organisations' engagement with the state and their efforts to respond to the changing needs of Muslim communities. While these and other findings will be discussed in greater detail in this thesis, in this section I will outline the project's empirical, comparative and theoretical contributions to existing literature.

Empirical contribution

The project's empirical value lies in its attempt to fill some of the literature gaps on Muslim representation in Britain and Russia. A series of general studies have shared a thematically similar interest in understanding the complex nature of Muslim communities and their changing relations with the British and Russian state (Ansari 2002, Abbas 2005 and Gilliat-Ray 2010; Hunter 2004, Malashenko 2007 and Yemelianova 2002). They provided rich descriptions of the national specificities of state-Islam relations and a solid understanding of Muslim communities, interests and organisations. However, few studies have specifically focused on the Muslim councils and their organisational strategies, rhetoric and engagement in state-Muslim relations. In the thesis, I will draw on some of these general studies to explain the patterns of state-Muslim relations in the two countries. The project will also build on existing knowledge on the Muslim councils and provide new insights on their institutional behaviour.

British studies on Muslim representation and integration have discussed the challenges of accommodating Muslim migrants within an increasingly securitised context of multicultural policies, preventing extremism and protecting Muslim rights in British political system, society and the media (Brighton 2007, Meer and Modood 2009, Poole 2002). The changing nature of Muslim communities marked a change in

the scholarly agenda from examining issues of social exclusion, ethnic migration and policies of multiculturalism to focusing on the growing stratification within Muslim communities, increased Islamophobia and security threats (Hussain 2008, Lambert and Githens-Mazer 2010). While these studies addressed some of the issues affecting Muslim communities, they paid less attention to the changes that took place within the strategies of Muslim organisations. In this study, I will address a series of shifts which took place in the Muslim councils' approaches to institutional legitimacy in response to the changing nature of Muslim communities.

The two recent projects have explored the development of Muslim civil society and the growing importance of Muslim religious identity and participation in politics (Bolognani and Statham 2013, O'Toole et al. 2013). The first work discussed the ways in which Muslim organisations tried to 'serve and represent Muslim communities while operating within a political environment shaped by contextual factors' (Bolognani and Statham 2013: 232). For example, it showed that a particular combination of top-down political opportunities and bottom-up faith engagement contributed to different Muslim groups coming together.

The second study focused on Muslim political participation in contemporary governance and explored practices of state-Muslim engagement in the period of 1997-2013 in the areas of faith-sector governance, counter-terrorism and inequality. The research focused on monitoring shifts in Muslim political participation over the last two decades and highlighted the increased pluralisation of Muslim interests as an indicator of the 'complexity and maturity of Muslim civil society.' (O'Toole et al. 2013: 28). Their analysis of Muslim organisations was based on exploring the shifting government approach on representation and the changing patterns of Muslim participation. A similar approach will be used in the thesis to better understand the changing context of state-Muslim engagement in Britain.

British scholars have also provided accounts of the MCB and its participation in British politics. McLoughlin (2005) offered a detailed exploration of the MCB as an institution, its origins and the complexities of internal power struggles. Works by

Pedziwiatr (2007) and Radcliffe (2004) used the example of the MCB and its engagement with the government to discuss particular challenges of Muslim representation in Britain. Their studies focused on the MCB's efforts to engage in Muslim activism and influence government policies at home and abroad. However, the fast-moving pace of state-Muslim relations meant that these works were written too early to reflect the changing fortunes of the MCB. With the Council's waning popularity after the London bombings in July 2005, fewer works tended to examine this organisation on its own terms, rather than in the wider context of its participation in British politics. A number of researchers who provided more contemporary accounts of the MCB's activities have become more critical of the organisation. (Birt 2008, Glynn 2008). A longer timeframe used in the thesis will allow me to better understand the changing fortunes of the MCB as a Muslim interest group struggling to mediate between government and community expectations.

Literature on Muslim communities in Russia has placed a strong emphasis on historical legacies and regional diversity of Muslim population. Many studies discussed federal specificities of the Russian state and its Muslim-dominated regions, thus providing rich accounts of Muslim diversity and differentiated state approaches to Muslim integration in Tatarstan and the North Caucasus (Bobrovnikov 2002, Dannreuther and March 2010, Nabiev et al. 2002, Pilkington and Yemelianova 2003). Within the regional focus, other works have discussed the extent to which some Muslim groups had become radicalised and how this was dealt with by the state and Muslim communities (Hahn 2008, Malashenko and Yarlykapov 2009, Sagramoso 2007).

Russian studies on the SMR have explored the Council's institutional strengths and weaknesses in relation to historical legacies of Muslim administration and the system of Muslim Spiritual Boards (Kurbanov 2010, Silant'ev 2007, Tulsky 2003). Considering Russia's long-term engagement with Islam, more historical approaches helped to establish a degree of continuity between past and present forms of Muslim representation in Russia. However, while some studies provided rather descriptive narratives on the nature of the SMR and its history, others may have adopted a less

neutral perspective. While these works highlighted particular weaknesses of these institutions, only few scholars discussed organisational reforms designed to make the institution more efficient and representative (Kurbanov and Mukhametov 2011). The thesis will try remedy some of these limitations by incorporating historical details with contemporary findings from interviews and statements from the SMR's leaders and other Muslim representatives.

This brief and by no means exhaustive overview of some of the relevant national studies on Muslim communities and Muslim councils suggests that despite some commonalities there exists a thematic gap between British and Russian scholarship on Muslim representation, participation and integration. Considering the different nature of Muslim communities and differences in political and religious traditions of the two countries, it is not surprising that some of these issues gained different levels of resonance within the two literatures. Whereas the British works appear to have focused on examining state policies in relation to Muslim claims and the development of Muslim civil society organisations, the Russian studies paid particular attention to the role of the state in managing religious provisions for Muslim communities.

A more integrated approach will be used in the thesis to examine the impact of state policies and civil society expectations on Muslim interest organisations.[17] The study will seek to provide a more nuanced typology of the changing organisational context of state-religion relations and its influence on Muslim minority organisations in Britain and Russia. It will discuss the role of civil society in shaping the councils' scope for engagement with state authorities and Muslim communities in the two countries. Moreover, it will highlight a series of opportunities and constraints furnished by working together with civil society organisations in general and Muslim

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[17] For national studies on Muslim councils in other European countries, see Caeiro 2005, Laurence and Vaïsse 2005 on the Muslim council in France, or a detailed study of by Rosenow-Williams (2012) on Muslim organisations in Germany.

segment of civil society in particular.[18] It will also explore the complex politico-religious nature of the two institutions by focusing on the ways in which the two Muslim councils fuse Islamic and civic rhetoric to mobilise support and improve their authority.

Contribution to comparative research

Alongside its empirical contribution, the value of the thesis lies in developing an analytical framework which would allow the comparison of different aspects of Muslim representation through the lens of these complex organisations. While extending the comparative leverage of the Western studies on Muslim representation, the project's contribution lies in overcoming a geographical bias and exploring the extent to which the findings can be generalizable in different national contexts.

Comparative studies on Muslim councils in Europe are rare and there are no apparent studies to date that compare Western Muslim councils with their Russian counterpart. The two scholars who provide a comparative snapshot of different councils in the European context are Silvestri (2005) and Laurence (2009). Silvestri examined the role and functions of Muslim councils in Britain, France and Italy in the context of integration and securitisation. Laurence discussed the establishment of 'quasi monopolistic Islam Councils' by interior governments in seven European countries (Austria, Spain, Belgium, France, Netherlands, Italy and Germany). He analysed the process of Muslim political participation in relation to institutional developments in (neo)-corporatism. In my project, I will try to explain corporatist

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[18] In this study civil society is broadly defined as the collection of voluntary associations and non-government organisations seeking to foster a sense of cooperation and engagement among members of society in order to encourage government accountability and keep interests of the majority in check (see Putnam 1993, 1995 and Seligman 1997). Therefore, discussions on the nature of state-religion relations in Britain and Russia will refer to civil society in terms of different religious and civic organisations and networks. However, the project will also make a particular reference to Muslim civil society as an integral part of wider civil society, playing a key role in shaping state-Muslim relations in the two countries (to a larger or smaller degree).

features of state-Islam relations in Russia. I will add a contrasting example of institutional pluralism to understand the nature of state-Muslim engagement in Britain.

Over the last decade, comparative works on the ethnic dimension of Muslim identity have become complemented by the increased focus on its religious component and state-Islam relations. For example, Statham et al. (2005) discussed the processes of accommodating Muslim migrant claims in Britain, France and Netherlands, indicating a problematic relationship between Islam and the state. Klaussen (2005) emphasised the implications of complex politico-religious perspectives of Muslim spokesmen on general processes of Muslim integration. However, the internal dimension of how religious notions affect institutional legitimacy of Muslim organisations has not received sufficient attention.

The study will also discuss the extent to which the need to accommodate the religious dimension of Muslim claims has resulted in a series of changes in traditionally pluralist or corporatist approaches to state engagement with Muslim communities in Britain and Russia respectively. Moreover, an exploration of policy shifts in promoting an increasingly corporatist recognition of religious pluralism not only in Russia, but also in Britain suggests the need for a more nuanced understanding of the two approaches, currently missing in the existing literature on accommodation of Muslim rights and practices.

A more common approach among European scholars has been to examine Muslim organisations in light of broader processes of integration, participation and representation. Some works emphasised the importance of structural factors and institutional settings of the receiving societies (Cesari and McLoughlin 2005, Loobuyck et al. 2013, Triandafyllidou et al. 2011). Other studies prioritised mobilising strategies and claims-making processes of migrant groups and their dynamic interaction with institutional structures (Koopmans and Statham 2005, Martiniello and Statham 1999, Schrover and Vermeulen 2005).

A more recent project on cultural interactions between Muslim immigrants and the receiving states (EURISLAM)[19] aimed at providing a deeper understanding of cross-national variations in top-down factors of Muslim integration and bottom-up dynamics of Muslim self-organisation (Cinalli and Giugni 2013). In the thesis, I will seek to develop a more integrated comparative framework to better understand the organisational behaviour of Muslim councils in different political contexts.

The two comparative studies that bring together institutionalist approaches and the theory of political opportunity structures on group mobilisation are Maussen (2009) and Odmalm (2005). Maussen's study on mosque building in France and the Netherlands examined institutionalisation of Islam as the outcome of political processes in which Muslim groups were to 'enter into relations of cooperation and conflict with a range of actors, institutions and governments' (Maussen 2009: 18). However, his main argument was grounded in historical institutionalism. Maussen analysed colonial past and path-dependent legacies that had shaped public policies as key factors responsible for divergent approaches to governance of Islam in the two countries. In his study on migration policies and political participation in Western democracies, Odmalm (2005) combined analysis of institutional environment with a detailed examination of a particular set of political opportunities and constraints which help account for the variance between different national arrangements. In turn, these were used to define the nature and scope of actions available to migrant organisations in Sweden and the Netherlands. Institutional arrangements in the two countries were contrasted with those in Britain, France and Germany.

Western comparative studies have examined a variety of theoretical and empirical challenges of state-Islam relations and Muslim institutions. However, there is a tendency to select cases which are either politically and geographically similar or culturally and linguistically familiar. Therefore, findings are drawn primarily from

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[19] EURISLAM is a European comparative project, co-funded by the European Commission within Seventh Framework Programme. Conducted between 2009 and 2012, it examined incorporation of Islam in European Member States.

the European or American contexts, where the immigrant nature of Muslim communities, pressures of integration and security concerns can be held constant (Bleich 2010, Cesari 2009, Kepel 1997). There is little cross-fertilisation between Russian and Western studies, with analysis of Russian Muslim communities and institutions being rarely incorporated into a wider comparative study.

There exist, however, a handful of studies which either bring together different experiences in one thematically-based volume, or seek to compare Russia's engagement with Islam with how these similar processes have been addressed in a different political regime. A collection of articles considered shared challenges facing young Muslims in Britain and Russia (Shterin and Spalek 2011). Although it did not attempt to draw a direct comparison between the two countries, it illustrated a series of findings on radicalism, ethnicity and faith. Works by Pain and Suslova (2012) and Suslova (2012) discussed the issues of state efforts to curb xenophobia and Islamophobia in Russia and the United States. Their work contrasted the Russian paternalistic approach with the cooperative nature of state-Islam relations in America (Suslova 2012: 19). Although their research made references to Muslim organisations, the main focus was on anti-Muslim feelings in the two states. With a large set of differences in political systems and the complex nature of Muslim communities themselves the limited scope of such comparisons and their rarity is not surprising. This project will contribute to remedying a persistent geographical bias by widening the comparative scope and incorporating a seemingly different experience of state-engagement with Muslim communities in Russia.

A more nuanced theoretical framework

The thesis will provide an integrated theoretical approach to explore the complexity of Muslim councils as already-established institutionalised organisations engaged in articulating minority interests. Its theoretical contribution is expected to be three-fold.

First, the project will seek to make contribution to theories of social movements and institutionalist approaches to organisational change and internal legitimacy. Without neglecting individual theoretical positions represented by each approach, I will try to provide a more dynamic framework based on the interaction between the two approaches. Structural and discursive elements of political opportunities have been successfully addressed in claims-making literature on citizenship and ethnic representation (Koopmans and Statham 2000). However, insights from historical institutionalism (Mahoney and Thelen 2010) can deepen our understanding not only of political opportunities but also long-term constraints on organisational development of interest group actors.

Second, the study aims at extending the existing approaches on political opportunity structures by including a religious dimension in the existing typology on state-society relations. It seeks to expand the theoretical leverage of the comparison by providing two contrasting examples of interest mediation in pluralist and corporatist settings of state-society relations. In the existing literature, the two settings tend to be theorised in political terms, rather than in relation to religious arrangements. The proposed study will expand the existing typology by including the religious dimension and applying it to the context of religious governance and minority representation. To better understand the two contrasting contexts of state-Muslim relations in Britain and Russia, the thesis will develop a more nuanced theoretical framework by combining insights on claims-making and mobilisation together with the contextual institutionalisation of interest group organisations.

Third, the theoretical contribution of the thesis lies in conceptualising the behaviour of each Muslim council in the two different institutional arenas, the external environment of state-religion relations and the internal environment of Muslim communities and their organisations. The suggested framework provides a dual perspective to examine the ways in which the two Muslim councils negotiate with the state and seek to represent Muslim communities. Moreover, the dual perspective allows us to explore a series of more general theoretical expectations on agency and structure in political research. In particular, this is addressed in relation to the processes of mobilisation and institutionalisation.

Chapter outline

The proposed thesis will first outline some theoretical and methodological considerations of the study. It will then provide a detailed analysis of the empirical data on the two Muslim councils in relation to their engagement with the state and Muslim communities. Finally, it will provide a comparative summary of the key findings and draw a series of conclusions.

Chapter 1 will provide a theoretical framework for the thesis. To reflect the institutional complexity of the two councils, the study suggests framing them as institutionalised social movement organisations contesting the nature of state-Muslim relations, while fighting to maintain their own legitimacy with Muslim communities. The project's preoccupation with the interplay of contextual factors and the institutions' own actions and rhetoric in engaging with their external and internal environments requires a broad institutionalist framework to address the variety of challenges facing the two councils. The chapter will discuss the ways in which different social movements and institutionalist approaches can be used to elucidate particular processes and challenges of interest mediation in state-Muslim relations.

The theory of political opportunity structures will help conceptualise a series of opportunities and constraints which influence the ways in which the two councils

decide to engage with or disengage from the state. A series of insights from organisational approaches will help theorise the ways in which the two interest group organisations struggle to maintain legitimacy with their own affiliated members and the wider constituency of Muslim communities. The historically sensitive lens of historical institutionalism will be outlined to reveal the extent to which internal decision-making is influenced by the events in which the two councils had been created. I will emphasise the usefulness of a historical perspective to determine the extent to which particular political affiliations, preferences and approaches to power-distribution may have continued to influence the councils' present strategies.

The aforementioned theoretical insights will be applied to analyse the empirical data collected on the two councils. Chapter 2 will provide a summary of methodological challenges raised by the project. It will focus on comparative considerations behind the project and discuss the issues associated with research design and data collection.

The empirical part of the thesis will provide a detailed exploration of the ways in which the two Muslim councils have tried to reconcile their commitment to Muslim communities with state expectations. Each case study will consist of two parallel chapters on the council's engagement with the state and the council's engagement with Muslim communities in each country. The analysis will be informed by theoretical insights on political opportunities and mobilising strategies, organisational contingencies and historical constraints.

Chapters 3 will explore how the MCB engages with the British government. First, I will outline the pluralist nature of state-religion relations in Britain by using the concepts of formal and informal opportunities and constraints. I will then examine the extent to which the Council's strategies of cooperation and confrontation with state authorities have been influenced by shifts in formal approaches to religion and the widening religious cleavages, exemplified by the growing Islamophobia and discrimination of Muslim communities. I will also explore the ways in which the Council has changed its rhetoric in response to the changing configurations of competing organisations and allies.

Chapter 4 will discuss the MCB's struggle to represent the diverse nature of Muslim interests in Britain and to establish itself as a legitimate voice of British Muslims. I will apply insights from organisational sociology on institutional development to discuss strategies used by the MCB to build support for its organisation, reform its internal processes and make its institutional structures more accountable and inclusive. I will also analyse historically contingent resistance to the proposed reforms in relation to traditional structures of power sharing relations in mosque committees.

Chapters 5 will examine the SMR's relations with the Russian state. First, I will explain the corporatist nature of state-religion relations in Russia, in light of its institutional opportunities and constraints. Similarly to the British case, I will then explore the extent to which the Council's engagement with state authorities conforms to the corporatist expectations. In particular, I will discuss how far its strategies and rhetoric have been affected by shifts in formal approaches to religion and changes in religious cleavages, exemplified by public recognition of religion on one hand and the growing discrimination of Muslims migrant communities on the other.

Chapter 6 will focus on the ways in which the SMR has struggled to represent a variety of Muslim interests in Russia. As in the British case, I will apply insights from organisational sociology and institutionalist approaches to examine the Council's efforts to improve its reputation among Russian Muslims. In particular, I will discuss a series of internal reforms designed to make the Council's organisational structures more efficient, consolidated and inclusive. Finally, I will examine the scope and nature of these reforms in light of the historically contingent patterns of Muslim representation through the traditional structures of the Muslim Spiritual Boards.

In the concluding chapter, I will bring together the insights from the two case studies and focus on the interplay between cooperation and representation, mobilisation and institutionalisation. I will summarise the key findings and outline some of the more

interesting and less obvious areas of convergence between the two cases. I will also tease out more general implications of the thesis for future research about Muslim intermediary institutions. While the study discusses individual elements generally associated with pluralist and corporatist forms of interest mediation, it will also highlight that the boundaries between the two types are not necessarily fixed, but open to internal modification. Finally, the study will emphasise the dilemma of Muslim minority representation through such national umbrella bodies. In particular, it will show the inherent tension between the Muslim councils' ability to act as a reliable partner of the state, while remaining a representative voice of Muslim communities.

Chapter 1

Institutionalist framework of interest mediation

Introduction

The thesis examines how the two Muslim councils respond to the dual pressure of working with the state and representing Muslim communities in Britain and Russia. In order to explain the ways in which the two organisations engage with the state and legitimise their actions in the eyes of Muslim communities, I will draw on two theoretical approaches. The first approach is grounded in theories of social movements and linkages with contentious politics, discursive framing and political opportunity structures (Kriesi et al. 1995, McAdam et al. 1996, Tarrow 1998). The second approach brings together institutionalist insights on organisational behaviour and historically contingent understanding of change and power relations (Meyer and Rowan 1977, Mahoney and Thelen 2010, Pierson 2004).

The first group of theories will be applied to analyse how the two councils negotiate and engage with the external environment of state-religion relations based on the corporatist or pluralist arrangements. Social movement theories are instrumental in understanding how interest group organisations engage in contentious yet peaceful strategies to articulate Muslim claims. Particular configurations of political opportunity structures are likely to account for divergent strategies of engagement. Building on different models of political opportunity structures, I will develop a typology which could be applied to understand how the different patterns of state-religion relations influence the councils' strategies.

Institutionalist approaches will be used to better understand the organisational dynamic and rhetoric of how the two councils engage with their own constituents and other Muslim organisations in light of their own past practices and current changes in the nature of Muslim communities. Discursive approaches and insights on the

processes of institutionalisation will be used to examine how the two councils frame their actions to improve their legitimacy. While political opportunities, negotiated by the challengers, may encourage the choice of a particular course of action, they may also constrain it. Another theoretical expectation is that the councils' decisions (particularly in relation to their own organisations) are likely to be contingent not only on their own skills and resources, but also on historically entrenched internal power struggles and previous patterns of engagement.

The interaction between social movement and institutionalist approaches allows for a dynamic, yet context-sensitive framework to explore the linkages between Muslim councils' actions and their institutional environment. It provides an opportunity to conceptualise the intermediary role the two councils play in state-Muslim relations and to understand how their actions and discourses are mediated by the context. The project draws on the two sets of literature to provide a deeper understanding of the similarities and differences in how the two councils challenge the state and mobilise support within a particular set of past and present opportunities and constraints.

In this chapter, I will first outline how far the two Muslim councils conform to a dual function of being involved in contentious politics and minority interest mobilisation, while acquiring some attributes associated with institutionalised interest group organisations. Second, I will use insights from social movement theories to suggest the ways in which political opportunities are likely to structure state-religion relations. I will then explore more discursive strategies which the two councils are likely to use to mediate between what they believe to be Muslim interests and what they understand to be state expectations. Finally, I will highlight the importance of historical factors as further constraints on the councils' scope of actions and ability to respond to the changing nature of Muslim representation.

The underlying argument of the theoretical framework is that social actors are subject to external and internal opportunities and constraints which influence political outcomes. Institutional environments matter in shaping the choices actors make by facilitating or constraining a particular course of action. In the famous

words of March and Olsen (1984: 747) 'the organization of political life makes a difference.' I suggest conceptualising the councils' intermediary functions in relation to the process of interaction which occurs between a social movement organisation and its institutional environment. However, from a constructivist perspective (which will be discussed in the next chapter), actors makes sense of their own environment by interacting and engaging with its opportunities and constraints. Therefore, the theoretical framework is also designed to capture interrelations between agency and structure in line with Meyer's (2004: 128) famous remark that:

> The wisdom, creativity, and outcomes of activists' choices – their *agency* can only be understood and evaluated by looking at the political context and the rules of the games in which those choices are made – that is, *structure*.

Muslim councils: between mobilisation and institutionalisation

Before theorising how particular combinations of political opportunities can influence the ways in which Muslim organisations respond to the pressures of co-optation and representation, it is important to explain their complicated institutional status. Both organisations challenge the existing attitudes towards Muslim communities and lobby the state to ensure a fair treatment of Muslim minorities. Both articulate the need to protect Muslim identity from Islamophobia and mobilise support for their actions. Therefore, both councils show attributes of social movement organisations and are subject to a similar set of exogenous rules and political opportunities as more radical global actors (e.g. Islamist groups) who challenge the system from the outside. However, their close interaction with state institutions, a degree of organisational maturity and conventional strategies suggest that they have become institutionalised actors. They campaign on behalf of Muslim communities by challenging state-religion relations from within.

Theories of social movement organisations (McAdam et al. 1996, Tarrow 1998) and ideas on how organisations integrate themselves with their environment (Meyer and

Rowan 1977) offer a series of insights to conceptualise how the two councils oscillate between mobilisation and institutionalisation. Literature on social movements examines violent protest and contention as well as peaceful bargaining strategies available under different political conditions. Tarrow (1998: 199) maintains that political opportunities 'play the strongest role triggering general episodes of contention' as they may produce instability among the existing alliances and inconsistency of state repression' (Ibid: 199). If contention over particular grievances becomes institutionalised, social movements or interest groups are encouraged to combine contention with participation in institutions. Moreover, 'movements institutionalize their tactics and attempt to gain concrete benefits for their supporters through negotiation and compromise' (Ibid: 101).

Notably, Tarrow (1998: 84) argues that cooperation with the state and non-violent contention may be a double-edged sword, as 'it deprives organizers of the potent weapon of outrage.' If a social movement organisation is too alienated from its institutional environment, it risks becoming too sectarian. However, if it collaborates 'too closely…and take[s] up institutional routine' it becomes indoctrinated with its values (Ibid: 208). Tarrow's argument partly supports the logic of 'institutionalised organisations' as elaborated by Meyer and Rowan (1977). They suggest that to ensure their survival, organisations seek to legitimate their conduct by incorporating practices which are already institutionalised in society.

Zald and McCarthy (1979: 2) distinguish a social movement organisation from other types of organisations or interest groups by defining it as 'a complex, or formal, organization which identifies its goals with the preferences of a social movement'. Although social movement organisations may have bureaucratic features, they differ from bureaucratic organisations because 'their goals are aimed at changing the society' as they wish to restructure the society rather than provide it with a regular service (Zald and Ash 1966: 329). On one hand, Muslim councils are involved in providing regular services for Muslim communities to ensure they can practice their religion. On the other hand, their goal is to change societal attitudes to Islam and encourage a more favourable treatment of Muslim communities by the state.

Therefore, they are appropriately seen as social movement organisations in this sense.

As intermediary institutions, Muslim councils are involved in simultaneous interaction with their constituents and authorities. For example, at times of contention, intermediary institutions may act more like social movement organisations, but with time they develop formal elements akin to institutionalised interest groups. However, maintaining both relationships at the same time presents a particular challenge. Muslim councils continue to engage in the same activities of lobbying authorities. However, once the initial phase of contention is over, they tend to focus on their organisational structure. This may include institutional reform and strategies to maintain membership and ensure their organisational advantage.

Social movement theories explain mobilisation of minority interests that may lead to periods of violent or peaceful contention between organisations and state structures. A number of scholars within this theoretical approach also try to bridge the gap between collective behaviour theories and analysis of individual organisational strategies. For example, Kriesi (1996) distinguishes between internal and external structuration of a social movement organisation. He maintains that internal structuration refers to internal mechanisms and possible directions its organisational composition can take. Based on the Weber-Michels model of organisational change, he suggests that internal structuration of a social movement organisation may result in its institutionalisation, making it similar to a party or an interest group (Ibid: 156).

A close analysis of the internal mechanisms of organisational maintenance provides a useful way to theorise the process in which the two councils seek to boost their legitimacy not only among its affiliated organisations but also within Muslim communities. Internal measures may include 'the development of its internal structure, the moderation of its goals, the conventionalisation of its action repertoire, and its integration into established systems of interest intermediation' (Kriesi 1996:156). While the process of institutionalisation may not necessarily result in maintaining community support, it provides an easier access to public authorities

because 'government bureaucracies prefer to deal with organizations with working procedures similar to their own' (Ibid: 158). This reveals the inherent challenge of intermediary institutions of being co-opted by the state, while remaining representative of particular group of interests. Additional insights from theories on organisational legitimacy will be applied to explore how each council undertakes a series of internal changes (Meyer 1977). In the thesis I will explore the extent to which organisational reforms conducted by each council have reflected external norms of corporatist and pluralist interest mediation. This may have particularly important implications for the question of Muslim integration.

Kriesi's approach to external structuration takes into account three dimensions, namely the social movement organisation's 'engagement with its constituency, its allies and the authorities' (Ibid: 155). State support provides public recognition and gives access to public resources and decision-making which provides crucial resources and representation for the organisation (Ibid: 156). However, being integrated into a conventional system of interest intermediation 'may impose limits on the mobilization capacity … and alienate important parts of its constituency, with the consequence of weakening it in the long run' (Ibid). I will explore these assumptions in light of the councils' engagement with state officials, other Muslim organisations, as well as representatives of other faith groups which may be their competitors, as well as allies.

Authorities often use co-optation as an effective tool of social control to institutionalise the leadership of social movements, restrict its range of aggressive strategies and reduce the level of contention. A classic definition of co-optation by Selznick (1949: 13) identifies this as a 'process of absorbing new elements into the leadership or policy-determining structure of an organization as a means of averting threats to its stability or existence'. For example, co-optation implies winning consent of popular leaders or organisations which may be opposed to state policies (Ibid). It can also refer to giving disfranchised groups a temporary representation 'to win their solidarity in a time of national stress' or responding to the demands of a particular group by meeting their interests (Ibid: 14). Therefore, the cost of co-

optation may be relatively high as it imposes a considerable restraint on their activities and reduces a number of protesting strategies available to them.[20] I expect the level of co-optation to be different in the two cases. However, as will be illustrated by the empirical data, this apparent divergence conceals a series of internal fluctuation between increasing and decreasing levels of state involvement in Muslim affairs and the implications this has for the councils' engagement with authorities.[21]

Social movement organisations become increasingly institutionalised as they modify more threatening claims into more modest reforms. Inclusion and participation into a policy making process may be a positive step for receiving access to decision-makers. However, the challengers may be subject to what Coy and Hedeen (2005: 417) call the 'paradox of collaboration'. In other words, once a challenging movement gains access into policy making, 'continued participation may become a goal in and of itself.' The group's own participation in the process gives it a sense of 'ownership and it is unlikely that, it would desire to leave the process of collaboration' (Ibid: 418).

In the next section, I will draw together a series of insights from social movement theories concerning political opportunities and constraints which are expected to influence the behaviour of Muslim intermediary organisations. This is particularly relevant in relation to the choices available to them on mobilising against particular grievances or institutionalising their representational practices.

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[20] A further exploration of how the concept of co-optation can be applied in relation to interest mediation can be found in a study of community mediation in the United States by Coy and Hedeen (2005). They argue that 'co-optation becomes possible when a challenging group or social movement opposes the practices, initiatives or policies of more powerful social organization or political institution' (Ibid: 406). Their model of social movement co-optation includes engagement, appropriation of language and assimilation of challenging movement leaders.

[21] Debates on the enabling or restrictive qualities of co-optation as a mode of participatory governance have been explored in relation to either promoting active citizen participation or enforcing top-down engagement to safeguard and legitimise state interests (see O'Toole and Gale 2014 and Newman 2005 respectively). In this thesis, I will contribute to the existing discussions on co-optation processes by providing a more dynamic account of the interaction between state approaches to religious governance and the ways in which Muslim councils interpreted these measures as interest group organisations.

Political opportunity structures and contentious politics

Institutional environments play a key role in shaping actors' decisions and mobilising supporters. The underlying assumption of this thesis is that political opportunity structures can facilitate or restrain the group's capacity to engage in protest activity and influence its choice of engagement or disengagement strategies. Different combinations of these factors account for the extent to which the political system remains open or closed to the entry of new challengers as well as continues to affect the already established organisations. Before conceptualising how political opportunity structures can shape the institutional context of state-religion relations, it is important to outline how they can facilitate and constrain activities of social movements and interest groups in relation to contention.

American and European scholars have applied different approaches to examine the impact of political opportunities on contentious politics (McAdam et al. 1996: 3, Meyer 2004: 129-131). American scholars have been traditionally interested in how different movements have emerged and why some have succeeded where others failed (Costain 1992, Tarrow 1989, 1998 and Tilly 1978). The relevance of their contribution for my project lies in the longitudinal value of their work, with particular emphasis on the evolutionary processes of social movements and protest activities. For example, Eisinger (1973: 15) suggested that the protest or contention is most likely to happen 'in systems characterised by a mix of open and closed factors.' Their research indicated that protest and mobilisation occurred when the challengers' claims were neither sufficiently accommodated, nor completely repressed. This curious hybrid of mixed measures is particularly relevant to the study of Muslim Councils and state reaction to Muslim mobilisation in the two countries.

European scholars have applied some of the core notions of opportunity and constraint, facilitation and repression to their cross-national studies of social movements. They have developed a comparative dimension by examining variation in social movements in different national contexts (Kitschelt 1986, Koopmans and Statham 2000, Kriesi et al. 1995, and Oberschall 2000). For example, Kitschelt's

research on anti-nuclear movements in France, Sweden, Germany and the United States elaborated a detailed explanation of national variation between these movements to reveal how 'political opportunity structures influence the choices or protest strategies' (Kitschelt 1986: 58). Similarly, research by Kriesi and his collaborators (1995) focused on new social movements and their interaction with the existing environment. The significance of this strand of research for my theoretical framework is two-fold. First, it provides a comparative foundation for the study. Second, its inclusion of non-disruptive, more conventional strategies and peaceful claims can be developed and applied to the study of the two organisations in the institutionalised contention.

The aforementioned social movement theorists share an interest in understanding how and under which conditions new or existing challengers use political opportunities and to what extent their actions are restricted or facilitated by their environment. A more nuanced and widely-accepted definition of political opportunities and constraints is advanced by Tarrow (1998: 20):

> By political opportunities, I mean consistent – but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national – dimensions of the political struggle that encourage people to engage in contentious politics. By political constraints, I mean factors – like repression, but also authorities' capacity to present a solid front to insurgents – that discourage contention.

Tarrow notes that while authoritarian regimes repress social movements and representative ones facilitate them, 'there are aspects of repressive states that encourage some forms of contention, while some characteristics of representative ones take the sting out of movements' (Tarrow 1998: 80). He acknowledges the distinction between repressive authoritarian and facilitating democratic states. However, his model of political opportunities is more complex as it includes the opening of access to participate for new actors and 'a decline in the state's capacity or will to repress dissent' (Ibid: 76). His research provides a more differentiated linkage between the nature of the protests and the centralisation of political authority, by arguing that whereas centralised states 'attract collective actors to the summit of

the political system…decentralized states provide a multitude of targets at the base'
and encourage 'many alternative pockets for participation' (Ibid: 81). This way of
framing state facilitation and repression is more relevant to understanding the
behaviour of Muslim councils under the different conditions of cooperation and
confrontation with authorities and other actors.

Tarrow's approach to the opening/closing of access to the political system can be
applied to the process of interaction between the councils and their institutional
environment. A change in particular patterns of political opportunities and
constraints is the driving mechanism behind people's decisions to engage in
contentious politics (Ibid: 19). Once this happens, actors 'create new opportunities,
which are used by others in widening cycles of contentions' (Ibid). Although the
notion has been used to explain the processes of mobilisation within a single context,
Tarrow's focus on the importance of political conditions at a precise moment and
short-term changes that result in opening up access to participation is particularly
relevant to understanding the creation narratives of the two Muslim councils.
Paradoxically, this dynamic conceptualisation of political opportunities as moments
of institutional change bears resemblance to more static interpretations of political
processes offered by historical institutionalists (Pierson 2004, Thelen 1999). Tarrow
(1998: 199) notes that:

> political opportunities…play the strongest role in triggering general
> episodes of contention in which elites reveal their vulnerability,
> new social actors and forms of conflict appear, alliances are struck,
> and repression becomes sluggish or inconsistent.

In the last section of the chapter I will discuss how historically contingent
institutionalist approaches emphasise the importance of particular points in time
(critical junctures) in triggering a new sequence of events and its institutionalisation
along a particular path. The two seemingly different approaches can be used to
identify particular points of contention and cooperation between Muslim
organisations and the state. Moreover, a better understanding of particular changes

happening within the external environment helps understand particular decisions the two institutions took on reforming their own organisational structures.

Finally, there is a tendency among social movement theorists to focus on the emergence of particular new movements or organisations on the grounds that this is the critical point when new conflicts are introduced into the existing system. This may lead to insufficient attention being given to the already established (or mature) organisations which still participate in contentious politics but use less contentious strategies. The structure of political environment influences not only the emergence of the protest movement or organisation, but also that the same 'enduring and volatile features of a given political system, can be expected to continue to play a major role in shaping the ongoing fortunes of the movement' (McAdam et al. 1996: 13). Therefore, a large part of the project will focus on how the two Muslim councils have continued to lobby the government and develop their organisational structures after they had already articulated their position on fighting for Muslim rights.

In this project I am also mainly interested in examining the dynamic nature of political opportunity structures, particularly in relation to how a series of shifts in the institutional structures (external and internal) can trigger changes in the councils' engagement strategies. This is in line with an assumption that 'a focus on *changes* in the structure of political opportunities can contribute to our understanding of the shifting fortunes of a single movement' (McAdam et al. 1996: 13). An added feature of the continuous or ongoing interaction is that political opportunities become negotiated and appropriated by the challengers. Mature movements and their established organisations rely on discursive framing to mobilise support for their claims, as will be discussed later in the chapter.

Political opportunities and constraints of state-religion relations

In light of the different ways of conceptualising political opportunities, a number of scholars sought to simplify the typology by combining some of its elements to make the theory more inclusive not only of the new movements and actors but also of the existing challengers. The project will following the synthesising efforts by McAdam et al. (1996) working within the American tradition and Koopmans and Statham (2000) working within the European approach. It will use four elements to outline political opportunities of state-religion relations which are likely to affect the council's choices of engagement strategies. They include formal institutional structures, national cleavages, informal institutional structures, and alliance structures. The first two dimensions are traditionally conceptualised as stable structures of political opportunities which are particularly beneficial for drawing cross-national comparisons. The last two elements are more volatile and offer a degree of dynamism to the suggested comparison.

This typology provides an attempt to conceptualise a series of opportunities and constraints responsible for structuring state-religion relations in the two countries in general and its implications for Muslim minority representation in particular. The significance of each factor will be explained in relation to interest mediation. In light of the politico-religious nature of Muslim councils, all four factors structure the external environment in which the two institutions engage with the state and religious organisations. I expect particular configurations of these factors (and their internal shifts) to help account for a different level of cooperation and the nature of engagement between Muslim councils and the state in the pluralist and corporatist contexts of interest mediation. Moreover, some or all of these external factors may also influence the councils' internal organisational strategies aimed at gaining support from their internal audience – affiliated institutions and Muslim communities in whose name they claim to engage with the state (see previously discussed linkages between the external and internal environment).

Formal institutional structures

Formal structures help account for the most obvious divergence between the two cases as they represent key features of each political system and shape the openness of access to the state. Traditional interpretations of formal institutional structures consider the number of institutional actors, while specific dimensions of this opportunity structure often include a level of centralisation and conventional channels of access for the challengers (Koopmans and Stratham 2000: 34).

As was noted earlier, the state uses inclusive or exclusive strategies in either facilitating or restricting the actors' engagement in contentious politics or community mobilisation. Heeding Tarrow's warning on the limited value of linking facilitation and repression purely with the level of state strength and its ability to coerce, I suggest extending the theoretical leverage of formal rules to include pluralist and corporatist mechanisms of interest mediation based on respective principles of competition and participation. A traditional pluralist/corporatist dichotomy has been successfully applied to the study of competition and political participation of different political parties and interest groups in policy making (Lehmbruch 1982, Odmalm 2005).

To explain the ways in which formal structures shape the strategies of Muslim councils it is important to provide a more nuanced understanding not only of their political and ideological, but also their organisational, or institutional environment. Clearly, the authoritarian or liberal nature of the state creates its own rules on how minority religion organisations interact with the government and each other. However, I suggest that pluralist/corporatist distinction may be more useful here to explain the institutional mechanisms of organisational competition in religious governance. Whether Muslim institutions have to compete for state support or attempt to increase popularity by outmanoeuvring their competitors, their behaviour is likely to be shaped by the prevailing rules of cooperation and competition in state-religion relations.

In the introductory chapter, I suggested that Britain and Russia were chosen on the grounds of generally corresponding to two types of interest mediation which may be categorised as pluralist and corporatist. Mechanisms of pluralist arrangement of interests include 'intergroup competition and bargaining, voluntary membership …multiple and overlapping organizational jurisdictions' (Berger 1981: 21). Schmitter (1974: 93) juxtaposes a corporatist system of interest representation by emphasising that its 'constituent units are organized into a limited number of singular, compulsory, non-competitive, hierarchically ordered and functionally differentiated categories, recognized or licensed by the state.' These actors are offered 'a deliberate representational monopoly within their respective categories in exchange for observing certain controls on their selection of leaders and articulation of demands and supports' (Ibid).

The project will apply this classification to the two case studies. Pluralist rules of multiplicity of interest groups, autonomy from the state and horizontal approaches to resolving internal conflicts will be used to describe the British context. Conversely, Russia's approach to state-religion relations, including such elements as co-optation of leaders and state patronage, fewer interest groups and vertical policy of compartmentalisation of religious interests will be considered as corporatist. Not only does this help theorise key differences in the two cases, but also contributes to extending theoretical leverage of such a categorisation in light of the gathered empirical evidence. While these definitions provide rather crude and ideal types of differentiation, the two systems are not fixed, and some blurring of the boundaries is inevitable. Some of the subsequent modifications of definitions on pluralism and corporatism are discussed in Wiarda (1997) and Berger et al. (1981).

However, for the purposes of my study what matters here are the general mechanisms, configuration of interests and their relations between themselves and vis-à-vis the state. For example, the presence of competition is generally associated with the pluralist system, rather than the corporatist arrangement. However, competitiveness between Muslim organisations and other faiths is present to larger or smaller extent in both countries. What is relevant for my study is not the presence or

the lack of competition as such, but rather the way in which it is present or absent in the relations between faith groups and the state in general and in the council's own engagement with the state and other religious groups in particular. Moreover, the nature of civil society itself, including mainstream and Muslim organisations, is an important formal structure determining the level of autonomy Muslim councils can exercise from the state and the level of influence they hope to enjoy from Muslims communities.

A key expectation of this pluralist/corporatist dichotomy is that the number of religious organisations, their degree of autonomy from the state and the influence of the established religion can create divergent opportunities and constraints on the behaviour of the two councils. The councils' strategies are also likely to be affected by the changes in the pluralist and corporatist conditions.

National cleavages

National cleavages structure the political space within which the challengers are able to introduce new conflicts and use the existing divisions to mobilise contention. Following Rokkan's typology (1970), scholars of social movements traditionally identify politicised conflicts and divisions in society over the issues of class, religion, ethnicity, or centre-periphery relations as being endowed with 'mobilizing potential' (Klandermans and Oegema 1987). The extent to which social groups are able to mobilise depends on the degree of closure of social groups which are divided by a cleavage. For example, in his analysis of national cleavage structures, Kriesi et al. (1995) identify two elements of national cleavages which are likely to increase the potential for mobilisation.

First, they use Oberschall's argument on the notion of closure and integration of particular groups and highlight that members of a group which is closed on the basis of a traditional cleavage will be more open to the idea of mobilisation. This is due to 'their distinctiveness – that is their collective identity and common interests, their

loyalty to the group, and their shared consciousness of belonging to a distinct group' (Kriesi et al. 1995: 7). Second, they emphasise the salience of traditional cleavage to particular groups and 'the degree to which it dominates the conflicts in the political arena' (Ibid). Cleavages are salient if they are not institutionalised and pacified through the established procedures or incorporation of the challengers into the political and administrative structures or addressed in state policies.

As was noted in the beginning of the thesis, a growing body of research suggests that over the last ten to twenty years, religion has become a crucial marker of Muslim collective identity in the public sphere, arguably overtaking ethnic, class and regional distinctions. Increasing global tensions over the role of Islam coupled with fears over national security and the media's often oversimplified identification of terrorism with Muslim faith contributed to the growing politisation of the Muslim agenda. General perceptions of injustice and mistreatment of Muslims by the authorities or negative representations in the media have given rise to the mobilising potential of religious divisions, thus encouraging the challengers to gather support for their own actions in representing Muslim interests. The conflict over religion becomes particularly salient with the threat of growing Islamophobia.

In the project, I will explore the extent to which the religious divisions are affected by the pluralist and corporatist frameworks. Although the role of the established Church is important in both cases, its influence is expected to be lower in the pluralist context and higher in the corporatist setting. Therefore, in the pluralist context I expect tensions over religious issues to be lower, whereas the mobilising potential for minority groups to introduce new issues to be higher. Conversely, in the corporatist context, religious tensions should be higher, while the mobilising potential for minority groups to introduce new conflicts to be lower.

I will also examine the extent to which the behaviour of Muslim councils can be affected by the changes in religious cleavages. On one hand, state policies towards religion and positive promotion of faith are likely to facilitate the councils' engagement with the government and ease the existing tensions by engaging Muslim

leaders in state-religion dialogue. On the other hand, securitisation of Muslim faith and the rise of anti-migrant feelings, coupled with competition for state funding and religious spaces, are likely to deepen the existing cleavages and embolden Muslim councils to use these tensions to articulate Muslim claims and increase support for their own actions. Theoretical framing of salient cleavages between groups with a strong sense of distinct identity suggests that politicisation of religious discrimination offers a strong mobilising potential for the challenger.

Informal institutional structures

Informal structures and prevailing strategies generally refer to historically emerged rules for resolving conflicts and managing political challengers (Koopmans and Statham 2000: 34). These structures are important to my theoretical framework because they help conceptualise two different traditions of diffusing tensions between the state and institutional actors: consensual or polarising. In both cases, the state has at its disposal a series of 'exclusive' or 'integrative' strategies for responding to challengers (Kriesi 1995 et al. 33-34). The ways in which these can restrict or facilitate the councils' ability to manoeuvre in lobbying the government are expected to play out differently in the two institutional environments. While in the proposed typology, informal institutional structures will be used as another independent variable, their inevitable linkages with formal structures need to be acknowledged.[22]

In the pluralist context, a horizontal, decentralised approach to state-society relations and a high number of players implies that the central government's backing of particular organisation or partnership is more unpredictable and less likely. This is in line with the decentralised mode of state-society relations and a tradition of resolving

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[22] In the next chapter, I will outline my preference for a more flexible methodological approach to isolating important variables. This will explain why some blurring between formal and informal structures was allowed. Although each variable was examined in its own right, I was not interested in isolating a particular variable or a factor that would alone explain the councils' behaviour. Instead, more importance was attached to the cumulative impact of different contextual structures on the councils' strategies of engagement or disengagement.

issues locally, rather than creating centralised channels or bodies such as national umbrella-based organisations. Mobilising public support on a contentious issue is particularly difficult within a more competitive environment where different groups offer their own programmes and solutions to experienced or perceived grievances.

The corporatist regime, particularly within its more authoritarian dimension, is highly bureaucratic and vertically structured, with the lower or middle level officials being dispensable, should things go wrong. This provides a safety-valve to manage conflicts without offending senior religious leaders or government officials. Although the state is not formally able to sack religious leaders it does not like, it is able to use its internal resources to limit access to particular consultative bodies or funding, should a conflict unfold. The same process works in reverse. If the challenger shows loyalty to the government, for example by refraining from criticising the state, it can expect to be rewarded with greater access to decision-making process and implementation.

The project will explore the extent to which informal rules of communication between the government and religious organisations influence the strategies of the two councils in their respective contexts. A more decentralised system implies that different religious and political platforms may be used locally to resolve internal conflicts. Conversely, a system characterised by high levels of state patronage and bureaucratisation may encourage a search for more formal strategies of engagement. In other words, interfaith local initiatives and informal consultations may be favoured in the pluralist context of state-religion relations, while in the corporatist setting, state-Muslim relations are expected to remain formal with decisions likely to be taken only at the highest level. My expectation here is that stronger levels of state patronage and centralisation mean higher risks for the councils to disengage from the government. The lower the levels of state patronage and centralisation, the lower are the risks of disengaging from the state.

Alliance structures

Alliances refer to particular power relations between different actors and are generally considered to be the most volatile dimension of political opportunity structures. In its traditional interpretation oriented towards social movements and political systems, alliance structures imply divisions among political elites, such as political parties and established political actors. By forming strategic alliances with these actors, the challengers can shift the balance of power in their favour and mobilise support for their claims. The already established political actors are likely to facilitate the claims-making process of the new ones (Kriesi 1995: 81).

What makes this a particularly unpredictable and therefore more dynamic feature of the POS-based approach is its reference to a particular balance of power at certain moments in time. The presence or the absence of potential allies is a significant factor in helping the challengers to decide what course of action to take. Periods of weaker or stronger engagement between the challenger and the state are likely to be influenced by the presence or the lack of powerful allies who would support their claims. Moreover, I expect alliance structures to be also conditioned by formal institutional rules. In a corporatist system, where the number of allies is restricted, the challenger may be more likely to continue its engagement with the state, unless it manages to find allies outside the given institutional environment (e.g. foreign assistance). In the pluralist setting, high numbers of different actors are beneficial for the creation of alternative, independent networks of support.

To apply this dynamic to Muslim representation and state-religion relations, I suggest framing it within the context of the challengers' relations with other faiths as well as other Muslim organisations. The established Church can act as an ally, similarly to how in a political context a political party may form a temporary alliance with the challenger. What distinguishes it from a purely political ally is that it does not necessarily need to be in opposition to the state. A common ground between a challenger and its 'already-established' ally lies in the temporary meeting of their respective agendas. However, if the same allies become dependent on support from

the state, their cooperation may come to an end and turn into a competition for financial resources and patronage. The latter is more likely to happen in the corporatist, rather than pluralist context.

Another way of looking at the alliance structures is to focus not so much on the structural components of state-religion systems but to examine the potential for intra-Muslim cooperation. Friendly relations with other Muslim organisations may provide powerful partners to establish a shared agenda and mobilise support from Muslim civil society to engage in a collective struggle against social injustices. Whereas the pluralist context with a high number of challengers encourages formation of such alliance networks, the corporatist setting is more likely to reduce such benefits. This may be due to a more personal nature of competition which exists between fewer actors aim to secure equal treatment of Muslim citizens. Moreover, well developed structures of Muslim civil society may also serve as a barrier to the level of support Muslim councils can mobilise among Muslim communities in light of the growing number of alternative Muslim and non-Muslim civil society initiatives and players, keeping their activities in check.

If the challenger works together with other Muslim organisations and other faiths, its reliance on the state should be weak. Conversely, in case of weak cooperation with other Muslim groups and competition with other faiths for state support, its engagement with the state becomes more likely, whereas its efforts for securing support among civil society actors may be restricted. The first expectation is likely to correspond to the pluralist setting, while the second to the corporatist one.

The following summary (see Figure 6) provides a meta-typology which illustrates the divergence between the two ideal types of pluralist and corporatist modes of state-religion relations. The four key components of this typology will be applied to Britain and Russia. Each will be explored in light of the data discussed in the empirical section of the thesis to help understand a series of contextual opportunities and constraints which have shaped the councils' behaviour in the two countries.

Figure 6. The POS-based approach to state-religion relations

Type of POS	Pluralist	Corporatist
Formal institutional structures		
Autonomy from the state	Higher	Lower
Number of interest groups	Higher	Lower
Religious cleavages		
Influence of the established religion	Lower	Higher
Opportunities for new conflicts	Higher	Lower
Informal institutional structures		
Level of state patronage	Lower	Higher
Level of centralisation	Lower	Higher
Alliance structures		
Cooperation with other faith groups	Higher	Lower
Cooperation with Muslim groups	Higher	Lower

Integrating approaches: discursive framing and structural opportunities

Theoretical approaches to political opportunities have been criticised for favouring the institutional dimension of opportunities at the expense of their discursive qualities. However, some theorists have increasingly acknowledged the importance of the 'interpretivist' turn and tried to theorise 'the translation of political opportunity structure into movement action' by incorporating 'mediating mechanisms' (Kriesi et al. 1995: 245). A better understanding of how the challengers frame their decisions and mediate political opportunities helps understand how structural factors can be transformed into mobilising strategies.

Discursive framing provides an important meeting point between structuralist and culturalist approaches by creating a linkage between political opportunities and their mediation. The extent to which political opportunities constrain or facilitate collective action is partly contingent on how these political opportunities are being interpreted and used by movement actors to mobilise supporters (Koopmans and Duyvendak 1995). In other words, just as contextual factors shape the available choices, particular framing of contentious issues allows the challengers to mobilise their supporters and gain maximum legitimacy for their actions.

McAdam et al. (1996) and Tarrow (1998) have emphasised the importance of integrating political opportunity structures with framing approaches to understand the shared meaning actors use to mobilise their supporters. Koopmans and Statham (2000: 37) have integrated the two approaches to political contention on migration and ethnic relations into a single theoretical framework. While institutional opportunities determine the chances of access and the level of repression and facilitation from those who are in power, discursive opportunities determine 'which collective identities and substantive demands…gain visibility…to resonate with the claims of other collective actors, and to achieve legitimacy in the public discourse' (Ibid: 19).

The original concept of discursive framing and collective action belongs to Snow and Benford (1988, 2000). They concluded that social movements '*frame* particular meanings' and 'interpret relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists' (1988: 198). They have identified three integral frames of collective action: diagnostic, prognostic and motivational. The first frame applies to the process in which 'movement adherents negotiate a shared understanding of some problematic condition…in need of change'; the second considers 'attributions regarding who or what is to blame'; and the third frame implies 'articulat[ing] an alternative set of arrangements…to affect change' (Snow and Benford 2000: 615).

The diagnostic frame is often identified in the literature with the idea of unfair treatment and 'injustice', originally formulated by Gamson et al. (1982). However, the feeling of injustice does not just derive from a particular issue: it is jointly interpreted, defined and redefined by social actors, the media and general public (Klandermans 1997: 44). In this process, collective action frames may 'underscore and embellish the seriousness and injustice of a social condition or redefine as unjust and immoral what was previously seen as unfortunate but perhaps tolerable' (Snow and Benford 1992: 137). Within the context of state-religion relations, actors often frame Muslim concerns by questioning excessive victimisation of anti-terrorist

policies, anti-migrant feelings or inadequate provisions for exercising religious rituals.

The second frame identifies the 'source(s) of blame and culpable agents (Snow and Benford 2000: 616). In light of competition between different actors, the attributional aspect of collective action frame is often subject to dispute. Gamson's notion of 'adversarial framing' (Gamson 1995) may be more appropriate here as it implies delineating the boundaries between the 'good' and 'evil' as a way of distinguishing between the 'collective action' of protagonists and the negative impact of the 'aggregated ills'. This may be particularly useful in trying to understand how the two councils are likely to manoeuvre between state demands and community expectations. For example, while trying to avoid a direct attack on the government, they may find more abstract targets, such as Islamophobia in the media or anti-extremist measures. By successfully manipulating the good/evil dichotomy and tailoring their messages to a particular audience, the challengers may also seek to gain access to the government by setting themselves apart from more radical ('bad') groups, while maintaining their 'good' status in the eyes of the communities by attacking unpopular state policies.

The third frame envisages motivating supporters and taking a course of action to remedy the situation. Framing political goals and strategic decisions 'almost always draws upon the larger societal definitions of rights and responsibilities' (Zald 1996: 267). However, in their efforts to persuade the audience of the righteous nature of their cause, challengers have to consider 'an external and internal competition for defining the situation and what is to be done' (Ibid: 269). The external dimension may relate to conventional, non-violent strategies of lobbying the authorities, advocating alliances with other religious organisations and engaging with the media. The internal dimension consists of providing a persuasive narrative of their own organisational legitimacy and ability to represent their interests.

Although the process of framing provides a dynamic way of analysing the ways in which challengers understand and engage with their environment, there is a danger of

interpreting 'all contention as struggles over meaning' (Tarrow 1998: 199). The contextual opportunities and constraints within which collective action is embedded can determine whether a particular framing strategy can succeed or fail. Resonance is one of the most powerful facilitators or restrictors of collective action. To resonate with the audience, the words and strategies must be salient and credible (Snow and Benford 2000: 619).

In line with this argument, the salience of the issue depends on the extent to which the target audience can identify with a particular claim made by the challenger. Mobilisation of target groups becomes directly proportional to the groups' ability to tap into particular beliefs, ideas and narratives and make them relevant for people's own everyday experiences' (Ibid: 621). Muslim actors face a double challenge of mobilising support for religious issues within the discourse of equal rights as well as integrating Muslim values within the national narrative based on common cultural traditions.

Another aspect of resonance is credibility which can be broken down into three factors: 'frame consistency, empirical credibility, and credibility of the frame articulators' (Ibid: 619-620). Put differently, the extent to which credibility of the challengers' actions can facilitate mobilisation depends on the following three factors: a fit between the actors' deeds and words, the critical nature of the issues, and the actors' authority. Conversely, a disparity between behaviour and rhetoric, a wrongly chosen grievance and the lack of well-respected leaders risk stifling any efforts to mobilise support.

The project will explore how the two councils have used discursive framing to adapt to particular demands of their external and internal environment in order to legitimise themselves with the state as well as in the eyes of Muslim communities.

Historical institutionalism and gradual change

Theories concerning political opportunity structures and the behaviour of interest group organisations are mainly preoccupied with explaining contemporary divergences in contextual and institutional arrangements respectively. Although they acknowledge the importance of historical legacies and their impact on the emergence of a social movement or an interest group organisation, they pay less attention to examining particular historical mechanisms which might have conditioned its institutional character and development in the first place. A historical dimension often gets neglected in two ways. First, these theories do not sufficiently explore how formal institutional arrangements have been shaped by previous episodes of contention or engagement between the state and the challenger (or its precursor). Second, they fall short of considering historically embedded, institutionalised processes as a key constraint on the actors' ability to implement organisational change and mobilise internal support.

To provide a better understanding of how the choices of Muslim councils are constrained by previous patterns of institutional behaviour, it is important to incorporate a historical institutionalist perspective. Theoretical insights from these studies (Pierson 2004, Steinmo 1992, Thelen 1999) throw light on more constraining factors shaping the behaviour of Muslim councils, such as historically entrenched interests and particular configurations of power. Historical approaches are criticised for their structural rigidity and focus on institutional continuity rather than institutional change (Peters 1999). However, it is precisely this preoccupation with institutional stability and resistance to change which offers a greater explanatory leverage to understanding the nature of external and internal constraints.

Historical institutionalism offers an eclectic set of theoretical tools to analyse different historical narratives and power configurations (Hall and Taylor 1996, Steinmo et al. 1992). As a neo-institutionalist approach, it focuses on formal and informal rules that structure the relationships between different actors and their environment. While its two institutionalist relatives (sociological and rational choice

institutionalisms) provide respective explanations on institutionalised power-sharing arrangements, namely through the efforts to reduce transactional costs (North 1990) or the concept of organisational inertia (DiMaggio and Powel 1983), they do not explore historically contingent patterns of power sharing.[23]

Conversely, historical institutionalists embrace the distributional effects of power configurations by embedding them within particular historical narratives. Doing so, they can explain how particular series of past events may have shaped the current outcomes. They ground their research in the concept of path dependence which is explored through the mechanisms of critical junctures and positive feedbacks. Path dependence implies that specific events or combination of events 'place institutional arrangements on paths or trajectories, which are then very difficult to alter' (Pierson 2004: 135). These events work as a catalyst which locks in particular patterns of institutional behaviour and development.

Within the context of state-Muslim relations, these mechanisms act as constraints on the challengers' attempts to bring about organisational change or alter the nature of their engagement with authorities. The length of previous engagement by the same challengers or their precursors may also affect their ability to develop a new, more beneficial relationship with the state or modernise their own organisation. Increased institutionalisation in state-religion relations may also increase the challenger's reluctance to alter its course of action. In other words, it is important to consider previous incidents of successful or failed collaboration with authorities which may have shaped the challenger's strategy of engagement or disengagement.

Critical junctures help elucidate the ways in which events and interactions join into causal sequences at particular moments in time and develop along different

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[23] The three institutionalist approaches are discussed in comparative perspective in Hall and Taylor 1996 and Peters 1999. See also Levi 1997 for how rational choice institutionalists understand the entrenchment of vested interests as a way of maintaining the existing power equilibrium. See also Hannan and Freeman (1984: 540) for how sociological institutionalists argue that organisational structures are notoriously difficult to change, once they become 'a source of resistance to institutional change.'

trajectories (Pierson 2004: 135). They are conceptualised as particular periods when the usual rules and constraints on action are lifted (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007). As was mentioned earlier, there is a linkage here with the way in which some social movement theorists (Tarrow 1998) conceptualise short-term changes which may facilitate or constrain the challenger's recourse to action. Historical institutionalists, however, are not only interested in the changed trajectories and potential opportunities this can bring, but also how original 'choices during the critical juncture trigger a path-dependent process that constrains future choices' (Ibid 2007: 348). While a temporary opening of access may work as an opportunity or an exogenous shock, it may be not significant enough to act as a critical juncture. A short-term period of institutional instability does not necessarily mean that once the challenger enters the system its presence will automatically become institutionalised.

While the concept of critical junctures helps explain the exogenous shocks that lead to the entry of new challengers, the notion of positive feedbacks provide a more robust theoretical concept for my project because it can be applied to the already-established actors. Positive feedbacks operate on the idea of increased returns, similar to the notion of transactional costs advanced by rational choice institutionalists. According to Pierson, once an actor takes a particular path, it produces 'consequences that increase the relative attractiveness of that path for the next round' (Pierson 2004: 18). As these 'effects begin to accumulate they generate a powerful cycle of self-reinforcing activity' which is difficult to reverse, with earlier events being more important than the later ones (Ibid). Therefore, once a particular institutional configuration has been introduced, it becomes locked-in since the cost of replacing is higher than preserving.

This idea is critical to why organisations may actively resist change. The cost of switching to alternative arrangements becomes increasingly high over time. Pierson adapts this argument from one of the characteristics of positive feedbacks he borrows from Arthur (1994). The latter defines 'inflexibility' as a feature of positive feedbacks by arguing that 'the farther into the process we are, the harder it becomes to shift from one path to another' (summarised in Pierson 2004: 20). This is why it is

important to adapt a historical approach to see how this plays out within the internal environment of each council as it helps explain ongoing resistance to introduce structural rather than cosmetic reforms.

Pierson notes that the 'allocation of political authority to particular actors is a key source of positive feedback' (Pierson 2004: 36). These actors become increasingly interested in using the institution to reinforce their own original preferences and power within the institution. Although Pierson acknowledges the importance of learning and self-correction being an important vehicle for change, he concludes that the impact of these processes is limited (Ibid: 41). He identifies two obstacles which are particularly relevant to politics: 'the short time horizons of political actors' and 'the strong status quo bias associated with decisions governing most political institutions' (Ibid). While the first obstacle can be applied to individual decisions, the second conceptualises institutional resistance to change, as 'actors…create rules that make existing arrangements hard to reverse' (Ibid: 43).

The brief outline of these ideas suggests that historical institutionalists provide a good foundation to explain the ways in which institutional factors constrain the challengers' strategies to implement organisational change. And yet, this does not mean that no change is possible. Once the institution feels under threat and its sense of equilibrium is overturned, the costs of ignoring exogenous developments might be higher than doing something internally to respond to new challenges. For example, once the threat of losing community support or losing out to competitor organisations becomes high, the challengers may decide to embark on a course of limited reform, provided these steps are seen as a means of self-legitimating.

Historical institutionalism has been traditionally criticised for not providing sufficient explanations as to why changes happen and how they unfold. In response to some of these criticisms, a recent study by Mahoney and Thelen (2010) seeks to redress the balance. Drawing on ideas by Pierson, they use historical institutionalism to explain the process of gradual change. While this approach is sensitive to institutional resistance, it helps explain why and how limited change is still possible

and what forms it can take. This is particularly applicable to the idea of organisational maintenance and institutionalisation of particular practices discussed earlier in the chapter.

Mahoney and Thelen (2010: 8) suggest that change comes not only from exogenous shifts, but also from endogenous sources such as the mechanisms of internal power distribution. They attach particular importance to incremental, gradual processes of changes that can be achieved internally. The most relevant aspect of this work for my research is explaining what choices are available in the challenger's particular institutional environment. I am interested in examining what types of reforms are possible within the institutional constraints of vested interests.

Mahoney and Thelen delineate four types of institutional change: displacement, layering, drift and conversion (Ibid: 15). Following their typology, displacement implies the removal of existing rules; layering – the introduction of new rules alongside the existing ones; drift – subtle changes in the overall framework of the existing rules or their impact; and finally, conversion – the changed enactment of existing rules due to their redeployment. Layering takes place when organisations lack the capacity to actually change the original rule and instead, they have to work within the existing system by adding new rules alongside the old ones (Ibid: 17). This is particularly relevant when there is strong resistance to change from the powerful veto players or interests within the institution.

Mahoney and Thelen apply the processes of layering to account for how challengers seek to change the rules in their external environment. And yet, the same idea can be used in reference to their internal environment as well. For example, once confronted with reduced legitimacy, Muslim councils may embrace the need to implement (or appear to be implementing) internal reforms. Leaders may become aware that more profound changes are needed. However, they do not want them to come at the expense of restricting their own authority or upsetting the powerful interests within the institution. Unlike other modes of change (e.g. displacement) layering does not introduce completely new rules, but rather 'involves amendments, revisions, or

additions to existing ones' (Ibid: 16). Moreover, processes of layering can occur when the challengers lack the capacity to convince the organisational defenders of the status quo to fully accept them. Layering provides a useful theoretical tool to explain the nature of internal constraints that affect the decisions Muslim councils make concerning their organisational capacity to represent Muslim communities.

Conclusion

This chapter aimed to develop a more nuanced theoretical framework in which to explore the mediatory strategies available to the two Muslim councils. By combining theoretical insights on co-optation, mobilisation and institutionalisation, it conceptualised the two interlinked dimensions of these semi-co-opted and semi-representative institutions. It has emphasised the importance of institutions in structuring organisational behaviour and provided a synthesised approach to theorise the influence of political opportunities and constraints on Muslim representative organisations.

Drawing on social movement theories, it created a compound typology of political opportunity structures to distinguish between the two approaches to interest mediation: pluralist and corporatist. This typology was developed to embrace the increasingly important religious dimension of Muslim identity, particularly in the context of state-religion relations. Moreover, with their strong emphasis on contextual factors, these theories helped identify a series of theoretical expectations to explain the divergent outcomes in the councils' behaviour in the two cases.

The processes of discursive framing were explored to theorise the ways in which the two councils are likely to embrace political opportunities and negotiate institutional constraints. A better understanding of these processes is particularly important in examining the councils' agency and the ways in which they construct individual narratives in lobbying the state and harnessing the support of their affiliated institutions or grassroots supporters. Finally, historical institutionalism offered a way

to outline historical legacies and suggest that the councils' choice of actions is also likely to be constrained by the previous forms of representation.

The underlying objective of this chapter was to build a theoretically robust and dynamic framework to identify a series of external and internal factors likely to structure or at least influence the ways in which Muslim councils interact with the state and Muslim communities. The next chapter will discuss how these theoretical insights were operationalised by designing a comparative methodology and engaging in qualitative research.

Chapter 2

Research design and methodology

Introduction

As was set out in the previous chapter, the research project was designed to examine how Muslim councils respond to state pressures and expectations from above, while trying to represent Muslim interests from below. I found that theoretical assumptions concerning opportunities and constraints that structure the choices these organisations make could be best explored through a comparative use of case studies. In order to provide a robust but also context-sensitive comparative framework, a series of methodological decisions were considered. In this chapter, I will first explain the reasons behind selecting a case study method and applying a constructivist approach based on qualitative research and comparative analysis. I will then explain the ways in which the data was collected, using documentary analysis, elite interviews and non-participant observation. Finally, I will provide a short discussion of how the data was analysed thematically, as well as with the help of discourse analysis and process-tracing.

Case studies, comparative framework and qualitative approach

The research was grounded in the constructivist epistemology which provided a flexible framework to develop a rich and multi-dimensional picture of how the two councils mediate between state policies and community interests. A constructivist approach is based on the assumption that the social world is inter-subjectively constructed (Wendt 1999). Different scholars using constructivist methods seek to understand 'the complexities of decision-making processes' and examine the ways in which different choices are shaped by 'perceptions of external and internal constraints' (Marsh and Furlong 2002: 39-40). As they examine institutional

processes and meanings, they embed individual and collective preferences in a particular social, political and historical context in which these meanings have been created, understood and framed by the actors.

Constructivist perspectives range from rational choice assumptions to more discursive approaches (see Wendt 1999 and Risse 2000 respectively).[24] In this thesis I applied a middle-ground approach advocated by Adler (1997, 2005) and Checkel (1999, 2005) whose research has provided a dynamic understanding of how different interests make sense of and interact with particular institutional practices or context to which they belong. Warning against 'methodological individualism', Checkel (1999: 546) emphasised the importance of positioning oneself 'between positivist and agent-centred rational choice, on one hand, and interpretative and structure-centred approaches on the other.'

Therefore, constructivist assumptions influenced my use of process tracing and discursive framing. Both were used to better understand how the two Muslim councils interpreted the nature of state-religion relations and communicated their strategies in light of particular institutional opportunities and constraints. Moses and Knutsen (2007: 223) note that:

> Constructivists do not use comparisons to uncover law-like generalities in the social world…they march towards meaning rather than laws, and they search for meaning by examining individual cases closely (and the contexts within which that meaning is situated).

By examining the interface between the structuring context and organisational behaviour, I tried to provide a more nuanced understanding of how the two councils

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[24] On different positivist and discursive trends within the constructivist school, see the Special Issue of the *Journal of European Public Policy* on 'The Social Construction of Europe', 1999, 6:5. While most of the empirical arguments are made in relation to the study of Europe and European integration, the compilation of articles delineates different constructivist perspectives concerning theoretical and methodological approaches.

had made and framed their decisions under the contrasting conditions of pluralist and corporatist settings.

The constructivist framework also informed my approach to case selection and comparative analysis. The thesis used case studies to explore a series of theoretical assumptions made about how Muslim councils behave in different institutionalist contexts. A case study is an 'empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context' (Yin 1994: 13). For a methodologically-rigorous scholar, it offers theoretical leverage to make far-reaching generalisations about particular instances, contexts or behaviour of actors which are significant beyond the case boundaries (Gerring 2004). As an empirical unit of analysis, it also provides a series of context-sensitive observations and thick descriptions for a qualitative researcher who is more interested in offering more detailed and valid accounts of a particular phenomenon or an actor (Ragin 1989). The method used in this thesis is based on the assumption that the two approaches are not mutually exclusive.[25]

The case study method was used to provide a deeper understanding of the two Muslim councils and to explore more generalizable patterns of their behaviour as a particular type of an institution engaged in Muslim representation. In other words, the two councils were studied in depth to capture their unique character and enrich the existing knowledge of these rather under-researched organisations. At the same time, the case study method provided an opportunity to examine the councils' strategies and internal processes in different institutional contexts. This has allowed for a more detailed exploration of theoretical assumptions on social mobilisation, legitimacy and interest mediation. A Muslim council in Britain and a Muslim council in Russia were selected on the grounds of exemplifying two different scenarios of interest mediation in pluralist and corporatist approaches to state-religion relations.

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[25] For evaluation of different approaches to the case study method, see Gomm et al. 2000.

The project aimed to identify causal mechanisms and explain the ways in which particular combinations of contextual features have shaped the behaviour of the two councils. Although scholarly approaches to case studies vary, there is a general agreement that case study methods provide a useful compromise for research in which 'experiments cannot be performed' and 'historical accounts may be too limiting' (Yin 1994: 8). They are praised for 'achieving high conceptual validity' and providing 'a useful means to closely examine the hypothesized role of causal mechanisms in the context of individual cases' (George and Bennett 2005: 19).

The event-based analysis could have provided an alternative framework to understanding the councils' strategies of engagement and representation.[26] This approach would have been useful in identifying the diverging or converging strategies of Muslim claims-making in the pluralist and corporatist contexts by offering a snapshot account of particular developments and their impact on Muslim institutions. However, it would have been less revealing of the changes in the councils' strategies of engaging with state officials and improving their organisational legitimacy over a period of time.

A particular focus on events such as 9/11 or the Danish cartoons controversy might have highlighted linkages between the globally-significant developments and the national contexts of interaction between home-grown Muslim institutions and the state. However, this would have obscured the project's primary objective of examining specific challenges faced by the two Muslim institutions in their domestically-institutionalised role of mediating between state interests and community expectations. For example, in spite of their universal significance, the extent to which the events of 9/11 resonated with the two Muslim councils was rather

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[26] This method was successfully applied to examine the impact of dramatic events on Muslims claims-making activities and public debates on Islam in Europe, see Cinalli and Giugni 2013, Vanparys et al 2013).

different.[27] The difficulty in selecting international events with equal relevance for the two organisations might risk diminishing the project's comparative value.

The project's approach was to embed the comparative analysis of the individually-significant national events within the rich empirical fabric of the two cases. When considering the councils' respective responses to the London bombings or the Mosque controversy in Moscow, the study sought to contextualise these developments within the larger institutionalist framework of state-Muslim relations. In line with theoretical expectations, these events were treated as focal points or critical episodes emphasising the nature of relations and punctuating the process of engagement between the councils, the state and Muslim communities. A more rounded nature of the case-oriented method offered a contextually-sensitive comparison of the councils' changing strategies and rhetoric.

A similar way of thinking was applied to using a qualitative approach based on a small-*n* comparison to 'explain political phenomena in terms of the combined effect of several factors' (Hopkin 2002: 263). Rather than identifying a single variable responsible for how the two councils engage with the state and Muslim communities, the research focused on a more holistic method of uncovering a 'combination of characteristics' (Ragin 1989: 3). Following a distinction between the case-oriented method and variable-oriented method, the project was built on the assumption that the former is particularly useful in providing 'multiple, conjectural causation' based on empirically-rich accounts (1994: 302). While the case-oriented method does not need to exclude any analysis of variables, it allows for greater flexibility in exploring 'combinations of conditions' and 'causal complexes' (Ragin 1989: 52).

With the aim of explaining the two councils' relations with the state and Muslim communities, independent variables influencing the process of engagement were

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[27] Arguably, the initial effects of 9/11 were more important for the MCB in Britain than for the SMR, which, at the time, was more preoccupied with the events in Chechnya.

grouped together under external and internal factors. The project explored the extent to which the behaviour of the two councils was shaped by a series of institutional changes which occurred within its external and internal environment. As discussed previously, the external context was theorised through past and present political opportunities and constraints based on the suggested dichotomy of predominantly pluralist and corporatist mechanisms of interest mediation. It included formal structures of state-religion relations, religious cleavages, informal structures for resolving conflicts and opportunities to strike alliances with other religious, political or civil society groups.

In particular, I examined the changes which occurred in the pluralist and corporatist approaches over time. In the British case, this method helped to trace an interesting shift from the pluralist nature of state-religion relations to a more corporatist approach under the Labour Party's first administration, followed by the return to the pluralist conditions under the Coalition. In the Russian context, the period in question revealed a rather atypical pluralist episode of state-religion relations under the presidency of Boris Yeltsin, followed by the increasingly corporatist conditions under the successive administrations of President Putin (with a short pluralist interlude under the presidency of Medvedev). In the concluding part of the thesis, the implications of the comparison will be discussed in relation to the theoretical expectations of the project.

A series of assumptions was also made in relation to the changes in the councils' internal environment, namely in the nature of Muslim communities and historically contingent structures of Muslim organisation and configuration of power. A careful examination of how particular shifts and changes within these factors may have influenced the councils' internal strategies helped explore the theoretical leverage of the aforementioned institutionalist assumptions. This was designed to provide a more nuanced typology of the ways in which Muslim councils operate under the external and internal pressures of state co-optation and minority representation.

Positivist methodology exemplified by Mill's 'method of agreement' (1848) and comparative analysis by Przeworski and Teune (1970) of 'most different/most similar systems' may have provided a better way of isolating a single explanatory factor to account for divergence or convergence between the two cases. In fact, scholars of comparative politics who favour more robust scientific approaches (see discussions in Landman 2000, Lijphart 1971, Peters 1998) criticise the findings of a small-n comparison on the grounds that fewer cases result in selection bias, unrepresentative results and atheoretical conclusions. However, in this project a more flexible methodology was used to offer a richer typology of the diverse factors which have shaped the councils' internal and external strategies.

A way to mitigate potential limitations of this approach was to select particular cases which can predict 'similar results' or provide 'contrasting results but for predictable reasons' (Yin 1994: 46). Although these concerns may be less relevant for a qualitative study, methodological justification for this comparison was based on the presence of similarities and differences between the two cases. On one hand, Britain and Russia were selected because both countries have sizable Muslim populations whose ethnic, social and religious composition has become more complex and diverse. In light of the increased tensions over minority representation and challenges of integration and security, the two states sought to develop more robust, yet religiously-sensitive ways of integrating Muslim minorities. Moreover, the nature of state-Muslim relations in the two cases has been also affected by global implications of the transnational nature of Islam, exogenous events and rising levels of Islamophobia. Therefore, the two cases have shared a series of similar challenges the Muslim councils have to deal with as they juggle the growing pressures of co-optation and representation.

On the other hand, the two councils have engaged with state authorities and Muslim communities under the different institutional and organisational conditions. For example, in the British context of religious pluralism and better-developed civil society, there is a multitude of different religious organisations, charities and interfaith groups which are largely independent from the state and constitute the rich

fabric of British society. The Russian case, however, has been characterised by high levels of state intervention into religious matters. Contrary to the British case, the number of religious organisations and minority groups in Russia is smaller and these bodies tend to be larger in size and less autonomous from state authorities. The thesis will discuss the extent to which the Muslim councils' behaviour has been shaped by these seemingly diverging pluralist and corporatist contexts.

Therefore, the preferred method of comparison for this project was a binary, or 'paired' (Tarrow 2010) comparison which offers a compromise between a more representative study based on a large number of cases and a more valid, 'thick' description derived from a single case study (Geertz 1973). For example, Peters (1998: 67) acknowledges that 'some of the potential for extraneous variance' in binary comparisons can be reduced by 'focusing on a single institution, policy of process … [g]iven that these … perform many of the same functions.' In his illuminating analysis of using paired comparisons, Tarrow (2010: 239-246) argues that this method draws on 'deep background knowledge of the countries being examined' and, therefore, can endow the study with a 'degree of intimacy and detail that inspires confidence that the connections drawn between antecedent conditions and outcome are real.'

Moreover, he praises the 'full and varied potential of paired comparisons' as it provides a way to reconcile the most different and most similar system designs by seeing them as complementary rather than competing methodologies (Ibid: 254). Therefore, unlike statistical analysis and quantitative methods, the comparative study based on a small number of cases does not claim to reveal representative generalisations of how all similar Muslim organisations are likely to behave in different national contexts. Instead, its comparative value lies in developing rich typologies to deepen our understanding of political processes and explore a series of assumptions by keeping a series of factors constant.

The original research design included a third example of the French Muslim council and the French institutionalist context which was identified to contain some elements

similar to the Russian corporatist context and others more comparable to the British pluralist setting. However, I decided to limit the cases to two and compare and contrast the behaviour of the MCB and the SMR in their respective contexts. The importance of the reduced scope was two-fold. First, it offered two clearly-defined and different institutionalist scenarios in which to investigate the dual dynamic of co-optation and representation. Second, the chosen comparison presented a more practical and manageable way to collect data and create rich typologies of the councils' engagement with the state and Muslim communities.

Data collection: interviews, documents and observation

The data collection process consisted of qualitative elite interviews, documentary analysis and non-participant observation. Each method has its own benefits and limitations on the grounds of validity, representation and reliability (Bryman 2008, Burnham et al. 2004). The project used triangulation to minimise data distortion and enhance its validity (Denzin 1978: 291). Evidence from official reports, speeches and written communications was cross-referenced with insights gained from personal observation and individual interviews. Moreover, the interviews were conducted not only with those directly involved in the processes and discussed in the documents, but also with commentators who disagreed with the official line taken by the councils' leadership.

A key strength of using case studies is their flexibility of combining data collection techniques which allows the researcher to present 'more rounded and complete accounts of social issues and processes' (Hakim 2000: 59– 61). While there were some informational discrepancies in the findings collected from a variety of sources, these disparities helped understand particular tensions between real and perceived actions (Gomm 2008: 242-244; Peters 1998: 97-102). For example, a discrepancy between official statements and views voiced in confidential interviews helped reveal motivation of the councils' leaders and explore their views on particular chain of events or individual instances of communication with the state.

Elite interviews and selection of participants

Qualitative, semi-structured interviews were used to examine the ways in which the two councils build relations with state officials and Muslim communities and interpret specific challenges of Muslim representation in each country in question. Thirty interviews were conducted in the course of research in October 2011 and January-February 2012 (18 in Russia and 12 in Britain). They were carried out in Russian and in English. Most of the interviews were digitally recorded, apart from the two instances where participants declined to be recorded on grounds of confidentiality.

While the discussions were not envisaged to involve any particularly sensitive issues, ethical treatment of participants was ensured in two ways. First, the interviewees were contacted beforehand and emailed a short description of the project and a series of questions to be discussed. Second, the interviews were translated and transcribed, with prior consent gained to use the data anonymously.[28] While some interviewees did not have reservations about their names being used, the majority preferred to provide evidence on a no name basis. This helped facilitate a more detailed and honest response.

Participants were selected using purposeful and snowballing methods of sampling which were particularly useful in locating key individuals and senior representatives from Muslim organisations based on the articles in the media (particularly the Muslim press) and personal recommendations from friendly contacts. The selection criteria included senior representatives from the two councils (e.g. senior management figures, heads of internal departments and chairs of individual committees) and their individual affiliates (e.g. holding positions of president of association or head of Muslim spiritual board, as well as representatives from other

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[28] The research was carried out in accordance to the University of Edinburgh ethical guidelines, please see, 'Postgraduate Research Ethical Procedures'. Available at: http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/research/ethics/postgraduate_research_ethical_procedures (accessed 7 April 2014).

friendly and competing Muslim organisations and civil society groups (e.g. founders, directors of organisations or mosque imams). Other participants included public figures engaged in state relations with Muslim minorities, senior politicians (e.g. members of the House of Lords), journalists and academics writing on Muslim communities in the two countries.

Some participants were selected because they were likely to voice a typical perspective associated with a particular organisation or a group, while others were chosen on the assumption that they can provide alternative, more critical views (Patton 1990: 169-186). For example, I interviewed a senior representative from the TsDUM's office in Moscow and a former member of the MCB in London. Both of these individuals expressed views very different from the main line formulated by the leadership of the two councils. A small selection of these dissenters in the two cases and people 'outside the range of those at the centre of the study' helped enforce the validity of the study by providing an effective way to 'check…against drawing easy conclusions' (Seidman 2013: 57).

Snowballing sampling was used to access hard to reach respondents (Burnham et al. 2004: 91). In Britain, it enabled me to extend the network of contacts in different regional locations. In Russia, recommendations from scholars facilitated access to senior Muslim figures by way of personal introduction. Interviewing senior leaders from competing organisations and academics with more critical views on the SMR and its cooperation with the Russian government helped collect more representative data. Although I was unable to interview state officials directly involved in state-Muslim affairs, I was successful in interviewing policy advisors in Britain and some prominent members in the House of Lords who had played an active role in state-Muslim relations in the past. In Russia, I interviewed some public figures who were instrumental in state relations with official Muslim organisations, although they were not directly working for the government at the time. The primary focus of the project was on the Muslim councils and their role in state-Muslim relations. This is why the lack of individual interviews with senior government officials was not found to be detrimental to the project. Nevertheless, further data on government expectations was

collected from official statements, speeches, policy papers and transcripts of meetings between state officials and senior Muslim representatives.

Participants from different age, ethnic and religious groups were included in the sample. Generational, ethnic and religious markers of Muslim identity were expected to be particularly important in explaining the changing nature of Muslim communities in the two countries. Therefore, the individuals were selected to reflect that diversity of interests. Although the majority of Muslim leaders and spokesmen were men, I also interviewed four women. The proportion of men and women reflects the issue of representation in senior positions within the two councils, particularly in relation to the MCB and its internal efforts to improve female participation. Whereas in the Russian context, I found many women working in the council, this was not the case in its British counterpart and women were underrepresented in the head office. As will be mentioned in the subsequent empirical chapters on the MCB, this was presented as an issue which was being addressed. The question of gender was not, however, the main focus of my research as the key question centred on institutional mechanisms of state-Muslim relations and general approaches to organisational restructuring and increased participation from all sections of Muslim communities.

Representativeness of the sample also depends on its geographical spread. In Britain participants included representatives from Muslim civil society groups and organisations, Muslim spokesmen and politicians, mosque leaders, local community figures and academics from London, Bradford and Leicester. The four locations were chosen partly because there are large Muslim communities living there and they have well-established Muslim organisations. They were also chosen for practical reasons and easy access as a result of personal recommendations.

In Russia, the interviews were conducted mainly in Moscow, because key centralised organisations have their offices and representatives in the capital. For example, while it was not possible to travel to the city of Ufa (home to TsDUM, a key rival institution of the SMR), I interviewed their representative in Moscow. Similarly,

while I did not to travel to the North Caucasus for security reasons, I conducted some interviews with Muslim representatives of Dagestani and Chechen communities also in Moscow. For the purposes of this project and its particular focus on state-Muslim relations, Moscow was considered to be a suitable location to gather data on the Muslim institution which is based in the capital, but claims to speak on behalf of Muslims across Russia. However, further data was also collected in Kazan, the capital of Tatarstan, a key Muslim region in Russia and a place with which the SMR's leaders share strong ethnic and religious ties. For more conclusive findings on Muslim communities in Russia, future data should be gathered from a wider set of locations.

The process of data collection was informed by the skills gained and lessons learnt from earlier data collection in Russia.[29] Research experience gained in the course of a pilot study helped inform this project, create an overall picture of the topic and sharpen the initial research questions. For example, some of the earlier interviews in Russia brought to light a series of particular pitfalls of qualitative interviews, including asking leading questions, mismanaging power relations and underestimating the different meanings of concepts.

During one of the first interviews with an official from the SMR in 2008, I was interested in testing the idea of the council being a legitimate intermediary body between the Russian state and Russian Muslims. However, introducing this idea very early in the interview partly limited the validity of the participant's answers as he interpreted everything through this particular lens. Moreover, I did not foresee that in the Russian context the term 'legitimacy' may also have a different connotation associated with simply 'not doing anything illegal.' This was a clear example of 'conceptual stretching' which happens when similar concepts do not 'travel' well in different contexts (Hantrais 209: 90-91, Sartori 1970). In my later interviews, I tried

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[29] For example, four extra interviews mentioned in this research have come from my personal and group interviews conducted in Russia in October 2008, while working on the ESRC-funded project, 'Radicalisation and violence: The Russian Dimension' (Ref No. RES-181-25-0020).

to avoid leading questions and allow for sufficient space for the interviewees to share their own 'meanings, interpretations and understandings' (Rubin and Rubin 1995: 7). A deeper understanding of the subject has helped me keep the interviews focused, without letting the respondents stray too far into unrelated or less relevant concerns whenever possible (Burnham et al. 2004: 213).

My own identity as a researcher had a series of implications on the interviewing process. Initially I was concerned that being a woman and a non-Muslim would hinder my credibility in the eyes of some Muslim religious leaders. The researcher's ability to share social characteristics with respondents plays an important role in establishing trust and generating valid data (Dunne et al 2005, Halperin and Heath 2012: 301-303). The question of gender did not present a particular obstacle in my research and I was able to have constructive discussions with men and women. Occasionally, gaps in my own knowledge on Islam resulted in somewhat patronising and more superficial responses than I would have liked. However, the fact that I was not a Muslim provided an opportunity to ask additional questions to clarify some statements, thus enhancing the richness of the data.

Interestingly, the duality of my national identity helped overcome some of these issues. For example, many respondents paid more attention to me being a foreigner than being a woman. Being raised in the two countries enabled me to use the 'insider-outsider' card to my advantage. Sharing some linguistic and familiar cultural characteristics of the British and Russian identity helped create a good rapport with the respondents. On the other hand, some representatives from British organisations saw me as a Russian researcher and were happy to compare experiences of Muslim migrants in Britain with Muslims living in Russia. Similarly, Russian representatives were interested in learning about British Muslims and their struggle against Islamophobia or increased pressure from state authorities. The value of cross-national lessons encouraged respondents to share their views more openly.

A key trade-off in the interview process can be between the depth and breadth of the obtained information. Legard et al. (2003: 147) distinguish between 'content mapping' which involves aiming for a 'breadth of coverage of issues' and 'content

mining' that implies 'exploring the detail which lies within each dimension.' In my interviews I tried to manage both. More contextual and historical questions asked earlier in the process were designed to provide an overall understanding of the issues, while more specific, action-related probing was used to delve deeper into particular motivations and decisions. The latter was increasingly difficult to achieve in the Russian context with senior figures reluctant to divulge information. For example, I had a particularly difficult interview in Russia, not so much because of the sensitivity of the topics addressed, but because of the rather sensitive status of the organisation itself. The respondent was reluctant to be recorded and was very reticent with the answers.

The problem of that specific interview was the issue of power relations, typical for interviewing members of the elite. The researcher 'may not be able to control the format, or direction of the interview' as 'it is the interviewee who has the power [to] control the information the interviewer is trying to eke out' (Richards 1996: 201). One of the solutions is to remain flexible and 'stay alert to see which way the direction goes' (Ibid). Although it was difficult to establish sufficient credibility 'by asking relevant questions which are seen as meaningful by the participant' (Legard et al. 2003: 143), the interview was still informative about the nature of the organisation, its own perception of its status and its views on other institutions. By shifting the focus of the interview away from a rather problematic issue of state endorsement, I was able to gain some valuable information on generational differences, intra-Muslim relations and the changing attitudes towards migrants.

I found the issue of power relations to be less problematic during my interviews in Britain. On one hand, many of the respondents had already been familiar with the topic of my research because of similar projects done on the role of Muslim organisations in state-Muslim relations. On the other hand, a less detached style of leadership, combined with stronger ties with the academic community and civil society groups, made British organisations more approachable. By contrast, some of the more familiar questions were met with a degree of fatigue which I tried to counteract by offering insights into how the issue of representation and similar

expectations have been addressed by Muslim organisations in Russia. For example, in light of the media focusing on the controversial role the MCB in British society in the aftermath of the 7/7, there was a feeling that the senior leaders were tired of answering the same set of questions in relation to their engagement with the British government. I tried to make my questions more interesting and engaging for them by offering parallel examples from the Russian context. The interviews reached a saturation point once it was not only the questions that were being repeated but also an increasingly limited variety of answers from different perspectives, organisations and commentators.

Documentary analysis and non-participant observation

Documentary analysis provided a large corpus of the contextual data to understand the nature of state-Muslim relations and the role of Muslim councils. While extensive documentary analysis was carried out before the two sets of interviews, many documents were collected during and after the two trips. This proved invaluable to understanding the changes which have occurred in Muslim representation in the course of the research project, not only in terms of modified discourses used by the institutions but also in relation to internal changes in the two organisations.

A wide range of primary and secondary documents were used to gain an insight into the ways in which Muslim councils respond to community expectations and engage in verbal and written exchanges with state officials (Burnham et al. 2004: 167). Primary sources included official statements and communications from the two councils, transcripts of their meetings with state officials, particular speeches and statements made during official meetings with affiliated institutions, as well as more general Muslim events.

While hard copies of organisational booklets and council-endorsed publications on Islam were collected from the two organisations, most of the official documents were online, including policy papers and written responses to government consultations.

Online data may not always be a reliable source as the content gets changed and deleted. While this in itself can be significant in analysing the changes in how the organisations wish to be perceived, special care was taken to download online documents and keep a record throughout the course of research. This was another lesson learnt from the pilot study on Muslim communities in Russia in 2008, as the SMR's website underwent rebranding and some of the materials and articles were subsequently removed.

Further secondary sources included commentaries and analyses of particular events in Muslim newspapers and websites. For example, I collected a series of different perspectives and opinions on the issue of the 'Prevent' agenda for the British case study and the question of mosque shortages for the Russian counterpart. The written documents were cross-referenced with each other and assessed according to the extent to which they provided reliable, authentic and credible accounts (Scott 1990: 30-31). Official documentation in relation to the two councils was complemented by critical statements, articles and reports produced by rival organisations and think tanks. Secondary sources also included academic studies and articles on the two institutions and the issues facing Muslim communities in the two countries.

Written and verbal exchanges between the councils' representatives and government officials during the periods of disagreements were of particular interest. A series of letters between the MCB and Labour ministers and transcripts of meetings between Russian government officials and senior representatives from the SMR have highlighted particular points of tension in state-Muslim relations and revealed the ways in which they were understood, interpreted and communicated by the councils' leaders. These documents and written exchanges were available online, not only published in online newspapers and forums, but also many were available on the websites of the two institutions themselves. Documents are rarely free from external influences, and should be considered as **'**situated products, rather than as fixed and stable 'things' in the world' (Prior 2003: 26). In analysing these exchanges I tried to put them into the overall context by ascertaining the purpose of statements and their intended audience.

Moreover, the documents were not simply treated as 'transparent representations of organisational routines, decision-making processes or professional practices' but rather as 'social facts' with their own 'formal properties… and their rhetorical features' (Atkinson and Coffey 2011: 79-90). For example, while examining written communications and official statements between the councils' leaders and their affiliated institutions, a special emphasis was placed on identifying and analysing the phrases used to boost public support. Official communications and press releases from the councils were examined to see how the two councils tried to increase support for their strategies by 'bring[ing] people from different groups together to negotiate and coordinate common practices' (Brown and Duguid 1996: 9).

In addition to the interviews and documentary analysis, non-participant observation was used to experience the internal dynamic within the institutions and their affiliates and cross-reference what was said by the interviewees with how it was observed by the researcher. Non-participant observation is similar to Gold's definition of 'observer-as-participant' (1958: 221). The value of this kind of observation becomes particularly apparent in the context of 'one-visit interviews' where the contact with informants and participants is rather formal and brief (Ibid).

Observation 'allows to collect data from the context in which it occurs' and "[t]he researcher is part of the process' (Dargie 1998: 66). Brief amounts of time spent in the organisation before and after the interview can give the researcher 'a feel for organisational environments and the roles of actor within them that cannot be achieved through an interview situation' (Ibid). Observational evidence was collected in two ways. First, I tried to observe the behaviour and institutional practices within the organisations before or during the process of interviewing. Second, by attending, but not actively participating in community-based or academic seminars, I observed the ways in which particular ideas were presented to or discussed by representatives from the Muslim councils.

For example, while waiting to interview a representative from a Moscow-based organisation which positioned itself as an alternative, state-endorsed voice to the

SMR, it was important to observe how small and under-staffed that organisation was and under what conditions it had to operate. Without the personal visit and observation it would have been easy to mistake its far-reaching rhetoric in the public sphere with its real opportunities to engage with Moscow Muslims. Observational evidence was also useful while conducting interviews with multiple organisations in Bradford and Leicester. Aided by personal recommendations, it was possible to observe internal communication processes and the work of these organisations, as well as the ways in which different affiliates of the MCB and their leaders interacted with each other. Therefore, non-participant observation has provided additional opportunities to contextualise the insights gained from written documents and individual conversations with participants. Conversely, as these observations were non-participant and rather brief, they were also triangulated with the data derived from documents and interviews.

Data analysis: themes, discourses and process tracing

The data analysis was informed by theoretical assumptions discussed earlier in the chapter. The gathered data was analysed thematically, tracing particular changes in discourses and reconstructing a series of events and causal mechanisms which were likely to influence particular decisions. As will be discussed in the empirical section of the thesis, these decisions involved the level of engagement with the government and other religious and non-religious actors, as well as the nature of organisational reforms designed to establish strong connections with Muslim communities to gain their support.

Thematic analysis involved recognising patterns in the data collected from different sources and organising them into categories to uncover 'connections between the various categories that might be called themes' (Seidman 2013: 127). The process of coding proceeded in a series of steps. First, the data was coded in relation to the councils' interaction with state officials and other religious groups and their particular organisational strategies within their respective internal environments.

These were large categories of arguments and findings put together. Second, a more nuanced re-coding was used to identify particular segments of data in line with particular set of contextual opportunities and constraints. These were later re-coded into individual factors identified within the external and internal contexts. Third, I grouped together the data referring to particular actions and strategies taken by the two institutions. Consistency of comparative analysis was ensured by grouping the data in relation to the same set of identified factors relevant for the two cases and using the same wording to pinpoint particular themes.

With the project's interest in discursive strategies used by the two organisations, a large part of analysis focused on tracing discursive frames and examining the ways the actors used rhetoric in their written documents as well as verbal communications to justify their actions in the eyes of the government and Muslim communities. For example, in light of the two institutions acting as social movement organisations, particular discursive frames were identified to see the extent to which each council has sought to foster 'a shared understanding' among their communities 'vital to the effectiveness of [them as an] institution' (Brown and Duguid 1996: 9). A detailed analysis of the written exchanges between the councils' leaders and public figures helped uncover the ways in which the processes of engagement or disengagement have unfolded.

A constructivist approach to process tracing was also incorporated into the data analysis. It provided a useful way to understand internal mechanisms of particular shifts in the council's behaviour over a short period of time (Bennett and Elman 2005, George and Bennett 2005, Checkel 2005). As Collier (1993: 112) famously noted, 'within-case comparisons are critical to the viability of small-n analysis.' For example, I focused on particular chains of events leading to the points when relations between the council and the government had altered. Combined with a careful analysis of the changing rhetoric, it helped identify critical junctures and trace the steps following which these relations had become rather tense. This was particularly relevant in the British case. However, in the Russian scenario, a careful tracing of the aftermath of rather confrontational events on the issue of mosque shortages offered

another interesting sequence leading to the normalisation of the SMR's relations with the government.

Similarly, while analysing the data on the processes and events in which the two councils were created, it was possible to identify how and why more conservative approaches to power-sharing have become entrenched. Process tracing was also used to understand how the two councils have engaged in preparing, communicating and delivering internal reforms. It has provided an evolutionary approach to explaining how 'institutionalised patterns' can be established and 'new political identities' forged (Adler 2005: 71).

Conclusion

This chapter has addressed a series of informed choices made in relation to case selection and methods to collect and analyse the data. By outlining a constructivist framework, it discussed the ways in which the two case studies were compared using qualitative methods. Document analysis, semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation were triangulated to create two rich typologies of the councils' engagement with the state and Muslim communities in the two largely contrasting contexts of state-religion relations. Consistent application of the methods to explore the two cases was used to enhance the project's validity. It was also designed to ensure a future replication of the results in a larger number of cases to deliver more representative findings.

Individual methods were applied to match the underlying theoretical assumptions. Thematic analysis was relevant to explore a combination of theoretical insights and was used as the main strategy of analysing the data. Discourse analysis was particularly helpful in exploring the ways in which the two institutionalised challengers have framed their actions. Process tracing, which is a key methodological tool of historical institutionalists, enabled me to trace a series of events which were

likely to influence particular decisions, or were largely responsible for 'locking-in' specific patterns of power relations between the councils' leaders and their affiliates.

The next part of the thesis will offer a detailed analysis of the two councils and their relations with the state and Muslim communities. It will explore the theoretical assumptions by applying the methods discussed and present the findings in light of the empirical data collected during the fieldwork trips. The first case study will focus on the MCB and the British pluralist context. I will examine conditions under which the council engages or disengages from the government, what strategies in adopts and how it frames and negotiates its actions towards state officials and religious groups (Chapter 3). I will then examine the ways in which it tries to build support with Muslim communities and adapt its own organisational structures in light of the changing nature of Muslim expectations in Britain (Chapter 4). The second case study will look at the SMR and the Russian corporatist context. Similarly, I will first examine the SMR's engagement with the Russian government and other religious groups (Chapter 5). I will also explore the SMR's efforts to improve its reputation in the eyes of Russian Muslims by undertaking organisational reforms (Chapter 6).

Chapter 3

The MCB's relations with the British State

Introduction

The MCB's relations with the British state over the last two decades has been subject to increasing controversy and debate. In this chapter, I will examine the changing nature of the MCB's cooperation with British state authorities in light of the aforementioned expectations on pluralist forms of interest mediation. The chapter will discuss the extent to which the MCB's engagement with the British government conforms to the pluralist rules of state-religion relations. Before tracing the changing nature of the MCB's relations with British authorities, including not only its actions but also its rhetoric, I will contextualise the four dimensions of political opportunity structures. Based on the religious dimension of the institutional context, I will outline the pluralist forms of religious mediation, religious divisions present in British society, informal ways and practices of resolving conflicts in state-religion relations and opportunities available for making alliances with religious groups and other civil society organisations.

In particular, I will examine the extent to which the Council's engagement with the government has been shaped by the pluralist setting, exemplified by low level of state intervention into societal life, strong civil society and a high number of voluntary and autonomous civil society organisations. The POS theory suggests that the pluralist nature of the British context is likely to hinder the processes of singling out and co-opting particular organisations to represent Muslim interests to the state. However, should such a partnership be formed, the risk of disengagement would be low because of the availability of alternative platforms from which Muslim interests can be articulated and represented. In light of these institutional conditions, I expect the MCB's engagement with the government to be rather weak, whereas its cooperation with other religious and non-religious organisations to be strong.

I will explore these assumption in light of the data gathered in 2011 in three different locations in Britain, namely in London, Bradford and Leicester. Although some references will be made to the events in 2013, most of the analysis will cover the period from 1997 to 2012. After explaining some of the pluralist elements of the British context, I will discuss the MCB's engagement with the government during the so-called 'honeymoon period' of the first Labour administration (1997-2001) which was marked by close cooperation. Next, I will examine the tensions in state-council relations between 2005 and 2009 which can be classified as a period of contention. I will investigate the ways in which exogenous shocks and pluralist forms of representation offered alternative channels for articulating Muslim interests, once informal connections with government officials became problematic. In the final section, I will analyse the MCB's relations with the Coalition government in light of the increasingly diversified approaches to religious governance.

A key argument advanced in this chapter is that the MCB's relations with the British government were influenced by the shifts that took place in institutional patterns of religious governance and official interpretations of the existing religious divisions. The first shift involved a rather unusual incorporation of corporatist elements of state-religion mediation under Labour and state efforts to pacify religious divisions by mainstreaming faith in public policies. The second change resulted from increasingly negative perceptions of Muslim communities in British society in light of the growing concerns about terrorism and the state's attempt to diversify its engagement with official Muslim organisations and return to pluralist forms of interest mediation. I will examine how the MCB has responded to these changes by adjusting its rhetoric and making new alliances to rebalance its status within an increasingly diversified mode of state-Muslim engagement.

Britain's pluralist context: past legacies and recent shifts

State-Muslim relations in Britain have developed in a context which can be generally characterised as pluralist. In this section, I will apply the POS-based approach to explain a series of institutional and organisational features of state-religion relations. The pluralist nature of the British case has been marked by religious organisations being autonomous from the state, although the Anglican Church has officially remained the established Church. It has been also exemplified by a strong preference for a horizontal (or network) approach to resolving community tensions within the local settings and strong opportunities for cooperation between different faiths, civil society and minority interest organisations. A better understanding of the religious divisions which manifested themselves at the public and societal level, coupled with a strong role of civil society and multicultural policies aimed at integrating Muslim communities, provide an insight into the nature of formal opportunities and constraints of the British context. At the same time, multiple opportunities for cooperation between different religious, ethnic, and cultural groups and informal practices of resolving inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions on the local level constitute some of its more informal approaches and opportunities for making alliances.

State-religion relations in Britain are characterised by cooperation between the state and different religious groups (Cesari and McLoughlin 2005, Fetzer and Soper 2005). The nature of religious cleavages and tensions in British society has been rather complex. On one hand, the religious pluralism and the less imposing character of the Anglican Church did not hinder the development of different Muslim organisations. On the other hand, the Anglican Church has traditionally enjoyed a privileged position of being the 'established' religion within the multi-faith society, while persistent inequalities in legislation were rather slow in accommodating the religious dimension of Muslim identity. A close link between the state and the church has been accompanied by certain benefits and burdens, including the Anglican bishops' unique constitutional position to vote on legislative matters in the House of Lords and the state's reciprocal right to exercise control in appointing or

confirming the leaders of the Anglican Church (Cumper and Edge 2006). Although many elements of this relationship remain nominal, some commentators have called for a disestablishment of the Church to provide fairer representation and protection of minority religions (Modood 1994).

Religious divisions in British society have been marked by two contrasting dynamics. For many non-Muslim British citizens, the importance of religious affiliation has become less important (as was indicated by the changes revealed in the national Census in 2001 and 2011). However, this has been less the case for British Muslims. While for some Muslims a religious label attached to their identity has been less important, for others their 'Muslim self-identification and others' perception of them' have made them 'intensely sensitive to how their religion [has been] represented in the West' (Parekh 2008: 9). Initially, state policies were designed to protect Muslim racial and ethnic rights, without acknowledging the importance of their religious beliefs.[30] Against the backdrop of the lack of attention towards Muslim religious rights, some members of Muslim communities articulated a strong sense of identity-based politics and considered themselves as a distinct religious group. They regarded insufficient provisions on faith schools, the lack of protection from anti-Muslim feelings and increased levels of community policing as discriminatory.

Britain's formal approach to integrating Muslim communities formed as a result of colonial legacies, immigration pressures and a series of re-interpretations of its liberal brand of multiculturalism as a guiding principle to promote ethnic and increasingly religious equality (Meer and Modood 2014). Whereas state policies of multiculturalism underwent a series of changes to create greater cohesion and integration of different communities, the level of state involvement or direct interaction between the government and Muslim communities remained relatively weak up to the end of the 1980s. Following a series of reports that highlighted a growing sense of economic deprivation and social alienation among British Muslims,

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[30] This issue was not resolved until the Single Equality Act of 2010.

the state attempted to build stronger connections with its Muslim citizens by fighting social exclusion and improving living conditions through urban regeneration programmes.

Increasingly, debates on integration highlighted some of the dangers associated with the multiculturalist approach, especially in relation to creating increasingly segregated Muslim communities, detached from mainstream British culture. These discussions were sparked by Trevor Philips' (2005) comments on Britain 'sleepwalking into segregation.' Criticising the excessive focus on the 'multi' and not enough attention on the common culture, his words were later echoed by Bhikhu Parekh's distinction between positive multicultural-ism and negative multi-culturalism.[31] Consequently, the British pluralist approach to engaging with minority groups underwent a series of transformations from the *laissez-faire* policies of respecting and praising multicultural differences (originally defined in relation to race and ethnicity) to emphasising the need for national cohesion, underpinned by inter-religious and inter-cultural cooperation. However, notwithstanding these internal variations and reformulations of multiculturalism and the increased monitoring of Muslim activities in light of the terrorist threats, the overall level of state intervention into religious life remained relatively low. New Labour's policies on religion, however, made an exception to the rule, as will be discussed in the next section.

The informal structures of the British pluralist approach can be traced in its decentralising dynamic and a strong emphasis on dealing with the issues of minority representation locally. In the recent years, this has been challenged by Muslim communities increasingly calling for national initiatives to mainstream provisions which would guarantee their minority rights. Whereas this has been partly achieved through legislation (e.g. Race Relations Acts of 1960s-1990s and the Racial and

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[31] Bhikhu Parekh (2006) identified two types of multiculturalism: negative *multi-culturalism* that stands for cultural isolationism or ghettoisation, and positive *multicultural-ism* that envisages a dialogue between different cultures.

Religious Hatred Act of 2006), the process of engagement with Muslim communities and their organisations has remained largely the remit of local authorities. In the 1980s, the funding of multicultural initiatives and ethnically-defined bodies was cut, giving space for Muslim organisations to exercise their right to participate in local politics. A horizontal attachment to local-level politics entailed allocating resources to local authorities to tackle any arising tensions within the communities. Mutual efforts by community representatives and government officials to provide some opportunities for Muslim local representation by working with municipal authorities have led some scholars to label this a 'municipal drift in British multicultural public policies' (Meer and Modood 2009: 479). British multiculturalism 'has been heavily localised' and 'linked essentially to issues of managing diversity in areas of immigrant settlement' (Singh 2005).

Another important element of the British pluralist context is its well-developed civil society, consisting of religious and non-religious groups and associational interests. The lack of centralised provisions to manage cultural and religious diversity has encouraged more flexible forms of institutional arrangements between state authorities and different civil society organisations. This has led to a co-existence of many different minority-based organisations, religious as well as secular. Some organisations have embraced identity politics and engaged in articulating Muslim concerns in relation to political advocacy and representation, religious provisions and welfare, as well as campaigning against social exclusion and Islamophobia. Others have lobbied the government on issues of poverty, social exclusion and equality as part of British mainstream efforts, aimed at combating general grievances affecting British society as a whole.

The openness and flexibility of British civil society has also facilitated the work of Muslim organisations by providing different platforms for articulating issues, cooperating with (and between) institutions and charities, political, religious, or social organisations. In the words of a strong advocate of multiculturalism as a civic idea:

> it is a positive virtue that there is internal variety within any group and that (organised) members of any one group will want to locate themselves in different parts of the representational landscape - secular, religious, close to government, distant from mainstream political parties - for that is true integration; new groups should have similar opportunities to old groups and will not need to conform to a special minority perspective (Modood 2007: 144-145).

With a growing number of Muslims entering politics and their strong presence in business, legal and cultural sectors, the number of channels through which Muslim issues can be addressed has also dramatically widened over the years. This reflects the plurality of British society in general and of the Muslim field in particular. Access to different political venues and interests creates a diverse pool of potential partners to engage with, not only for the different organisations themselves, but also for the government.

The more flexible character of religious pluralism and well-developed civil society does not necessarily reduce tensions between different interests and organisations. However, it provides greater institutional opportunities for interfaith cooperation at the national, municipal and local levels which are arguably more accommodating to Muslim communities in Britain. There are currently over 260 interfaith networks and organisations recorded in the Directory of Inter Faith Organisations by the Inter-Faith Network for the UK. The Church of England has also considered possibilities and guidelines for multi-faith worship for its increasingly diverse parishioners. Although there is little consensus on whether joint religious services are indeed compatible, some justification to accommodating different religious practices has been provided on the grounds of Christian hospitality (Sudworth 2009).[32] As we shall see later, this is quite different from the Russian context where such forms of informal religious cooperation are less likely.

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[32] For example, these recommendations included having 'multi-faith gatherings where faith groups observe respectfully while other believers worship and take their own turn' (Multi-Faith Worship – A guidance paper 2008: 4).

This brief analysis of the pluralist elements of state-religion relations in Britain and their impact on state-Muslim relations was designed to provide a snapshot of political opportunities and constraints likely to influence the MCB's engagement with the British state. In line with POS theory, a key expectation of the thesis is that actors' strategies are determined not only by political opportunities but also by internal shifts which take place within these formal and informal structures. While state-religion relations in Britain have remained largely shaped by the pluralist rules, a series of changes occurred in state policies on religion, particularly in relation to the level of state involvement. Strongly influenced by ideological considerations of the government in power, these fluctuations in policies under Labour and later under the Coalition have influenced the nature of the MCB's engagement with the state. A key shift which will be discussed in the following section involved a short interlude of corporatist elements being introduced into religious governance under Tony Blair's administration.

Similarly, the chapter will explore the changes in the nature of religious cleavages and the ways in which they have been interpreted by the MCB. The first change entailed state efforts to mainstream faith in an attempt to limit what was considered to be the real or perceived discrimination against Muslim religious rights in relation to other faith communities, namely the Christian, Jewish and Sikh. While these measures helped to resolve some of these tensions, the events of 7/7 and the ensuing securitisation of how Muslim communities were treated under the anti-terrorist legislation reopened some of the partially healed divisions, thus altering the existing conditions for state-Muslim engagement. This was particularly evident in relation to the MCB's efforts to lobby the government on the issues of Muslim discrimination.

In the next two sections, I will discuss the impact of these changes in formal structures and religious cleavages, together with the more volatile elements of informal relations and alliances on the MCB's engagement with the British government. Pluralist elements in state-Muslim relations in Britain would suggest that the MCB should experience low pressure to cooperate with the government. Moreover, the opportunities for building alliances with other groups (which can be

beneficial for its efforts to lobby the government) should be high. However, the data indicates that the nature of the MCB's engagement with the government was more complex in light of the aforementioned shifts and fluctuations in state policies and interpretations of religious tensions.

The MCB's engagement with New Labour: mainstreaming faith

The creation of the MCB coincided with Labour coming to power in 1997. While the impetus for such an umbrella body came under the previous Conservative administration, the importance of the MCB as a representative institution speaking on behalf of Muslim communities was fully embraced by Tony Blair's government. The research suggests that a strong sense of cooperation was made possible because of the initial alignment between the government's agenda on faith and integration and the MCB's lobbying efforts to protect Muslim rights. A match in expectations was grounded in a series of shifts in formal structures of state-Muslim relations and perceptions of religious divisions. The first shift focused on the importance of Muslim collective representation through an officially-recognised single faith group organisation, which was in line with the corporatist ideology of the first Labour administration. The second change involved a desire to recognise faith as a strong identity marker to bridge some of the religious divisions in relation to state policies. As will be illustrated in the next section, this was aimed at developing a positive recognition of Islam and pacifying the divisive issues between Muslims and other faith communities.

The corporatist spirit of civic religion

Labour's efforts to incorporate a faith dimension in policies aimed at promoting multiculturalism and creating social cohesion between different communities is well-

documented.[33] In 2000, the Commission for Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, chaired by Lord Parekh, developed a vision of British multiculturalism as the one that 'treat[s] people both equally and with due respect for difference' (Runnymede Trust 2000). Some of the Report's recommendations on cultivating a sense of membership, belonging, and shared citizenship, were embraced by the Blair administration in relation to the need to heal existing national divisions on the issues of national identity and integration.

During its first years in power, Tony Blair's government took a series of steps designed to improve its relations with Muslim communities by widening the scope of protective legislation on race and ethnicity and including religion in debates on British identity and national values. This signalled a shift towards pacifying religious differences by politicising state recognition of faith and the latter's positive contribution to British society. The greater 'receptivity to faith' (Birt 2006) was partly dictated by New Labour's ideology, partly by Tony Blair's personal religious convictions. For example, the government set up the Faith Community Liaison Group with a particular remit to consult different departments 'for the effective long-term involvement of the faith communities' perspectives and needs in policy development across government' (Hansard 2003).

New Labour's willingness to give faith communities a stronger recognition in the public sphere can also be attributed to its 'communitarian' preferences which emphasised 'social cohesion….over the resolution of conflict between competing interest groups' (Birt 2006: 691-692). In 2001, in a speech on faith in politics, Tony Blair (2001) stressed the importance of major faith traditions 'in supporting and propagating values which bind us together as a nation.' The desire to create a public space where civic religion would help cement the scars of ethnic and racial divides resulted in what some scholars called a neoliberal incorporation of 'community organisations into partnership structures' (Glynn 2009: 5). The focus shifted from

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[33] For a more nuanced exploration of Labour's policies on faith, see Allen 2011 and O'Toole et al. (2013).

recognising racial differences to celebrating cultural diversity and promoting peaceful coexistence of faith communities (Peach 2005).

The research supports a widely-held view that the Blair government 'has brought up faith as a fairly central policy issue' (Interview 27). A newly-discovered emphasis on the value of a multi-faith society provided a positive drive towards recognising the religious dimension of Muslim identity. New Labour's ideology as regards faith, social cohesion and communitarianism provided a powerful incentive for the creation of the 'interfaith industry where you… get funded for interfaith activity' and benefit from 'state patronage' (Interview 28). It permeated political discourse on community cohesion and integration and has become a common language between government figures and the MCB's spokesmen.

Therefore, the MCB's engagement with New Labour was facilitated by the government's shift towards increasingly corporatist attempts to mainstream faith in the public sphere. New Labour's approach to religious governance contained a series of features which are more readily identified with a corporatist mode of engagement with specifically co-opted organisations. For example, rather than engaging with a variety of voices, early policies under New Labour aimed at empowering particular organisations to represent different faiths. As will be illustrated later in the chapter, between 1997 and 2005, the MCB was supported and encouraged to be such a key representative voice (or a 'peak' organisation to use Schmitter's terminology) entrusted to speak on behalf of all Muslims in Britain.

The Review undertaken by the Department for Communities and Local Government acknowledged the present use of a 'decentralised model' (Home Office Faith Communities Unit 2004: 75). However, it also announced the government's drive to develop a more central role to support faith communities (Ibid). Some of the key recommendations included ensuring that 'faith-based organisations [would] not face unnecessary additional barriers when applying for funding under Government programmes' and that the government maintained 'a close relationship with faith leaders and representatives (Ibid: 77). Previously, the state was removed from

engaging in faith issues and the Church of England, was 'working as an interlocutor for other faiths' (Interview 28). This model was replaced by Labour's multi-faith approach of the 1990s (Ibid). The role of the Church of England would regain its significance under the Coalition government after 2010.

It would appear that whenever there was a match between the state's approach to faith and the MCB's own agenda of promoting Muslim interests, the level of cooperation was strong. Labour's singling out of the MCB as its key interlocutor to speak on behalf of Muslim citizens may have been atypical for the British pluralist context of interest mediation. And yet, it paved the way for a closer engagement between the MCB and government ministers.

There were previous incidents of using co-optation for resolving issues on the local level by engaging with particular community representatives. However, Labour's readiness to deal with religious groups rather than individual citizens and to embrace faith as a multicultural category marked a shift in British pluralism. The government's preferential treatment of the MCB and strong personal ties between its spokesmen and government ministers was more in line with the managerial state of a corporatist style of engagement.

The newly-found emphasis on religious equality provided the MCB with an opportunity to represent the needs of the Muslim community as a singular category on the grounds of parity with other faith groups, rather than within the previously-used ethnic and racial labels. For example, in the words of one interviewee:

> I think for democracy to work and to cater for everybody
> effectively, you need to have that intermediary or representative
> voice for any group of people who have a common agenda or
> interest (Interview 31).

A rather intriguing pacification of religious divisions by promoting the importance of faith in public policies gave the MCB a greater opportunity to promote Muslim religious and social concerns in public debates and discuss the issue of Islamophobia

and Muslim marginalisation with government officials. The next section will demonstrate how these changes in formal structures and approaches to religious cleavages provided favourable conditions and incentives for stronger cooperation between the government and the MCB. By adding more volatile political opportunities, such as building alliances and using informal relations, it will analyse the MCB's initial interaction with the government, generally categorised as a 'honeymoon period' when 'the relationship was strong' (Interview 27). A brief POS-based analysis of the MCB's efforts to include a question of religion in the 2001 Census provides an insight into how the MCB engaged with the state-religion environment to mobilise and protect Muslim interests.

A case for cooperation

As was mentioned earlier, the New Labour administration welcomed the creation of the MCB as a unified organisation, collectively representing Muslim interests in Britain. It was seen as instrumental in reducing community tensions and promoting 'moderate' forms of Islam. Initially, the MCB was consulted on a regular basis. The government encouraged its contributions on counteracting Islamophobia, preventing extremism and facilitating interfaith activities. The MCB praised the government for keeping its election promises to establish Muslim faith schools, introduce NHS chaplains and make 'provisions of a funded Muslim advisor for the Prison Service' (MCB 1998).

The honeymoon period between the government and the MCB was marked by regular consultations and personal visits of senior ministers to the MCB's events. The findings suggest that the MCB made the most of these early opportunities to lobby the government. The earlier editions of the MCB's newsletters had a separate section, specially dedicated to 'Whitehall encounters' which listed different official and informal meetings that took place between the MCB and different government departments. Moreover, the MCB's own committees were formed to mirror the existing government departments.

Further evidence of the MCB's institutionalisation as an official partner of the government comes from regular encounters between members of the MCB committees and government officials, ranging from the Foreign Office to discuss 'policy issues of concern to Muslims', consultation with the Treasury on eradicating poverty or discussions with Department of Health on NHS Chaplains (The Common Good 2001: 9). While listing some of the MCB's achievements, Iqbal Sacranie (one of the MCB's key founders and Secretary General 2002-2006), spoke proudly of 'the regular bilateral meetings with the Secretary of State for all major Government departments' as an 'opportunity to raise issues of concern at the very highest level of government machinery' (Muslim Weekly 2004).

Interestingly, the MCB articulated its claims by mirroring the words used by the government. For example, in his letter to Tony Blair on the importance of faith schools, the leader of the MCB linked the 'controversy about faith schools' to Blair's programme of 'national inclusion and integration' warning the Prime Minister of 'certain circles' [wishing] to derail the agenda (MCB 2002b: 8). While the MCB tried to use a newly found emphasis on religion to its advantage by realigning its objectives with those of the government, the written and verbal exchanges between Iqbal Sacranie and Tony Blair revealed the importance of personal relations in promoting the Muslim agenda. The MCB's success in engaging with the government was made possible through good informal connections between Iqbal Sacranie and Tony Blair and Jack Straw (Interview 27).

Strong personal relations served a powerful informal structure facilitating the Council's engagement with the government in the domestic sphere. The MCB has never stopped lobbying the government on a number of issues in foreign policy, such as Iraq, or the Israel-Palestine question, or on the problem of excessive policing of Muslim communities following the terrorist attacks of 9/11. However, until the London bombings in 2005, these disagreements did not appear to constrain MCB-government engagement. For example, as early as 1999, the MCB expressed concerns about MI5's attempt to recruit a religious leader as an informer and strongly demanded that 'Home Secretary Jack Straw [give] a categorical assurance that the

security services [will] not use any member of the community to spy on another' (MCB 1999b). However, the MCB remained hopeful that 'security policy [will] not be used to destabilise and alienate the community' (Ibid). The mild overall tone of the statement stands in sharp contrast to the MCB's later statements on the 'Prevent' agenda.

What was particularly important for the MCB during the earlier period of New Labour's administration was the opportunity to have direct access to the government and be able to make Muslim concerns heard – be it in relation to providing funding for community initiatives, rooting out religious discrimination or voicing disapproval of particular foreign policy actions. Strong personal connections and a match in the government and MCB's expectations created a strong sense of cooperation:

> We were consulted more, we were accepted as the only representative organisation and there was also a desire on the part of the government in terms of their policies and engagement that there should be an authentic, credible, democratic, transparent voice through whom they would do the business of talking to the community (Interview 31).

However, by endorsing the MCB as its key partner, the government helped institutionalise its official status. For example, the MCB monopolised the position of 'Muslim partner organisation' in the report on government engagement with different faith communities, in such diverse matters as burial or fireworks regulation (Communities and Local Government 2005). There were regular information exchanges and it was generally felt that the MCB's concerns were being heard and addressed. Overall, this was the period when the MCB was successful in working from within the institutional environment of state-religion relations, challenging the government on the issues that needed to be addressed to improve religious representation of Muslim communities and speaking out against unjust treatment of Muslim communities and excessive burdens of integration.

The 2001 Census: creating a new faith constituency

The MCB's campaign for a religious question to be included in the 2001 Census provides a good example of how a positive change in religious cleavages and formal procedures of state-religion relations affected its engagement with the government. Coupled with favourable opportunities created by inter-religious alliances and personal connections the campaign marked an important milestone in lobbying the government to improve religious provisions for Muslim communities.

A five-year effort to include a category of religion in the 2001 Census involved the MCB lobbying the government, participating in consultations, writing letters and issuing joint press releases with other religious groups. Its success was also due to the shift towards a greater recognition of faith in the public sphere. For Jamil Sherif, the MCB's representative on the 'Census 2001: Religious Affiliation Group',[34] this campaign 'marked the emergence of a new faith constituency' (Sherif 2003: 2). Instead of 'characterising people by what they looked like – their race or ethnicity – allegiance to moral and ethical values [became] more important in some contexts' (Ibid).

Sensing the government's sensitivity to matters of faith, the MCB focused its campaign on appealing to the government's notion of equality and social cohesion. As an interest group campaigning on behalf of Muslim communities, the MCB articulated Muslim collective concerns about being treated as the 'invisible' element of British society. Moreover, the Council emphasised the relevance of its campaign by claiming that more and more people 'identify themselves in terms of their religion and culture', whereas 'the basic classifications of Black, White or Asian are simply out of date' (MCB's statement to Jack Straw on 2 December 1998, cited in Sherif 2003: 7).

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[34] The Group included religious organisations of various faiths, academics and other representatives campaigning for the inclusion of a question on religious affiliation in the 2001 Census.

Moreover, the MCB made an explicit link between acknowledging Muslim religious presence and 'pav[ing] the way for proper provision of public services in areas such as education, health, housing and employment' (MCB 2000). In his earlier speech during the Prime Minister's reception, Iqbal Sacranie made a powerful appeal to include religion to show policymakers how many Muslims in Britain suffer from 'the high rates of educational underachievement, the crippling levels of unemployment, and the suffocating social exclusion' (Sacranie 1999).

The importance of personal connections became apparent once the Census (Amendment) Bill was to pass through both Houses of Parliament. Iqbal Sacranie wrote to Tony Blair urging him for 'direct intervention…to ensure that a few hours of Parliamentary time is given to this important Bill' (cited in Sherif 2011: 10). Further opportunities to make the Bill pass were provided by the interfaith cooperation between different leaders of Muslim, Jewish, Christian and Sikh communities. By working together with different faiths, as well as by creating a particular narrative of how the question of religion was introduced in the Census, the MCB proved successful in lobbying the government to achieve greater recognition of British Muslims as a faith community.

Interfaith cooperation on the issue of the Census began in the mid-1990s with the 'Inner Cities Religious Council', 'Churches Working together' and the 'Inter-faith Group' examining the religion question in the Census. With the creation of the Religious Affiliation Sub-Group 2 of the Census Content Working Group under the leadership of Professor Leslie Francis, different religious representatives worked together on the wording of the question. During the negotiations, Muslim participation was first represented by the UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs (UKACIA), the founding body of the MCB, and from 1997 the MCB itself.

The significance of having strong allies to lobby the government became apparent once there was a risk that the Bill might be delayed and not pass in time to 'allow the proposed religion question to be included in 2001 Census in England and Wales' (MCB 2000). In his capacity as Chair of the Sub-Group, Professor Leslie wrote to

the Treasury warming the minister that 'if a question on religious identity is not asked in the Census, there will be no credibility in future Ministerial declarations of intent to ensure the needs of different faith communities are appropriately met' (cited in Sherif 2003:12). Similarly, it was believed that the respected Sikh broadcaster Indarjit Singh managed to 'convince Lord Weatherill to propose the matter in the Lords' (Ibid: 12).

In his study of the MCB and its new role in the public sphere, Pedziwiatr brings to light the MCB's attempt to 'aggregate and mobilise people of often quite different subjective positions in a common cause' to create 'a category of a single Muslim community' (Pedziwiatr 2007: 275). My findings suggest that whenever there was a match between the state approach to engaging with Muslim communities and the MCB's agenda to promote Muslim issues, there was a stronger chance for cooperation between the government and the institutionalised Muslim organisation. A newly-discovered emphasis on the value of multi-faith society provided a positive drive towards recognising the religious dimension of Muslim communities. The MCB was successful in positioning itself in the eyes of the government as the intermediary or representative voice of the newly recognised Muslim faith category. There may have been disagreements over foreign policy, but the shared agenda on religion ensured that the first five years of the MCB's engagement with the government were marked by good relations and a strong sense of partnership.

Labour's disengagement from the MCB: securitising Muslim faith

A key turning point in the MCB's engagement with the government came in 2005, following the London bombings in July that year. The aftermath of 7/7 imposed a considerable constraint on the MCB's cooperation with key Labour ministers. Buzan and Waever (1998: 23-24) suggest that any public issue can first become politicised which means 'requiring government decisions and resources' and 'in a more extreme version of politisation' it can be securitised, which means it is 'presented as an existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure'. In this section I will first outline how religious divisions became more visible as in light of increasingly negative connotations attached to Islam in British society and state policies. I will also focus on how the MCB's spokesmen made sense of these changes and articulated them in their discourse. My findings help explain how the MCB's engagement with the Labour administration changed in light of the increased terrorist threat and the government's shift from recognising to securitising the Muslim faith.

The government's response to home-grown terrorism was the establishment of the 'Prevent Violent Extremism' (Prevent) agenda as part of a wider counter-terrorism CONTEST strategy. The aim of the Prevent was 'to stop radicalisation, reduce support for terrorism and violent extremism and discourage people from becoming terrorists' (HM Government 2009: 14). Although the counter-strategy was nothing new, a key implication of the Prevent agenda was that it increasingly targeted Muslim communities and provided a 'vehicle for a significant growth in state surveillance of Muslim communities' (Thomas 2010: 443). The extent to which different government departments were consistent in formulating and delivering provisions under Prevent remains debatable.[35] However, security concerns increased government pressure on the MCB to act not only as an equal partner in facilitating relations with Muslim communities, but also as an efficient partner, ready to 'deliver a law-abiding, loyal ethnic minority'(Bunting 2010).

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[35] See further discussions in O 'Toole et al. (2012), Meer 2012 and Thomas (2010).

A growing perception that Muslim communities and particularly Muslim faith institutions were being treated as potential grounds for breeding extremism and undermining Britain's security opened up new wounds in religious cohesion. Previous efforts to mainstream faith had provided opportunities for greater recognition of the Muslim faith. However, increased levels of terrorist threats and the subsequent securitisation of Muslim communities and radical forms of Islam resulted in a new shift in religious cleavages. As will be discussed in the next section, the British government was cautious not to isolate Muslim communities and welcomed those 'moderate' Muslims who shared what was considered to be 'British', home-grown values (Moosavi 2014). However, within the new climate of suspicion, there was a growing feeling that Muslim communities were singled out as a problematic category in need of close surveillance and monitoring.[36] Following a temporary pacification of the cleavage through mainstreaming faith, securitisation of Muslim communities deepened the divide, reinforcing sentiments that Muslims once again have become an isolated, distinct group whose collective identity rights were increasingly 'under pressure' (Abbas 2005).

The MCB and the Blair administration shared expectations concerning mainstreaming faith. However, their perspectives on how to deal with terrorism resulted in disagreements over the extent to which 'faith' was at the centre of the problem. The interview data indicates that some members of Muslim communities felt that the government wanted the MCB to denounce terrorist activities and 'accept that this was a religious problem, an Islamic problem… that these terrorists were Muslims' and that the Muslim communities 'have not done enough to stop their rise' (Interview 27). Whether this was the government's exact intention may be debatable. However, as the Council pitched itself as a Muslim leading institution, there was a feeling that in a rather corporatist style, the MCB was expected to put its own house in order and inform on extremists within the Muslim community. As will become clear from the following analysis, instead of being co-opted into a counter-extremism

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[36] On the issues associated with securitisation of Muslim communities in Britain, see Brown 2010.

agenda, the MCB expected the government to 'be more understanding of how [Muslim] communities' dynamics work, of how faith works …of how religions can be quite conservative, quite extreme, without being dangerous' (Ibid).

A case for contention

The difference in expectations revealed how a securitised dimension of faith had created a considerable obstacle for the MCB's cooperation with the government. The lack of agreement on combating terrorism marked an end to the government's experiment of engaging with a single Muslim umbrella organisation. The MCB leaders were still listened to and consulted on a number of issues, including the 'Prevent' agenda. However, there were signs that they were no longer treated as a leading authority on Muslim interests. In a short space of time, close cooperation between the MCB and the government changed into a relationship increasingly underlined by disagreement.

A clear consequence of the government's disapproval of the MCB was a gradual process of distancing itself from the institution by not inviting it to meetings. In July 2005, senior members of the MCB were still invited to a roundtable meeting chaired by the Prime Minister to announce the formation of the 'Preventing Extremism Together' Working Groups (Sacranie 2006). However, a year later the MCB was already excluded from taking part in consultations led by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion. While the MCB welcomed 'the inclusion of a commissioner representing the Hindu Forum of Britain' it felt 'puzzled by the absence of a representative from the Muslim community's largest umbrella body' (MCB 2007a).

The findings of the Commission had two major implications for the MCB's engagement with the government. First, it criticised previous patterns of engagement with older community leaders who were viewed as 'self-styled and appointed and ultimately not strongly representative' (Commission on Integration and Cohesion

2007: 40).[37] Second, it suggested that New Labour's original focus on faith communities might have been too narrow and contributed to social segregation. While it praised the interfaith work and recognised that '[f]aith groups and leaders…play a vital part in promoting harmony and understanding between faiths', it also noted that 'a majority of the population see religion more as a force for division than for understanding' and that there is a 'tendency to emphasis religious identities to the exclusion of other identities' (Ibid: 50).

The MCB's earlier refusal to attend a Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) played an important role in Labour ministers distancing themselves from the Council. The MCB maintained that its initial refusal to attend the commemoration was motivated by conviction that it should have been called 'Genocide Memorial Day' which would mean making 'no distinction between genocides undertaken against people of other religions and ethnicity' (Bunglawala 2005). Although the interview data indicates that the MCB's affiliates were split on the issue, the final decision to continue the boycott had a damaging effect on its relations with the government.

Whether the government was following its own convictions, or was responding to the pressure from the media and right-wing think-tanks, the MCB's decision to boycott the HMD in 2006 was taken as further proof that the Council was no longer fit to engage with. As a result, the government embarked on working with other Muslims groups, such as the Sufi Council and British Muslim Forum which were deemed to be apolitical. The later years of the Labour administration were to show that these efforts did not yield the desired results either and the government's cooperation with these two groups ceased too. However, these were the first steps the government took to diversify its engagement with Muslim organisations, recognising the need 'to engage with Muslims in plural ways' (Interview 24).

The British pluralist context provided further opportunities for the government to address the issues of extremism through alternative community arrangements without

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[37] The historical legacies of the MCB's roots and style of leadership will be discussed in the next chapter.

relying on umbrella bodies such as the MCB. As was mentioned earlier, a key feature of the British pluralist context is a well-developed network of civil society organisations with a variety of agendas, political and religious and secular preoccupations. Following that crucial consultation to which the MCB was not invited, the Commission on Integration and Cohesion produced a report which paved a way for a broader engagement with women and youth organisations.

The government's distribution of funds through the 'Prevent' agenda was a direct result of the decisions formulated in the Report that 'all future grants to ethnic and religious groups are to be assessed against tests of promoting cohesion and integration' (Commission on Integration and Cohesion 2007: 51). The MCB was no longer believed to pass that test. A diversity of community organisations enabled the government to reverse its policies and widen its list of partners to the apparent detriment of the MCB. A change in personal relations between the government officials and the MCB leaders has led to a further deterioration in their interaction.

Personal relations between government officials and the MCB leaders had a positive impact on the MCB's negotiations with the government in the early period of the New Labour's administration. In the previous section I explored how informal structures of close ties and matched expectations created opportunities to resolve potential issues on religious matters. This was to change after the 7/7, which coincided with Ruth Kelly (2006-2007) and then Hazel Blears (2007-2009) being in charge of Communities and Local Government affairs. A series of rather confrontational exchanges demonstrate the extent to which personal relations deteriorated over the period leading to the government's disengagement from the MCB as its strategic partner.

For example, in her earlier capacity as Police and Counter Terrorism Minister, (2003-2006), Hazel Blears defended the disproportionate use of counter-terrorist powers against Muslim communities on the grounds of the threat from 'people associated with an extreme form of Islam' (House of Commons 2005: 46). The MCB noted that 'the characterisation of British Muslims as a 'problem community' in much

of …the media and through statements made by government and police officials have contributed to an undoubtedly growing anti-Muslim climate in the UK.' (MCB 2005).

A brief analysis of Ruth Kelly's speech made on 11 October 2006 and the MCB's response to it on 14 October 2006 illustrate the extent to which personal relations had broken down. The speech entitled 'Britain: our values, our responsibilities' was aimed at engaging a wide range of Muslim organisations to work together with the government to tackle extremism. Although the MCB was also invited, its leaders were reportedly unable to attend due to a previously organised meeting with Home Secretary John Reid at the Home Office the same day (Bari 2006). In her speech, Kelly reconfirmed a change in government policy in tackling extremism. However, on closer inspection she also offered an explanation as to why the government decided to scale down its engagement with the MCB.

Highlighting successful joint ventures between the government and Muslim communities, she first emphasised the government's contribution to 'protect people from discrimination on the basis of faith at work and in their day to day lives' (Kelly 2006). She recalled that it was Labour which had supported Muslim efforts to pass the Religious Hatred legislation in 2006 and went on to criticise the MCB's own stance on religious tolerance and its unwillingness to attend the HMD. No specific organisations were mentioned in the speech. However, such words like 'some people who don't feel it right to join in the commemorations of HMD even though it has helped raise awareness not just of the Jewish holocaust, but also more contemporary atrocities like the Rwanda genocide' appear to have been mainly directed at the MCB (Ibid). The speech called for 'a fundamental rebalancing of…the relationship with Muslim organisations' (Ibid). This marked a key shift from corporatist-style cooperation with one official interlocutor towards increased diversification of government engagement with a variety of Muslim organisations:

> I am clear that our strategy of funding and engagement must shift
> significantly towards those organisations that are taking a proactive

leadership role in tackling extremism and defending our shared values (Ibid).

The MCB replied with a detailed letter written by Muhammad Abdul Bari, the MCB's Secretary General from 2006 to 2010, aimed at rebuking some of the accusations. It reconfirmed the MCB's commitment to 'combat extremism and safeguard our society' by citing instances when it spoke strongly against terrorism following 9/11 and 7/7 (Bari 2006). The overall tone of the letter was balanced and non-confrontational. However, its frustration was made clear by finding it 'most patronising to be lectured in this way' (Ibid). The MCB challenged the government on the issue of equal and fair treatment of Muslim communities. It merged its own concerns of being 'side-lined' by the government with the 'ministerial statements stigmatising' Muslim communities (Ibid).

It sought to indicate that by disengaging from their own organisation, the government would damage its relations with Muslim communities as a whole. By positioning itself as 'a responsible representative organisation', it wished to reassure the government that it 'reflect[ed] the views of its constituents fairly' and if those views were 'unpalatable to the government of the day, so be it' (Ibid). While acknowledging the government's right to 'speak to a wide range of Muslim organisations' the MCB questioned the strategy of rewarding with public funds 'only those [organisations] who support…the government' (Ibid). The letter also warned of the need to 'distinguish the mainstream, democratically-constituted Muslim bodies from the mavericks' (Ibid) – possibly hinting at the newly-endorsed Sufi Council.

These statements help elucidate some of the issues which contributed to the growing tensions between the government and the MCB, including concerns over foreign policy, counter-terrorism and distribution of funds for Muslim community projects. However, there was also a sense of betrayed expectations which illustrated the extent to which informal connections broke down. Relations between the government and the MCB deteriorated further in 2009 when the MCB's Deputy Secretary General Daud Abdullah signed the 'Istanbul Declaration' which justified violence against

Israel and British troops. One of the interviewees provided a sober assessment on this development by commenting that 'first the MCB fell into a trap of being too close to the Labour Party and secondly, they managed to fall out with them as well'(Interview 33).

Mobilising rhetoric and opportunities for new alliances

The deteriorating relations with the government inadvertently encouraged the MCB to reclaim its original status of a social movement organisation, campaigning on behalf of Muslim communities and acting as a challenger rather than a simple endorser of government policies. Through its previous engagement with the government it had gained access to institutional channels of lobbying officials, organising public events, responding to consultations on the issues of Islamophobia and integration, cohesion and extremism. The MCB's discourse during the growing escalation with the government remained within the institutional bounds of peaceful contention. However, its tone became increasingly critical and adversarial. On one hand, it was aware of the need to 'maintain a very strong, good relationship with the government' to communicate Muslim interests (Interview 31). On the other hand, it was aware of its responsibilities to its grassroots supporters, as articulated in its Constitution (MCB Constitution 2002).

As will be discussed in the next chapter, the MCB sought to mobilise its affiliates and supporters on most salient issues to legitimise its actions in the eyes of Muslim communities. However, the same issues created most friction with the government, particularly concerning the couther-terrorist agenda. The MCB appeared to be no longer willing to endorse government policies but was keen to shape them by offering its critique. For example, in reference to Prevent, Iqbal Sacranie (2006: 6) noted that:

> Instead of dealing with the underlying factors, isolating the
> pathogen and treating it with the strongest medicine, it is the

> Muslim community itself, all of the 1.6 million or more, which seems to have become the subject of mass medication.

As discursive framing theories suggest, the MCB used a classic triple frame of collective action by focusing on the salient and resonant issue, apportioning the blame and finally suggesting what needed to be done to get the issue resolved. The MCB Memorandum on the 'Prevent' agenda provides a good illustration of how it framed its discourse to challenge the government's actions and mobilise support for a better treatment of British Muslims. First, the Muslim community was presented as suffering from unfair treatment through the excesses of what the MCB called 'securitisation of integration' as if mirroring some of the securitisation discourse adapted by the government (MCB Memorandum 2009: 2). It then apportioned blame on the government by criticising the 'Prevent' agenda on the grounds that it 'has not minimised extremism but has instead proved to be counter-productive' (Ibid: 2). Finally, it urged the government to take its contribution to the consultation seriously and 'actively seek to rectify the damage done that has inevitably distanced the Muslim Community further from engagement on tackling extremism' (Ibid: 5).

A similar approach was later used by Bari, who criticised the 'Prevent' programme for being 'divisive in its engagement with Muslims, rather than fostering and promoting the diversity of British Muslims' (MCB Annual Report 2009-2010: 6). He accused the government of 'forcing' the MCB to become increasingly sectarian by dictating to Muslim communities which forms of Islam to adapt (Ibid). Moreover, he highlighted the influence of the 'right-wing pundits' on the government, as if challenging it to stop listening to the negative representation of the MCB provided by the media.

The idea of the government 'determining which forms of Islam are better' was reminiscent of the previous strong statements made by Iqbal Sacranie. In an effort to resist the government's attempt to impose a 'problematic category' on the Muslim community by delineating the ideological component of radical Islam from its moderate forms and criticising its policy of dividing Muslims into moderate and

radical, the MCB pointed out the inappropriateness of the term 'Islamic terrorism' (Sacranie 2005b). Moreover, Sacranie criticised the media and political leaders for juxtaposing the labels such as 'moderate', 'Islamist', or 'extremist' as a way to impose a 'reformation' in Islam like that experienced by Christianity' (Sacranie 2005a). He also criticised 'some think tanks' of attaching 'misplaced categories' and preaching to Muslim communities 'what is right or wrong with Islam' (Ibid). While this could be seen as a purely defensive action against the increasingly damaging reports on the MCB provided by neo-conservative think tanks (e.g. Policy Exchange), it was also an attempt to turn the tables on the government discourse on moderate and radical Islam and criticise the securitisation of the Muslim faith.

Mirroring the government's move to diversify its partners, the MCB took steps to reconnect with civil society organisations. Although this reveals the extent to which the MCB may have felt isolated, it provided an opportunity to improve its standing by building alliances with other partners and thus remain independent of the government. The British pluralist context with a large number of different civil society organisations, Muslim and non-Muslim, religious and non-religious, offered the MCB alternative platforms to articulate Muslim interests and demands for equal treatment. For example, the MCB continued to increase its engagement with other faiths, as was demonstrated by high-level public events such as the Interfaith Harmony Week at the House of Lords.

The MCB was also one of the founding members of the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB) endorsed by the government in 2005. Although the work of the MINAB has been criticised, it allowed the MCB to engage with the government on the issues of mosques, terrorism and extremism together with different and often competing Muslim organisations, within the institutional setting. In spite of its 'narrow remit and not enough trust between actors involved' (Interview 28), the MINAB offered the MCB an important safety-net to ensure that the government could not side-line it.

The MCB has become increasingly aware of the need to institutionalise more within mainstream society and not be accused of being too narrow and sectarian. Following the break-up with the government, it worked hard to build new links with London local authorities and the Mayor's office, as well as National Union of Students and the National Youth Agency (Bari 2007). Another alliance was struck with the TUC when an understanding was reached to 'resolutely fight Islamophobia and all forms of discrimination' (Ibid: 2). The MCB particularly welcomed the TUC support shown in response to the Conservative Party report which offered stern criticism of the MCB. During this period, the MCB made little effort to engage with the Conservative Party due to its left-wing preferences. While explaining its efforts to build new alliances Bari (2007) noted with a degree of cynicism that:

> to a large extent ignoring the politically motivated discourse from Whitehall and Westminster village we have decided to invest our time and efforts in cultivating more friends within civil society and strengthening our existing links with the community at large.

Personal connections would become important once again towards the end of the Labour administration as there was a gradual improvement in the MCB's relations with the government. By 2010 Farooq Murad was elected as the MCB's new Secretary General and John Denham became Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. There were signs that the MCB was still considered as an important Muslim voice. While the MCB showed its support for British forces abroad and its determination to build better relations with the Jewish community through interfaith dialogue (as well as officially ending its boycott of the HMD), Labour ministers demonstrated willingness to re-engage with the MCB by speaking at some of its events.

While the MCB was successful in strengthening its alliance with the TUC and improving its relations with left-wing politicians, the Council's openly poor relations with the Conservative Party may have proved rather costly, following the formation of the Coalition government and the Conservatives taking charge of the Department for Community and Local Government. The extent to which the MCB succeeded in

continuing to mobilise public opinion for treating Muslim communities equally and fairly within an increasingly diversified and pluralist context under the Coalition government will be discussed in the next section.

The MCB and the Coalition: pluralising faith

When the Coalition government took office in 2010, its engagement with Muslim communities was in some ways reminiscent of the Labour administration in its final years, particularly on the issues of security and anti-Muslim crime. The MCB's cooperation with key politicians under the Coalition was also subject to a similar combination of opportunities and constraints, namely the presence of a shared agenda and the existence or lack of good personal relations. However, it was also complicated by the Coalition's pluralist approach to state-religion relation which manifested itself in increased diversification of interfaith partnerships and its firm policy of non-engagement with Muslim organisations which it considered to be 'Islamist' under the New Prevent Agenda (HM Government 2011).

The issue of faith remained central to the government's engagement with Muslim communities. However, the way it was conceptualised under the Coalition differed from that of the Labour administration. This marked another important shift towards bridging religious differences by empowering local-based community project with the help of the Church of England on one hand, while diversifying state engagement with different religious and non-religious groups on the other. Therefore, the nature of divergence was two-fold. The first aspect involved the Coalition's greater reliance on the Church of England and the Near Neighbours Fund as 'a conducive channel for interfaith' and distribution of funding (Interview 28).[38] The second shift was a re-introduction of local-level initiatives and efforts. Some respondents saw these developments as 'a return to the status quo ante of the early 1990s' (Ibid). Before

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[38] Near Neighbours is a programme launched in 2011 and funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government. It provides small community grants for joint projects between different religious and ethnic groups and local organisations.

discussing the ways in which the MCB tried to navigate the changed political landscape, it is important to briefly outline the nature of state-religion relations under the Coalition.

The government's relations with faith-based organisations were delegated to the Faith Engagement team under the leadership of Baroness Sayeeda Warsi in the Department for Communities and Local Government. The Department was entrusted with providing 'expertise for colleagues across Whitehall, facilitating productive contacts between faith representatives and civil servants on policy areas' (Hawkins 2013). It primarily engaged in 'defending the value of religious belief' and 'working with communities and colleagues in other Departments to tackle religious hate crime and support its victims'(Ibid). There was also an increased focus on interfaith dialogue and cooperation between different faith communities and their organisations, particularly on the local level.

In their research on Muslim representation, O'Toole et al. (2013) emphasised a link between the Coalition's approach to faith and its principal project, the 'Big Society's renewed interest in interfaith work. While the 'Near Neighbours' programme was administered in close cooperation with the Church of England, a key change was a shift from delivering individual faith-based projects to building interfaith partnerships. While not all Muslim representatives were happy with the arrangement, many organisations welcomed it on the grounds that the established Church provided a degree of protection against advancing secularism. For example, the MCB's leading figure on Mosques and Community Affairs, Ibrahim Mogra, spoke favourably of the programme (Ibid: 50-51). My research also suggested that while cooperation between different faiths was not new, a stronger engagement between different faith organisations supported by increased funding was seen as an important step to break the barriers between different communities.

An important aspect of the Coalition's engagement with faith was its ideological departure from Labour's corporatist patterns and a renewed preference for a local, decentralised approach. Centrally-controlled practices inspired by New Labour

ideology gave way to the Big Society's support of localities and civil society initiatives. A clear illustration of the Coalition's strategy of empowering local authorities was introduced in the paper outlining the government's integration strategy:

> Integration is achieved when neighbourhoods, families and individuals come together on issues which matter to them, and so we are committed to rebalancing activity from centrally-led to locally-led action and from the public to the voluntary and private sectors (Communities and Local Government 2012: 2).

The distinction was also acknowledged by Muslim representatives. In the words of one respondent, the Coalition government did not believe in 'engaging with people through representative organisations…so it ignore[d] any kind of institutionalised attempt to engage with the Muslim community' (Interview 33). Muslims were increasingly seen as citizens, who have the same access to members of parliament and do not require any particular representative organisation to voice their interests (Ibid). A similar view was expressed by a member of the House of Lords, who noted that unlike France or Germany, in Britain 'we don't understand representation in terms of corporate structures' (Interview 32). Labour's desire to set up a formal consultative machinery for meeting regularly with Muslim organisations may have been beneficial for the MCB's earlier efforts to position itself as a leading community voice, engaged in collective Muslim representation. However, the Coalition's preference for a more individualistic approach based on a variety of partners resulted in the re-pluralisation of state-Muslim relations. The MCB found itself increasingly in the situation where it has had to diversify its own engagement and widen its network of civil society partners.

The MCB's efforts to re-engage with civil society

The MCB took a number of steps to lobby the government and articulate Muslim claims by using shared channels and platforms of civic engagement. Although this

may have revealed the extent to which the MCB was no longer in direct contact with the government, it has provided an opportunity to improve its standing by building alliances with other political networks. In his address to the MCB's General Assembly in 2012, the MCB's Secretary General, Farooq Murad, emphasised the need to 'build meaningful bridges' to overcome 'ignorance and mistrust and exploitation by certain groups and individuals for their self-interest' (Murad 2012). He also urged the MCB's affiliates to refocus their lobbying activities, to 'strategise and choose where to place our voice' (Ibid). The research suggests the MCB has become increasingly sensitive to the changing landscape of state-Muslim relations and sought to adapt its own discourse to new rules of pluralist representation.

Close cooperation with the Church of England helped unlock some government funding through the 'Near Neighbours' programme. Additionally, the MCB continued to build bridges with other faiths, particularly through its leaders' personal contacts in the House of Lords, as was exemplified by annual public events such as Interfaith Harmony Week at the House of Lords, mentioned earlier. Speaking at the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week, Farooq Murad emphasised the MCB's commitment to 'working together with all faith communities' and building trust 'on the common values of peace and harmony' (MCB 2012a).

Increased engagement with Muslim peers as well as extending its network of allies created an opportunity to promote a positive image of British Muslims and attract attention to the challenges of Islamophobia. Moreover, active participation in these high-level events showed that the MCB was still invited to the Parliament and was not side-lined by the British political establishment. In his article on the British government's engagement with Muslim organisations, Bari highlighted the rather controversial nature of the government's alleged disengagement from such organisations as the MCB by noting that 'while senior Muslim leaders continue to attend and speak at events in Parliament, the official position is that there is no 'formal' dealing with the bodies that organise them' (Bari 2012).

The MCB's own press department was keen to underline that they were actively engaged in British politics. For example, in November 2012, the MCB hosted the Eid Reception in Whitehall to celebrate not only the Muslim festival, but also engage in interfaith dialogue. It was important for the MCB that the event was attended by politicians, interfaith leaders and business representatives. A more recent example was the closing reception at the World Islamic Forum in London, held at the House of Lords in November 2013. Similarly, the MCB's press release drew attention to high-level guests and the MCB's contribution to the event. Focusing on the importance of 'addressing poverty in the third world countries… and building a just, peaceful and cohesive society' Farooq Murad reiterated that the same concerns were 'at the heart of the vision of the Muslim Council of Britain' (MCB 2013b).

The MCB tried to bridge the gap between its affiliates and the Conservative Party by emphasising its organisational diversity, maturity and openness to different political perspectives. Calling for inclusive politics, Bari (2012) argued that although many Muslims were 'traditionally Labour supporters' they were 'fast-learning the nuances and reality of British politics' which was for example illustrated by the creation of Conservative Muslim Forum. He went on to add that:

> [a]lthough Muslims are still under-represented in the Westminster village, we now have this presence in the Conservative Party and among the Liberal Democrats, too, as well as Labour. This is a natural progression: we – as a 'community of communities' – are maturing (Ibid).

The MCB's own engagement with the Coalition government and its Conservative ministers was also more nuanced. While there was no official interaction between the governments' leading figures and the MCB leaders, engagement took the form of informal relations between the MCB and the Department for Communities and Local Government. As before, personal connections and friendly relations played a key role in normalising the MCB's engagement with government officials. The following brief analysis of the MCB's engagement with Baroness Warsi (Minister of State for Faith and Communities 2012 to date) and Eric Pickles (Secretary of State for

Communities and Local Government 2010 to date) suggests that any prospect of cooperation rested on mutually-accepted expectations and personal connections.

Fighting Islamophobia

The desire to combat Islamophobia provided a particular meeting point for the MCB and the Coalition. Allen's research suggests that in its approach to dealing with hate crime, the Coalition government engaged more with the issue of Islamophobia than the previous Labour administrations (Allen 2013). He maintains that by moving away from the idea of equality as conceptualised by New Labour, the problem of Islamophobia was aligned with manifestations of general hatred against any religion (Ibid: 7). The establishment of such cross-sectional platforms as the All Party Parliamentary Group on Islamophobia, the Cross-Government Working Group on Anti-Muslim Hatred and TELL MAMA (a public service for measuring anti-Muslim attacks) was in line with the Coalition's pluralist approach to enhancing integration and social cohesion. However, it has also provided an opportunity to address the problem of anti-Muslim crime within the broader agenda.

Baroness Warsi's approach to faith reflected the Coalition's Conservative approach of 'doing religion' not on the basis of guaranteeing equality of individual faiths as bounded categories (New Labour's approach), but rather as a way of defending individual citizens against any acts of hatred, regardless of their religion. Reportedly, in her capacity as Shadow Minister for Community Cohesion (2007-2010), she had already criticised Labour's initiative to set up a Young Muslims Advisory Group, on the grounds that this had been 'another example of the Government engaging with the British Muslim communities on the basis purely of their faith' rather than considering other issues facing young people such as 'drugs, unemployment and housing' (Warsi 2008). Arguably, in her new mediatory capacity, she provided the missing link between the Coalition and the MCB, particularly by praising the efforts of both parties on the issue of Islamophobia. In 2011, she made her famous speech in which she claimed that 'Islamophobia ha[d] now passed the dinner-table-test' to

become socially acceptable in Britain (Warsi 2011). The MCB praised the renewed interest in condemning Islamophobia and welcomed Baroness Warsi's criticisms of the media in 'normalising Islamophobia' (Murad 2011a).

The tragic events of the Lee Rigby murder and the Woolwich crisis in 2013 provided an opportunity to reconcile some of the differences between the MCB and the British government.[39] While criticising Labour for their 'hyperbolic statements about the war on terror and questioning the usefulness of a 'them and us' mentality', Baroness Warsi praised David Cameron for being 'statesmanlike and sensible, careful to use non-emotional language [and] very protective of Britain's Muslim community' (cited in O'Done 2013). Similarly, she spoke highly of the MCB's response to the Woolwich attack and gave the Council some positive publicity in the media. In her interviews to the press, she highlighted the speed and the manner in which the MCB condemned the attack, indicating that 'Muslim spokesmen are not tacitly supporting *jihadists* in our midst' and 'the Council has learned from its past mistakes' (Ibid).

The MCB continued to cite and welcome Baroness Warsi's positive statements on its contribution to society as a 'Muslim organisation with British values' and applauded her 'firm response to some Islamophobic assertions in the House of Lords made by the former leader of the UK Independence Party' (MCB 2013c). These verbal and written exchanges may not have signalled full-scale cooperation between the Coalition government and the MCB. However, they indicated that shared positions, backed up by personal relations provided good opportunities for dialogue.

A joint condemnation of Islamophobia has led to a degree of cooperation between the MCB's leaders and senior politicians. However, the nature and the scope of efforts required to deal with a security-sensitive wave of anti-Muslim violence was a different matter. A brief illustration of the MCB's correspondence with Eric Pickles

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[39] Lee Rigby of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers was attacked and killed by Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale in Woolwich, southeast London on 22 May 2013. On anti-Muslim attacks, see *Independent* (2013).

reveals some of these differences on combating terrorism in its different forms. Following the murder of Lee Rigby and the ensuing wave of anti-Muslim crimes in the West Midlands, the MCB wrote a series of letters, including one to Eric Pickles and the other to Home Secretary Theresa May.

In his capacity as MCB Secretary General, Farooq Murad raised a series of concerns collected from its affiliates on the lack of national response to these hate crimes (Murad 2013a). The importance of these letters for the MCB's communication with the government was two-fold. First, it revealed that the MCB saw the issue of anti-Muslim hatred as a matter of national, rather than local security. Second, it showed that in light of the seriousness of the incidents, the MCB wished to re-establish a more direct engagement with the government. Acknowledging that any 'formal response from the government to the MCB has been muted in the last three years' the MCB leader emphasised that the organisation was ready to 'extend…hand of cooperation and work…together in this regard' (Ibid).

A copy of the same letter was sent to the Home Office, suggesting the need to 'meet…as soon as possible to discuss and agree a strategy to ensure peace and harmony are maintained within our communities' (Murad 2013b). The same day, the MCB's leader issued a press statement, calling for a 'coordinated, national response to ensure that these sorts of attacks never happen again' (MCB 2013a). He went on to question the government's response to the escalation in anti-Muslim violence by adding that '[i]t cannot be right that a minority community is allowed to be targeted in this manner' (Ibid). In response to Farooq Murad's letter, Eric Pickles (2013b) reassured the MCB that the government strongly condemned the attacks and their words 'received coverage in national press and was published online by several mosques.' He mentioned the role of Baroness Warsi in officially condemning the attacks and collecting views on what more can be done by the government. He added that his Department has funded the 'Tell MAMA' project as a way of tackling anti-Muslim hatred' and supported multi-faith *iftars* (evening meals) during Ramadan (Ibid).

Moreover, as a way of demonstrating that the MCB's previous claims had not gone unanswered, Eric Pickles recalled that the government had 'funded the first ever Srebrenica Memorial Day event to commemorate the genocide…to warn of the consequences of when religious hate crime and intolerance goes unchallenged' (Ibid). This was one of the key issues the MCB had campaigned on in the past. And yet, the fairly dry tone of the letter suggested that the Department preferred to remain neutral in its engagement with the MCB. There was little indication in the letter that the MCB's invitation to work together had been accepted. Instead, the MCB was treated as one of many important Muslim voices representing a segment of Muslim population. This was reinforced by the final words of the letter:

> I hope this reassures you of our commitment to preventing and addressing hatred and extremism and hope you will communicate these assurances to your affiliates (Ibid).

Moreover, there was no indication that there would be a coordinated national response to protect Muslim communities as proposed by the MCB. There was a shared understanding that such types of incidents should not be allowed to happen. There was, however, little agreement on whether this was a matter of national or local importance. As was suggested earlier, the Coalition's approach to engaging with faith communities was rooted in finding local solutions. In his earlier speech on integration, Eric Pickles (2013a) made it clear that the Coalition's position on faith was that it 'provide[d] a moral compass' and helped 'galvanise our communities.' However, unlike its predecessors, there was a strong belief that 'integration occurs locally and can't be imposed by Whitehall' (Ibid).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined the extent to which the MCB's engagement with the British state has conformed to the pluralist expectations of state-religion relations. The data indicated that the Council's relations with the government underwent a series of changes, from close cooperation to increased co-optation and

disengagement, followed by partial re-engagement but on rather different terms. The pluralist nature of state-Muslim relations should have made it difficult for the MCB to monopolise the status of the sole representative of Muslim interests vis-à-vis the government. However, the nature of relations was altered by changes that took place in state involvement in religious matters and attempts to pacify religious cleavages by mainstreaming faith in public policies. The growing importance of a new Muslim religious category was partly the result of guaranteeing equality of religious representation, partly a convergence in Muslim expectations and New Labour's ideology concerning mainstreaming faith. The second shift entailed securitisation of the Muslim faith, tighter controls on Muslim communities and co-optation of its leaders. Whereas the first shift facilitated the MCB's engagement with the government, the second caused friction and resulted in disengagement.

In line with theoretical expectations, the data supports the idea that formal and informal constraints have created a series of new rules which shaped the breakdown in the relationship. Some of the more formal constraints involved a gradual return to pluralist forms of engagement with a wide number of organisations, a process in which the MCB found itself increasingly side-lined by the government. However, the data also suggests that it was the availability of strong allies (on both sides) and a failure of personal relations which provided more volatile constraints and ultimately deepened a sense of crisis. The MCB leaders responded to the changed environment by openly challenging the government and using the securitisation of Muslim faith as a powerful mobilising strategy aimed at partially recovering its authority within the Muslim communities (as will be discussed in the next chapter). The process of politicisation and later securitisation of the Muslim faith provided the MCB with salient issues on which to lobby the government. The MCB's rhetoric was also transformed from integrationist to adversarial as it became increasingly frustrated with the government's counter-terrorist policies.

A change in informal structures had positive as well as negative repercussions on the process of engagement. During the rather short period of corporatist approaches to mainstreaming faith in public policy, the MCB's personal connections with the

government were shaped by similar expectations. However, following considerable disagreements over the 'Prevent' agenda, a breakdown in personal communications proved damaging and reinforced the already weakened cooperation. Finally, a change in alliance structures provided the MCB with a more graceful exit strategy from the relationship with the government which was no longer fruitful. By working with other Muslim, interfaith and mainstream networks the MCB managed to remedy some of the damaging effects of the broken relationship with the government.

Over the last fifteen years, the MCB's engagement with the government appears to have come full circle. A final shift in the MCB's engagement with the government came under the Coalition. Under the new Coalition government, the Conservative approach implies treating Muslims as individual citizens with the same access to mainstream channel of representation as anybody else, rather than engaging with them as a distinct group. It does not believe in block-representation and does not favour any institutionalised attempt to engage with Muslim community or to repeat the experiments of the Labour Party. This has placed considerable constraints on the MCB, making its traditional mediatory function between the state and Muslim communities somewhat redundant.

The MCB may have fallen out of favour with the government. However, in spite of clear differences of opinion between the MCB and the Coalition on the importance of local and national approaches, by 2013 the Council proved to be resilient in adapting to the changing environment by entering into new partnerships, particularly within the interfaith initiatives and civil society organisations. The extent to which the MCB showed similar flexibility in building support from Muslim civil organisations and legitimising itself in the eyes of British Muslims will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

The MCB's engagement with Muslim communities

Introduction

The previous chapter examined the MCB's relations with the British state in light of the changing political opportunities and constraints of pluralist patterns of state-religion relations and processes of mainstreaming and securitising Muslim faith. The MCB's rather complex relationship with the Labour administration threatened to alienate some of its supporters among British Muslims, while the proliferation of alternative platforms for community engagement, particularly under the Coalition government, challenged the MCB's status as a key partner in state-Muslim relations.

Over the last two decades the nature of Muslim minorities in Britain has become increasingly diverse in terms of Muslim perspectives and internal composition. In this chapter I will examine the MCB's engagement with Muslim communities and the ways in which it sought to improve its legitimacy in light of past and present patterns of Muslim representation in Britain. I will explore the extent to which the MCB has come to resemble an institutionalised interest group characterised by 'the moderation of its goals, the conventionalisation of its action repertoire, and its integration into established systems of interest intermediation' (Kriesi 1996: 156). In order to understand how and under which conditions the MCB has tried to integrate itself with its constituents I will examine a series of political, social and historic factors which have shaped the MCB's engagement with an increasingly discerning and diverse British *ummah* (Islamic community).

I will apply insights from organisational and social movement theories to examine the ways in which the MCB tried to improve its legitimacy with Muslim communities by dedicating its resources to the matters of organisational maintenance and bringing its internal institutional practices in line with the pluralist expectations

of the external environment. These assumptions will be explored in light of the empirical data on the changing nature of the Muslim communities and the MCB's activities mainly between 1997 and 2012. In particular, I will focus on the Council's discursive strategies and practical initiatives aimed at representing the growing diversity of Muslim interests and improving its own credibility as an inclusive and democratic institution.

The chapter argues that the MCB sought to reconcile its relations with the government with community expectations for more inclusive representation of Muslim diverse interests. Thus, its internal mobilisation strategies were influenced by the pluralist approach to minority representation and democratic principles of organisational accountability. However, they were also constrained by internal institutional resistance from the previously-institutionalised patterns of power-sharing among Muslim community elders. In the final part of the chapter, I will bring some insights from historical institutionalism to discuss the gradual nature of reforms and possible reasons why some suggestions for constitutional reforms were debated but not necessarily implemented between 2010 and 2012.

The pluralisation of Muslim interests in Britain

The changing nature of Muslim communities over the last two decades created a particular set of challenges for collective representation of Muslim interests in Britain. As was already suggested, internal community divisions and the lack of professional interlocutors capable of articulating Muslim claims and engaging the government and the media in meaningful discussions encouraged Muslim representation through a national umbrella body. The MCB's leaders came together to formulate a collective agenda to defend Muslim rights and speak out on behalf of Muslim communities. However, the same spokesmen would soon come under increasing scrutiny from Muslim communities themselves. A brief outline of the internal pluralisation of Muslim identity and the growing heterogeneity of Muslim

views, affiliations and demands provides an insight into the MCB's fluctuating levels of support within Muslim communities.

Numerous studies have discussed the nature of Muslim communities in Britain in their diversity (Abbas 2006, Ansari 2002, Gilliat-Ray 2010). Similarly, the majority of people I interviewed emphasised the complexity of Muslim pluralist communities first and only then went to discuss the nature of Muslim representation in general and through the MCB in particular. Some also reflected that despite the MCB's attempts to position itself as a non-sectarian, non-partisan institution, it could not fully reflect the diversity of ethnic, religious and generational aspects.

Muslims living in Britain belong to different ethnic, religious and generational groups, with diverse interests, views and expectations. Internal diversity has been predominantly shaped by the changing fortunes and aspirations of migrant groups who have settled in Britain and largely integrated into British society over an extended period of time. Britain's colonial legacy created an ethnically diverse Muslim community, with different cultural traditions and religious practices. As was aptly summarised by one of the interviewees:

> We are a community of communities – who have come at different stages with different experiences and different life journeys (Interview 29).

Greater diversity: changes in ethnic, generational and religious demands

The question of Muslim identity and what it means to be a British Muslim has undergone a series of reformulations, not only within the policy sector, but also in public debates on minority representation and discussions in Muslim groups. Previous emphasis on the racial and ethnic dimensions of the Muslim identity was gradually replaced by the need to develop a greater understanding of one's political and religious rights. This shift provided a new openness to embracing the idea of Muslim mobilisation and defending Muslim religious rights. A change occurred in

what Peach (2005: 17) called a 'British discourse on racialised minorities…from 'colour', in the 1950s and 1960s…to race in the 1960s-1980s…[to] ethnicity in the 1990s and religion in the present period.' Although racial and ethnic identity markers were still important, it was a greater urgency to protect the religious element that facilitated a collective effort to represent British Muslims as a bounded faith community. These were the conditions in which the MCB was created as a national umbrella body designed to collectively represent Muslim interests.

Once Muslim communities secured some protection not only against racial prejudices through a series of race relations acts but also got stronger assurances against religious discrimination, the question of the narrowly-defined identity politics and its representative bodies perhaps lost some of its salience. Arguably, a stronger sense of integration of the second and third generation Muslims, coupled with negative representation of Islam in the media and increased policing of Muslim communities, contributed to a sense of fatigue among some British Muslims with being singled out as a particular ethnic or religious group. Moreover, there was a feeling among some young Muslims that particular ethnic or sectarian perspectives went against their sense of belonging to the global *ummah* and the true meaning of Islam (Mandaville 2007).

Multiple interpretations of what it meant to be a British Muslim resulted in complex hyphenated identities co-habiting the same public space. The diversity and plurality of Muslim identities differentiated by ethnic origin, religious school of thought, generational belonging, political views, global outlook or social aspirations produced calls for a more inclusive and diversified representation. Inevitably, this created considerable obstacles for collective and unified representation as originally envisaged by the MCB.

My interview data supports the claim that intra-communal cleavages along ethnic, religious and generational lines have become increasingly nuanced. Muslims from the older generations tend to prioritise the ethnic aspect of identity by emphasising different waves in which migrant communities arrived and conceptualised their

identity. For example, one interviewee commented on one of the more recently arrived ethnic groups, the Somali community. Somalis were 'traumatised as a result of war, lived in Denmark in Scandinavia for 10-15 years and then came here' (Interview 29). By describing them as 'twice migrants', he drew attention to their complex European-British identity and Somali ethnic roots (Ibid).

Some of the interviewees have also pointed to ethnic tensions in relation to the numerical advantage of the Pakistani community living in Britain. Some felt there was a considerable over-representation of Pakistani groups within the MCB which dominated the Council's agenda and its ability to be an all-inclusive organisation. One respondent suggested that the MCB provides representation by size, rather than legitimacy, alluding to its favourable representation of one ethnic interest because it makes up the largest group (Interview 28). Moreover, while many Muslims acknowledge the need to unite on the theological level, 'in practice social interaction has been much along the lines of traditional nationally-based communities because of the social [and] language differences' (Interview 33).

The extent to which a particular religious interest is represented by the MCB is contingent on which 'group they belong to, whether it is their local mosque…or a larger group' and therefore 'it depends on their own group's relationship with the MCB' (Ibid). Some highlighted intra-religious differences and criticised the MCB for being too sympathetic to the Deobandi school of Islam, which is in conflict with a Barelvi tradition that has many followers among British Muslims (Interview 23).[40] Similarly some Shi'a groups felt the MCB did not reflect their interests, particularly when the MCB took a categorical stance defending Zakir Naik, even though his anti-Shi'a and anti-Sufi views were well-known.[41]

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[40] Deobandis emerged in India in the late 1860s, partly as a form of protest against the British colonial rule. Sometimes knows as Muslim revivalism, Deobandis do not recognise Sufi practices and rituals of worshiping the Saints which are widespread among the Barelvi movement. They believe in bringing Muslims back to the earliest practices of Islam, particularly within the context of educational seminaries.
[41] Zakir Nair is the founder of the Islamic Research Foundation and a prominent Islamic speaker. In June 2010, he was banned from entering Britain by Home Secretary Theresa May in light of his

While some respondents acknowledged intra-religious differences, others noted that 'secular voices have become more vocal' (Interview 24). In practice this meant making difficult choices in reconciling their religiously-defined Muslim identity with their increasingly secular British identity. For instance, some previously Islamist organisations such as the Islamic Society of Britain (a key MCB affiliate) began to develop a post-Islamist discourse. One interviewee noted that while it remained 'passionate about Muslim identity' it encouraged people to 'think about their faith in a very rooted, British context' (Interview 27). Policy Exchange (2007: 31) found that 'there [was] no consensus on what a British Islam should be like.' It maintained that 'while some organisations reject the 'Western' mode of democracy and political participation, others push for greater involvement and even celebration of 'Western' ideas' (Ibid).

Finally, generational cleavages provide one of the main obstacles to the MCB's style of community representation, as young Muslims criticise not only the concept of community representation, but also the personal credentials of traditional community leaders. A series of studies of British young Muslims highlight the obvious gap between their views and those of the first generations (Hellyer 2007, Khan 2004). Unlike their parents' generation, which had been primarily concerned with finding ways to build Muslim institutions and be accepted in British society, the younger generation became more politically-minded, with a more global outlook on politics and religion. A Report commissioned by Communities and Local Government (2009: 8) provides a succinct summary of how ethnic and faith identities are mediated through the generational cleavages:

> The significance of ethnicity and faith in relation to identity…is complex. For older generations in particular, affiliations relating to nation, clan, tribe, location of origin can all play as significant a part as faith identity and links with countries of origin remain strong. For younger respondents there are indications of a growing

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controversial statements and extremist views. He was due to address the Al-Khair Peace Conference at Wembley Arena. The ban fuelled the debate on extremism and freedom of speech in Britain. On the MCB's position on the matter, see MCB Annual Report 2011: 13.

religiosity and a more pan-Muslim sense of identity that rejects other ethnic boundaries and practices seen as specific to a cultural group rather than to Islam.

Similar findings on global perspectives and strong religiosity among British Muslim young people were also identified by Lewis (2007), while a collection of articles on young Muslims in Britain argued for a need to recognise further diversity among this group (Hamid 2011). My interview data confirms the growing salience of generational differences and more critical perspectives offered by young Muslims. For example, one respondent commented that younger generations are critical of such institutions as the MCB because they 'do not attach competence to [community-based] institutions', and see community leaders as 'uncles…out of touch…[with] a colonial style of politics which is out of date' (Interview 27). Moreover, what is particularly problematic for the MCB is that some young Muslims tend to reject 'the earlier style of activism' and prefer to 'work through the mainstream', rather than community-based organisations (Ibid).

The growing diversity of Muslim interests undermines the MCB's efforts to mobilise sufficient support for its community-based approach to collective representation. A multitude of internal differences, some more salient than others, challenge the MCB's ability to provide equal representation to various groups. Moreover, they undermine its ability to formulate a unified set of Muslim minority claims. For example, while a Somali community, Shi'a Muslims or young Muslims claim that their interests and concerns are not equally reflected in the MCB's demands and internal processes of making decisions, others argue that the presence of these divisions tend to undermine the MCB's unified position on Muslim issues. One of the interviewees summarised this dilemma as follows:

> The bigger the representational body becomes, the smaller the common denominator and the more secular it has to become, because it cannot touch on sectarian or religious issues, because they would be divisive. On the other hand, the narrower it is, the more contentious, the more political it can be (Interview 28).

Whereas the MCB positions itself as a non-sectarian, non-partisan organisation, some question the extent to which it can 'breach those ethnic, sectarian or regional cleavages in the Muslim community' (Ibid). Moreover, opinion polls indicate that while the MCB campaigns for greater Muslim unity, the level of support remains low. According to the *Populus* poll, 'few Muslims think that the 'self-appointed groups that claim to speak on behalf of British Muslims actually represent them' (cited in UK Polling Report 2006).[42] Similarly, only 7% of Muslims felt that their viewpoint was represented by the MCB (Populus 2006). Although this percentage is very low, the MCB scored the highest out of the suggested Muslim organisations, which included the Islamic Society of Britain, the Muslim Association of Britain, the British Muslim Forum, and the Progressive British Muslims. 52% said none of the suggested community-based organisations represented their views (Ibid).

This disillusionment in community leaders corresponds to a more general sense of rejection of essentialised forms of community representation. In the rather pessimistic words of one of the respondents, 'most Muslims do not think there is anybody else who is most representative, but many of them do not think very strongly of the MCB as representing them' (Interview 33). The changing nature of Muslim communities and pluralisation of interests created a series of complex and demanding expectations towards those claiming to speak on their behalf. Before discussing the ways in which the MCB attempted to (re)-connect with Muslim communities, it is important to review the organisational landscape of Muslim representation in the British pluralist context and a particular set of challenges it has created for the Council.

Collective identity representation: questioning the MCB's legitimacy

Until the late 1980s, the nature of Muslim representation was 'fragmented, localised and concerned with minor issues regarding accommodation for the practice of

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[42] The Poll was conducted between June 2006 and January 2007 and was based on the quantitative survey of 1,003 Muslims in the UK.

religion' (Policy Exchange 2007: 29). Although a number of organisations already campaigned on behalf of British Muslims, including the Union of Muslim Organisations (1970) or more regional bodies like the Bradford Council for Mosques (1981) or the Federation of Muslim Organisations (1984) in Leicester, their representation remained largely local. Moreover, little effort was made to consolidate community leadership due to internal local rivalries (Geaves 2005: 69). This was characteristic not only of the pluralist nature of Muslim communities but also of the British approach to local politics and horizontal preferences for community activism.

The aftermath of the Rushdie Affair tested 'the strengths and weaknesses of a Muslim community leadership grounded in grassroots networks and associations' (McLoughlin 2005: 59). One respondent in the study conducted by Ahmad and Evergeti (2010: 1704) linked the impact of the Rushdie events to the creation of the Muslim community identity by suggesting that 'when you are feeling oppressed… you stand together and you create an identity, a new identity'. Tanuka Loha (Catalyst 2006) suggested that in spite of considerable disparities in life and experiences of different communities, there was a need for 'vocal, accountable representatives' who were able to 'passionately and effectively advocate on behalf of those communities at a time when Muslims [were] being subjected to a particular kind of repression.' The idea of 'community under attack' worked in a similar way in the aftermath of 9/11 and 7/7, leading to a greater sense of solidarity in light of growing Islamophobia. However, this time the need for unity was also be accompanied by the 'call for representation to be reformed and broadened' (Ibid).

A plethora of different, uncoordinated organisations may have originally provided an opportunity for a more unified collective representation. However, it was a gradual development and professionalisation of Muslim organisations through active participation in a variety of identity-based and mainstream civil society initiatives that questioned the legitimacy of representation through a single Muslim body. The research indicates that a wish for more unified community representation based on accommodation of Muslim religious identity was gradually replaced by a more nuanced understanding of what such community leadership should look like. In line

with a series of studies on Muslim attitudes on community institutions and their leaders (Ahmad and Evergeti 2010; Klausen 2005, O'Toole et al 2013) my findings suggest that this shift in community perceptions was largely due to the pluralisation of Muslim interests. One respondent noted, that 'there has been some expansion and differentiation of institutions and … they have become less all things to all men/women and more differentiated and hopefully more professional' (Interview 28). Similarly, another interviewee remarked that:

> we have half a dozen of organisations which have emerged…and it will be fair to say that each organisation represents 'a' view and not a 'total' view…hence you have multiple organisations, they all have a purpose…their view should be taken into account…but also others (Interview 29).

The presence of stronger competition and choice within the pluralist environment contributed to a more discerning and critical Muslim community. The Labour government may have experimented for a while with a corporatist approach to mainstreaming faith, but the presence of multiple channels of interest representation contributed to the MCB's predicament of feeling 'under pressure' not only from above, but also from below. While some doubted the need to represent Muslims as a separate minority group, others voiced regret that the MCB was not 'professionalising fast enough, that it was a small, voluntary and under-funded centre that really struggled to keep up with the demands for an incredible national umbrella body' (Interview 28).

More serious comments were directed at the MCB's lack of democratic processes of representation, such as organisational accountability and transparent elections of community representatives to MCB's General Assembly and the Central Working Committee. For example, Ahmad and Evergeti (2010) emphasised the highly 'contested nature of Muslim representation' as many of their respondents expressed concern about representation through national Muslim organisations. While some gave credence to the MCB as 'an honest, broadly democratic, though over-ambitious

experiment', others questioned the strength and legitimacy of such national forms of representation, particularly in light of 7/7:

> Our leadership is terribly weak, who's come forward here, the same usual suspects, parochial, *biraderi*[43] driven, self-appointed leaders in many senses (Ibid: 1707).

The fact that such criticisms originated from different Muslim groups, religious and secular, liberal and conservative, is also indicative of the changes that took place in the Muslim organisational context. While the establishment of such organisations as the Sufi Council and the British Muslim Forum was supported by the government in the wake of the London bombings in 2005, they did not get the same amount of credibility as the MCB because of their narrow support base. However, their style of interest representation was similar to the community-style leadership of the MCB.

The strongest criticisms of the MCB came from the new, secular-oriented organisations which promoted themselves by capitalising on general disillusionment with the MCB, particularly after the government's u-turn on its engagement with the Council. For example, by distancing themselves from the collective style of Muslim religious representation and highlighting their secular values, Mariyam Namazie, (2007) the founder of the Council of Ex-Muslims in Britain told *BBC News* that:

> The new group will be an alternative voice to bodies like the Muslim Council of Britain…We do not think that people should be pigeonholed as Muslims or deemed to be represented by regressive organisations like the MCB.

Similarly, the chairman of the Muslim Educational Centre of Oxford (MECO) criticised what he called the 'unwarranted credibility' of such bodies like the MCB by claiming that:

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[43] *Biraderi* refers to traditional family, clan-based politics, based on place of origin or family connections, particularly associated with the Pakistani community.

[w]ithout any coherent programme to tackle the real problems facing British Muslims, the MCB…tended to enhance a-socio-religious-dynamic where disaffected youth gravitate to violent reactions that are authenticated by rabidly anti-Western clerics spuriously interpreting the Holy Qur'an' (MECO 2006).

Conversely, radical Muslim groups questioned the MCB's links with mainstream society and refused to see it as a credible institution on the grounds of being too moderate. They made their voices heard by storming the MCB election meeting in 2005 (Reuters 2005).

Although these reactions may have been rather extreme, they reveal a wide spectrum of critical attitudes towards the MCB. Arguably, the most damaging perception of the MCB's style of leadership is a commonly-voiced concern that it lacks democratic legitimacy. Kenan Malik noted that any 'community or group representation is inevitably anti-democratic' as the 'so-called community leaders are generally unelected, self-appointed and unaccountable' (Catalyst 2006). Pluralist patterns of interest mediation encourage strong rivalries among organisations. Muslim groups which have to compete for legitimacy and support within Muslim communities in Britain are no exception.

Organisational strategies to improve inclusiveness and accountability

The previous section focused on a series of changes within Muslim communities and the subsequent discussions on the nature of Muslim identity within the British context. In light of strong criticisms from different segments of the Muslim population and growing pressure from other Muslim organisations to provide independent, differentiated and accountable representation of Muslim interests, the MCB tried to develop a series of practical and discursive strategies to improve its legitimacy. The MCB's most visible initiatives designed to strengthen support within Muslim communities can be divided into two interconnected approaches. The first strategy included incorporating civic and Islamic values of community solidarity,

consultation and empowerment into its daily processes and discourses to present itself as an authoritative organisation that works in the interests of British Muslims. The second approach involved individual measures aimed at widening its own engagement with previously under-represented groups and building connections with leading Muslim members of the business community and civil society.

A key tension in representing Muslim interests is how to reconcile collective representation with the growing demand to represent diversity. The Council's leaders see their role as being community spokesmen who work in close consultation with Muslim communities, while developing particular provisions to empower British Muslims to represent themselves in British society:

> Though diverse – a community of communities – we are united by bonds of faith, and together under the banner of the MCB, committed to seek the common good (Murad 2012).

The MCB's rhetoric used to (re)connect with its grassroots supporters and demonstrate to its critics that its work resonates with Muslim community interests rests on three discursive frames: unity in diversity, consultation and empowerment. The three rhetorical strategies are part of Islamic discourse as well as the rhetoric of civic engagement. Both discourses promote the exchange of different views as well as help building consensus and taking action on the issues relevant to the needs of Muslim communities. They are used to mobilise support and improve the MCB's reputation. The following analysis explores how the MCB justifies and frames its legitimacy as a representative organisation.

As was noted earlier, the Council's discursive strategies developed within the changing pluralist context of interest mediation and were shaped not only by Islamic values, but also by government policies towards faith and the overall competitive environment of civic and religious organisations. Naturally, the MCB's rhetoric concerning community engagement was influenced by the need to adapt to the changing circumstances and the pressing issues of the day. Moreover, the exogenous shocks of the Rushdie Affair and 9/11 created an opportunity for the MCB to provide

leadership for those segments of Muslim communities who believed that they were threatened by Islamophobic attacks in the media and feared that their religious identity was not sufficiently protected by the British political system.

Arguably, this sense of 'community under threat' may have temporarily relegated ethnic or generational differences and created a need for a strong interlocutor which would provide collective representation of Muslim political and religious interests. A study by Pedziwiatr (2007: 12) supports the claim that the MCB tried to 'translate the diverse socio-cultural reality of numerous Muslim communities in the country….into the category of singular Muslim community.' Similarly, Masood (2005) maintains that the MCB sought to 'transcend the different religious groups and present, as far as possible, a single Muslim voice, at least at a political level.'

This was particularly characteristic of the MCB's actions during the earlier period of its closer engagement with the government (1997-2005). However, in the later period, following the aftermath of the London bombings and increased securitisation of the Muslim faith, a previously attractive concept of separate identity politics began to lose some of its popularity within Muslim communities. On one hand, this was partly a result of the government's accommodation and ongoing recognition of Muslim religious rights through legislation. On the other hand, the gradual cooling of relations with the MCB first by the Labour administration and later by the Coalition, accompanied by increasingly critical accounts of its alleged Islamist roots created doubts over the MCB's abilities to provide anything but a rather narrow representation of sectarian interests.

Muslim unity in diversity

In response to these circumstances and the mounting criticisms, the MCB continued to use two inter-related discourses to justify its role in representing Muslim interests. While it sought to emphasise Muslim unity and build consensus it was also increasingly concerned with communicating its awareness of the growing Muslim

diversity. The MCB's statements over the last twenty years reveal a gradual shift in its rhetoric from a singular to pluralist interpretation of Muslim identity. Whereas there is a conviction that the collective identity of British Muslims needs to be recognised and protected in the public sphere and religious governance, there is a greater openness to representing Muslim multiple identities and internal diversity.

The MCB tended to emphasise the unity of different views and perspectives over their diversity. For example, in one of his interviews, Iqbal Sacranie pointed out that the 'most important achievement of the MCB to date [was] to bring together the diverse sections of the community on one platform' (Muslim Weekly 2004). The MCB still uses the idea of British Muslims belonging to a distinct and bounded faith community as a way of drawing attention to the lack of public resources towards some disadvantaged Muslim areas. For example, while commenting on the results of the 2011 Census, Farooq Murad, the MCB's Secretary General, justified the MCB's efforts for collective representation of Muslim religious interests by linking a category-based representation to overall efforts to improve living conditions in deprived areas with a large Muslim population (MCB 2012c).

Therefore, in the context of religious equality, the MCB has continued to represent the needs of the Muslim community as a singular category on the grounds of parity with other faith groups. In his address in 2011, Farooq Murad reminded his grassroots supporters and affiliated institutions that the Muslim community is 'a faith community' and that the 'MCB is the result of extensive consultation on the need for a platform to …work on common issues' (Murad 2011b: 10). However, while justifying its capacity for acting as a platform for equal representation of different Muslim views, the MCB's recent statements also reveal an attempt to embrace diversity and represent different Muslim groups.

The MCB leaders want to promote a collectively acceptable religious and civic representation of Muslim interests. There is an indication that the Council seeks to qualify and re-evaluate its official position through the idea of unity in diversity. On one hand, Muslim unity and solidarity are enshrined in Islamic teaching:

> And hold fast, all of you together, to the rope of Allah, and be not
> divided among yourselves (Qur'an 3: 103).

On the other hand, this is a rather difficult task to achieve within the highly heterogeneous British Muslim environment. The issue of community representation is the notion that allows the MCB to merge its religious principles with democratic aspirations. In the words of one respondent, 'for democracy to work and to cater for everybody effectively, you need to have that intermediary or representative voice for any group of people who have a common agenda or interest' (Interview 31).

The MCB's response to the Conservative Party's Group Report on National Cohesion (2007) reveals the extent to which this has become a sensitive issue for the MCB. Whereas the intended audience was largely external, including some policy research groups which had criticised the MCB in the past, the document provided a clear summary of the Council's robust defence of its values and its contribution to Muslim collective action. The document gave a detailed overview of the MCB's activities and achievements to build a strong defence against the charges of being a reactionary, anti-democratic institution which is unrepresentative of community views (MCB 2007b: 17-20). Although it was careful not to call itself the *most* representative organisation (as it had done on some occasions referring to geographical spread of its affiliates) it claimed to be 'a larger and more vibrant coalition of grassroots organisations' and 'the first democratic British Muslim organisations' with transparent and regular elections and procedures (Ibid: 17).

Moreover, the Council underlined its organisational inclusiveness by defending its reputation as a religiously-oriented, but non-sectarian institution. It rejected being negatively labelled as a narrow Islamist organisation on the grounds that the term was used pejoratively and did not acknowledge 'the difference in political thought and action of all Muslims that derive their inspiration and values from the religion itself' (Ibid: 10). It was keen to emphasise diversity of religious positions it brings together on one platform by highlighting a range of its affiliates and claiming to 'create a space for all schools of thought to be represented, Sufi and Salafi, Shi'a and

Sunni' (Ibid: 9). Finally, it contrasted its work with that of other community organisations by claiming that it supports 'both inter-community and intra-community understanding', including 'speaking out against killing of Shi'a Muslims in Pakistan, or violence against Christians in Muslim lands' (Ibid: 17).

The idea of Muslim solidarity is a recurring leitmotif used by the Council to socialise its active role in representing Muslim interests. For example, the MCB's Secretary General promised that the MCB would work 'to strengthen the bonds of brotherhood and mutual understanding between the different communities of Muslims in Britain' and 'represent Muslims in an authentic, independent, competent and well informed manner…' (MCB 2011c). In his later address the same year, he spoke of the Muslim community being a 'vastly multicultural community', the one with different 'ethnicities, languages, shades and differences of opinions about faith and politics, varieties of food and dress etc.' (Murad 2011b: 6). He used this to demonstrate that the Muslim community 'can be united despite major differences' (Ibid).

There is a growing desire to focus on intra-communal diversity rather than just emphasise the multicultural nature of wider British society and the role Muslim communities play in it. Previously, a stronger emphasis was placed on diversity within *British* society itself. Bari, the MCB's Secretary General at the time, emphasised that one of the MCB's key priorities was 'mainstreaming the diverse Muslim community' (Bari 2008). By comparing individuals to 'multi-coloured flowers that make this earth attractive', he presented his view on the 'essence of unity in diversity' (Ibid). However, the diversity here was implied within the mainstream society rather than within Muslim communities themselves. He went on to stress that 'by diversity we certainly do not mean isolation, segregation or insularity' (Ibid).

A series of subtle discursive shifts illustrate the MCB's attempt to keep up with the changing dynamics of Muslim communities and a pluralised definition of Muslim identity. On one hand, while talking about the issues of Islamophobia or any attempts to marginalise Muslim communities, the MCB evokes common threats facing the

community as a singular entity. On the other hand, a considerable effort is made to win internal support by acknowledging Muslim internal diversity and the need to cooperate with other Muslim organisations. The MCB has tried to show its awareness of other representative voices: the ones which are affiliated to its institution and those which are not, the ones which are religious and those which are secular.

Community consultation

The MCB's political authority is contingent on its ability to placate its critics. A process of consultation enables the MCB to legitimise itself as a community-based actor which listens to different voices within its affiliated institutions and engages with other Muslim interest groups as a 'mandated organisation' (Interview 31). The MCB itself was created as a result of a lengthy process of community consultation. Between 1994 and 1995, the 'National Interim Committee on Muslim Unity'[44] collected detailed information on community expectations on creating a coordinating body which would represent their interests, including media relations, lobbying strategies, leadership and community-based programmes (British Muslims Monthly Survey 1994b: 9)**.**

The key objective of this committee was to consult with a wide range of national, regional and local Muslim organisations on how to build a 'functional unity around the common issues facing the British Muslim community' and 'to provide a common voice for their expression' (Ibid). In one of its founding documents, the MCB stated that 'coordination and unity is now seen as a question of the very survival of the community' (MCB Invitation 1997). By working together for the 'common good', the MCB continues to take part in developing consultation documents and inviting its affiliates to discuss these papers and develop a unified position (MCB Website). For

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[44] The National Interim Committee on Muslim Unity (NICMU) was created on 30 April 1994 under the auspices of the UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs (UKACIA) which had been set up earlier in 1988 to coordinate Muslim protests against Rushdie's book.

example, the MCB undertook a series of consultations on different issues, including the 'Prevent' agenda, interfaith dialogue and social action, and multiculturalism.

For an Islamic organisation the concept of *shura* (consultation) is central to building internal consensus in a democratic and transparent way just as it is for a civic-based organisation. The principle of *shura* is incorporated into the MCB's approach to representation from the very first pages of the 'Invitation' document encouraging new organisations to join its ranks. It presents the MCB as 'an independent body working for the pleasure of Allah to promote consultation, cooperation and coordination on Muslim affairs in the UK' (MCB Invitation 1997: 4).

In the words of one of the MCB's affiliates, the concept of *shura* is very similar to how a Western-type democracy is based on 'elected representatives making collective decisions on people's behalf' (Interview 30). Consultation with its grassroots affiliates allows the MCB to exercise a degree of democracy by providing it with a space to listen to different voices and resolve internal tensions. For example, on several occasions, neither the Federation of Muslim Organisations nor the Islamic Foundation supported the MCB's decision to boycott the Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) which lasted from 2001-2007. However, representatives from both organisations felt that the MCB's organisational structure was loose enough for them to speak their minds and take a different course of action. The data suggests that there is an informal understanding within the MCB that for a democratic organisation to function properly there must be a freedom to disagree and voice contrary opinions, without being forced to leave the organisation.

An additional element of consultation strategy is its informal dimension. In an attempt to build consensus the MCB leadership engages in a series of personal consultations with the key members of its affiliates. For example, a leader of one affiliate can also head a larger affiliated organisation and be consulted by the MCB's leaders in both capacities. On the day-to-day basis this provides a useful mechanism for negotiating and discussing the issues. Informal ties may also prove useful in sharing experiences and introducing best practices from one organisation to another.

Some highlight that 'there is a lot of interaction and support' between the MCB and some of its affiliates (Interview 29). However, others argue that occasionally such informal consultations may also contribute to a particular group of interests dominating the MCB's agenda. This creates an impression that some decisions are taken behind closed doors and are made to suit a particular ethnic group or religious interest within the MCB rather than to benefit the community as a whole. One respondent noted that:

> You have to be aware of the importance of informal connections, rather than formal affiliations. The important thing is personal connections… they are strong (Interview 28).

In line with an Islamic principle of Muslim solidarity, the MCB is ready to work together with other Muslim organisations. For example, the MCB reiterates that it 'will seek a relationship of good-will and mutual respect with all Muslim organisations… [t]he door will remain open for them to join' (MCB Invitation 1997). The MCB also engages with other leading organisations though its involvement in the work of the MINAB. While there are internal rivalries among the founding members of the Board, the data suggests that cooperation through the MINAB is beneficial for the MCB's efforts to improve its reputation. MINAB is believed to provide 'a space where there is genuine dialogue within [the] major factures within the Muslim communities, ethnic and sectarian' (Interview 23). The MCB's participation in the MINAB as a particular arrangement for collective representation of very diverse Muslim interests allows it to overcome its own shortcomings of being viewed as a closed sectarian group.

Muslim empowerment: self-governance and participation

The MCB sees itself as a service provider organisation (Interview 31). Its key contribution to mobilising Muslim claims is to empower Muslim communities to build their own capacities to represent themselves and secure provisions for religious and community practices. The rhetoric of empowerment helps the MCB to position

itself as a proper grassroots organisation which provides bottom-up representation of Muslim interests in the pluralist framework of decentralised civil society and multiple interest groups. This is echoed by general approaches to Islamic activism aiming at changing a negative perception of Muslims and empower Muslim communities living within British society. For example, Tariq Ramadan (2011) has described empowerment as 'spiritual independence, intellectual independence, socio-economic independence and courage.'

In his speech at the MCB's annual event, Ramadan also praised the MCB's active commitment to changing the discriminatory perceptions of Muslim communities externally, as well as highlighting the Council's work to break away from the 'victim mentality' internally (Ramadan 2010). The MCB's rhetoric reveals similar overtones in its approach to building community capacity and enabling Muslim communities not only to represent themselves by practising self-governance, but also to contribute to British society by fulfilling their duties as British citizens:

> Our motivations are underscored by the ethos of enthusing active and civic-minded British Muslims who will contribute to the common good of British society (MCB 2007b: 6).

The MCB's programme dedicated to capacity building of mosques and other Islamic organisations is a clear example of how the Council uses the idea of empowerment to make mosques community-friendly. Key recommendations from its own survey of over 1,000 mosques emphasised the need for the mosques to be more inclusive, while other focused on improving communications between the MCB's affiliates through such programmes as the MCB Community Engagement Week (MCB 2006a). The MCB presented its programme as a strategy to 'empower the community through enhancing support of fund raising activities and investing in infrastructure development of the organisations…to put them firmly on the road to achieve their tasks better in everything they do' (Al-Azami 2007).

In an MCB-endorsed study on the project, Wilkinson (2007) noted that the project's participants praised the organisational efforts to create a 'synthesis of western

managerial expertise and Islamic context.' By merging together practices and discourses of self-governance and Islamic empowerment, the MCB provided a clear illustration of how its work aimed to serve the everyday needs of Muslim communities. In his invitation for all UK mosques to join the programme, Salman Al-Azami (2007) emphasised that in serving the community, the MCB was determined to make mosques more inclusive through the 'active participation of youths and women.'

The MCB's approach to representation through community empowerment suggests that the MCB combined its discursive strategies with practical measures. Further evidence of the MCB's proactive steps to be inclusive of different group interests can be found in its engagement with Muslim women, young people and the business community. While mosques and mosque-based organisations form the backbone of its membership, MCB leaders are also aware of the need to reconnect with a wider range of Muslim interest groups. Because these measures often go underreported in the media, there is a commonly-held belief that the MCB can only provide narrow-based representation.

A brief outline of these measures provides an illustration of the MCB's attempts to build a wider coalition of support. By drawing attention to a degree of continuity in its efforts to 'connect and engage with …grassroots and communities' the MCB's leadership emphasised the need to 'increase participation of women and young people… to strengthen… alliance with civil society…' (Murad 2011b: 5). In other words, it created not only discursive but also actionable opportunities to widen its ranks and improve internal legitimacy.

The MCB was criticised for not having enough women working within its own institutional structures. As will be mentioned in the later chapters, the question of Muslim women being part of the SMR was not as problematic in the Russian context, particularly in light of historic precedents of women taking part in Muslim congresses dating back to 1917. However, different Islamic practices in Britain resulted in women being more under-represented in Muslim organisations with

strong Islamist roots. While some of the traditionalist attitudes of its individual affiliates may have complicated the process of women's inclusion, over the last two years the MCB has tried to invite more women to work not only within the affiliated organisations, but also within its own committees. For example, in November 2010, the MCB held a meeting for a group of women 'to encourage their involvement in MCB's many projects and committees' (MCB 2010c: 11). Nonetheless, while the MCB is becoming more open towards women participation, some of the individual measures are still seen as a particular achievement, rather than a normal everyday practice. While praising the fact that the half of the members of the Business Executive Committee consisted of women, it was also noted that it was a 'historic first for the committee' and it was a 'strong message' that the committee welcomed 'people of all talents, including women.' (Ibid: 9)

More significant results can be noted in the MCB's efforts to attract young Muslims to work within or alongside the institution. In 2005, the MCB organised a youth group convention at Manchester City Hall. To ensure that the views of young Muslims were taken into account, some audio recordings from the convention were played back at the meetings of the MCB's Central Working Committee. Arguably, the creation of the Youth Affairs Committee was a more significant development in this direction. The Committee holds annual 'Young Muslim Beacon Awards' which celebrate achievements and showcase best practices of Muslim youth organisations (MCB Youth Affairs Committee Website). The MCB also runs a special youth blog, *The Platform*, which claims to bring together 'talented young and mature writers to voice views on current events and topical issues' (Ibid). It is 'led solely by young people' while a majority of articles is written by 'leading academics, specialists, journalists, and politicians, along with insightful contributions from young up-and-coming writers, generating an exchange of vibrant ideas' (The Platform Website). One of its key aims is to improve dialogue between different generations.

The MCB's engagement with members of the Muslim business community has provided a further opportunity to get support from Muslim communities by encouraging self-representation. While outlining his vision for the MCB, Iqbal

Sacranie suggested that the MCB should work as 'a vehicle through which we can develop wise community leadership – men and women who are able to rise up above their parochial allegiances and think strategically for the benefit of the community a whole' (Sacranie 2006: 16). While this matches the MCB's agenda of empowering Muslim communities to improve their visibility within British society, it is also an indication that the MCB's leadership has become aware of the growing professionalisation of British Muslims. A key example of these initiatives are the annual 'Leadership Dinners' organised to highlight major achievements of Muslim communities. The MCB has framed this initiative as an invaluable platform to 'meet leaders from all walks of British Muslim life' (MCB Leadership Dinner). It was also keen to remind the participants of its own involvement as 'Britain's leading Muslim umbrella body' (Ibid).

Internal restructuring: The Constitutional Review (2010-2012)

In the previous section I examined the ways in which the MCB's behaviour has conformed to the expectations of social movements theories in relation to using mobilising rhetoric and implementing measures thought to resonate with its constituents. By fusing together Islamic and civic activism discourses, the MCB tried to re-establish itself as a grassroots organisation serving interests of Muslim communities and campaigning for Muslim solidarity and empowerment.

In this context, the Council's preoccupation with its own organisational maintenance deserves particular attention. The Council embarked on organisational reforms in response to growing criticism. In its efforts to streamline its processes and self-legitimise in the eyes of British Muslims, it incorporated institutional practices from its external environment. In line with institutional expectations of the pluralist context of interest mediation, internal restructuring was aimed at improving the MCB's democratic credentials by making its structures more accountable, transparent and inclusive.

The Constitutional Review (hereafter the Review) envisaged a series of changes to develop the existing provisions for membership, election processes and representation, as defined in the MCB's Constitution (MCB 2002a) and the Code of Conduct and Governance Protocol (MCB 2010a). In his annual address to the MCB's General Assembly, Farooq Murad (2011b) emphasised the need to take a critical look at the organisational framework to 'ensure the MCB's structure and processes are in line with its purpose, enabling it to be democratic, inclusive, representative and responsive.' The proposed programme of reforms focused on three areas: improving mechanisms for internal consultation; making electoral procedures and membership arrangements more accountable; and making the work of individual committees more transparent.

The Review began with an open invitation to its affiliates to voice their 'views and opinions on what the MCB needs to do to ensure its organisational structure is responsive to present-day and future challenges' (MCB 2010c: 3). The MCB's press office advertised the running of focus groups in Birmingham and Manchester. It also invited non-affiliated Muslim groups and organisations to 'make a difference and engage with the [Constitution] Committee to improve the structure of the MCB and enable it to better reflect and represent the Muslim communities in the UK' (MCB 2010b).

By opening up the consultation process the Council's leaders sought to get Muslim communities involved in debates over its organisational capacity to represent their diverse interests. This offered a useful strategy to mobilise support by showing that the proposed measures were not imposed from above, but rather the result of community empowerment and open debate. Advertising the campaign among Muslim communities provided a further opportunity to build broader alliances. This was particularly important in relation to existing criticisms that the MCB provided a very narrow representation of Muslim interests since many decisions had still been taken internally without broader consultation.

The process of consultation revealed that some were unhappy with the way in which top officials, such as the Secretary General, Deputy Secretary General and Treasurer were elected by the Central Working Committee and not the General Assembly (MCB 2011b). Under the section of 'Representation' the Review grouped together questions aimed at improving participation of the under-represented groups and suggested introducing 'positive action/positive discrimination measures to improve representation' of women and some ethnic/national groups, such as 'quotas for under-represented groups' (Ibid).

Electoral procedures, membership arrangements and individual committees

My research suggests that the MCB's leaders have been aware of the need to make the organisations 'more representative…engaged, connected…and more effective in decision-making (Interview 31). They have also been open to criticism that the existing structures had not been flexible enough to accommodate the needs of new communities and that 'the elections' process' [has not been] encouraging enough of good people to come forth' (Ibid). There was a further awareness that the current governance structure created an impression that 'all [was] done too much at the high level' whereas 'offices should be open for elections by the delegates and not just by the elected representatives' (Ibid).

There were a series of criticisms raised concerning the openness of the voting practices (referred to as block voting), particularly in relation to inbuilt biases of favouring small, nationally-spread organisations, rather than the large regional mosque associations. This is generally believed to favour if not the Islamist elements within the MCB, then at least some of its better represented, founding members. For example, at the MCB's Annual General Meeting that took place on 20 June 2010 there were concerns from the floor that the 'MCB was too heavily dominated by one narrow faction' (Amin 2011). The data suggests that some respondents see it as a significant constraint on the extent to which the MCB can succeed in reforming its organisational structures, even if there is a desire to 'see it work in a better way than

it does now and see it more open and more accountable and more dynamic than it is now' (Interview 28). Some of the concerns included calls for greater transparency in the electoral process for key posts, which could be achieved by giving enough time to read the candidates' biographies in advance and limiting the apparent circulation of 'pre-printed lists of candidates…supplied…by their organisations' (Amin 2011).[45]

The Review made a direct appeal to community solidarity by suggesting that the question of membership and the level of internal engagement of affiliated institutions needed to be addressed as the records showed that there was a feeling of apathy among the affiliates (MCB 2011b). Considering that only half of the delegates took part in the elections in 2010, this apathy was seen as a contributing factor to the democratic deficit. The lack of interest and disengagement was found to have an 'adverse impact on the profile and standing of the MCB' (Ibid). The existing Code of Conduct and Governance Protocols (MCB 2010a) were adopted to regulate the processes of decision-making and establish a notion of 'collective responsibility' which implied that decisions could only be taken 'after due process of consultation' (Ibid: 5). However, once a measure was agreed, it was 'the responsibility of all including those who had disagreed with the decision to own it and take responsibility for its consequences' (Ibid).

Some of the proposed changes also included ideas to introduce individual (rather than affiliate-based) membership. While the suggested reforms included the introduction of women's quotas, the extent to which this would be translated into real numbers remained debatable. While there was a general desire to improve female participation there was also a realisation that limited representation of women at the MCB level was 'just a reflection of [female] participation at [the] grassroots' (Interview 33). As will be discussed in the final part of the chapter, the MCB's key

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[45] The scope of this thesis only covers the period from 1997 to 2012, with occasional references to some developments in 2013. By 2014, however, there were some indications that more of these ideas have been taken into consideration.

affiliates are the mosques and the number of women holding offices in the local mosques are rather low.

Another area in which there was a reduced level of transparency was the inbuilt process of selection of individuals for the key committees within the Council. The MCB's committees are where the real work is being done. Arguably, while some Non-Specialist Committees (e.g. Business and Economics, Mosque and Community Affairs, Women and Family Affairs) are more democratic and can invite individuals from Muslim communities and mainstream society, the membership of the core ones, such as the Finance and General Purpose Committee have strict regulatory controls.[46] Their membership is 'restricted to the Office Bearers and Advisors duly appointed by the Central Working Committee' and any person who might be invited to its meetings does not have the right to vote on proposals (MCB 2010a: 14).

Such a differentiated approach suggests an attempt to be inclusive and open to external opinions in some areas while remaining relatively closed and exclusive in others. On one hand, Non-Specialist Committees are free to invite different experts. This provides an opportunity to listen to a wider set of views and perspectives. On the other hand, the chair of each of the Specialist Committees 'must be a member of the Central Working Committee' and 'selected by the Secretary General in consultation with his/her colleagues' (Ibid: 12). To ensure accountability of the Specialist Committees, these nominations must be made 'bearing in mind the balance in schools of thought, gender, age and ethnicity' (Ibid). This illustrates that the institution has a set of checks and balances to retain internal control, but also that it is mindful of the need to transcend the existing gender, generational, religious and ethnic cleavages.

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[46] Constitutionally-mandated, Specialist Committees include: Finance and General Purpose, Media, Research and Documentation, Legal Affairs and Membership. Their Chair-people are appointed by the Central Working Committee which is itself partly nominated, partly appointed and partly elected by the General Assembly.

The publicised results

The results of the Review were announced at the Annual General Meeting in 2012 which saw the re-election of the existing leaders of the MCB. The two essential changes that were publicised included women's representation and more direct elections. The delegates agreed to 'impose a minimum 20% quota for the women on the MCB's key decision-making body, its Central Working Committee' (MCB 2012b). The second important change involved direct elections of the future Secretary General not by the committee members, but by all MCB delegates from 2014 (Ibid). Further promises were made to 'listen far more intently to Muslim youth' starting with a 'specially-convened session at the AGM where radical ideas for youth participation were offered by young civil society activists' (Ibid). The newly re-elected Secretary General emphasised that more work must be done 'to bring women forward into Islamic institutions' (Ibid).

The Review gave the MCB a chance to respond to its critics and rebrand its credentials as a representative organisation. It provided a transparent and accountable exercise to take a critical look at its internal processes and to make the institution not only more representative but also more resilient in undertaking its representative functions in the future. However, it is also interesting to note which proposals did not make the cut and seem to remain on hold. These included the introduction of individual membership, direct elections of the chairs within the committees and removing the practices of block voting which were seen to favour some ethnic groups at the expense of others.

The way in which the Review was conducted, including particular areas it sought to reform, conforms to the previously formulated theoretical expectations. As an increasingly institutionalised interest group, the MCB became engaged in its own internal maintenance. Moreover, its search for internal legitimacy encouraged it to realign its own institutional practices with those of the external environment. British pluralist patterns of state engagement with interest groups have increased competition between the groups and challengers, making it difficult to maintain the

support of British Muslims without somehow adhering to the existing values of democratic elections, accountability and transparency. The reforms provided the MCB with an opportunity to improve its own processes and procedures which were seen as rather outdated. By consulting with different groups, getting them involved in the process and appealing to their sense of solidarity, the MCB sought to protect its conduct from being questioned.

Organisational theories shed light on how and why the MCB tried to improve its legitimacy through organisational maintenance. While a brief analysis of the MCB's discursive strategies helps understand a degree of decoupling between what was proposed and what was implemented, it does not provide a sufficient explanation of the nature of institutional resistance to these measures. Neither does it offer a sufficient explanation of why the MCB's actions have remained limited even when there was a shared understanding that organisational changes were required. The data suggests that there is an institutional barrier of entrenched interests within the MCB itself, as well as within some of its affiliates, which provides a considerable constraint on its ability to implement change. The next section will apply insights from historical institutionalism to trace the importance of these historically contingent interests to better understand which measures got sufficient tracking, which did not, and why.

Internal resistance to change and historically entrenched interests

The MCB's integration in the British pluralist context combined with Islamic approaches to consultation endowed the Review with a series of democratic mechanisms to improve the Council's legitimacy. Historical institutionalism emphasises the importance of particular sequences of events which contribute to some groups or types of interests consolidating their authority within the institution over a period of time. In this part of the chapter, I will examine how and why traditionalist interests became entrenched within the MCB and how power relations

in mosques may have influenced the Council's organisational development and resistance to change.

The political legacy of Islamist movement groups partly explains the MCB's cautious approach to giving equal representation to a variety of voices within its own organisation. However, the research also suggests that institutional practices of power-sharing arrangements migrated from the individual level of mosque governance to the national level of interest representation through the MCB. In light of these historical legacies, a concept of 'gradual change,' developed by historical institutionalists (Thelen and Mahoney 2010), provides a useful way to analyse the MCB's reforms. I will explore whether entrenched interests and historically institutionalised patters of governance have been locked in within the MCB's organisation.

Constraining legacies of Islamist preferences and conservative thinking

The Rushdie events provided a critical juncture for particular ideological interests to come together and defend religious rights of Muslims in Britain. The violent nature of the events was not only the result of the struggle between Rushdie's supporters and opponents, but also was generated by the competition between various Muslim groups in Britain (Kepel 1997: 127). The two sets of competing interests were allegedly the Iranians, represented by the Muslim Parliament of Britain and the UKACIA, which consisted of 'middle-class Islamic activists, intellectuals and businessmen broadly inspired by the South Asian Islamic reform movements, the Jama'at-i-Islami and…the Deobandis (Birt 2005: 99).[47]

One interviewee suggested that the Deobandis were more successful in attracting enough community support because 'they are better organised than other Muslim

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[47] On tensions between the Muslim Parliament of Britain and the UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs (UKACIA), see further discussions in Kepel 1997: 126-146 and Malik 2009: 120-141.

groups (e.g. Barelvis) and have more English-speaking imams' (Interview 23). Since the early days of the invitation for Muslim organisations to come together under one umbrella body, the MCB has considerably diversified its membership as is evidenced by its ever-expanding list of mosque-based and non-mosque affiliates. However, there are claims that it continues to be 'dominated by ideological supporters of Islamic movements' which may have 'discouraged other groups from getting involved' (Interview 33). [48]

In his analysis of the MCB's list of affiliates in 2010, Amin (2011) suggested that there was an in-built Islamist bias within the institutional make-up. He grouped together different local affiliates by their links and belonging to wider groupings, such as the UK Islamic Mission, the Islamic Society of Britain, the Young Muslim Organisation and the Islamic Forum and concluded that 'certain organisations [could] increase their voting power by affiliating their individual branches' (Ibid). He also suggested that this gives these groups a political advantage to 'nominate a member of the Central Working Committee and determine the elected members of the Central Working Committee' (Ibid). While discussing the MCB's electoral processes, Bunting (2010) summarised quite similar concerns that there exists 'an informal alliance known as the Islamic Movement' which 'will nominate a candidate…on whom they agreed a several months ago.' One respondent voiced a rather common interpretation of this in-built bias by commenting that 'part of the problem with the MCB is that everything is an Islamic issue, they are not just being a Muslim civil rights organisation' (Interview 24).

The original founders of the MCB may have followed a traditionalist interpretation of the Islamist ideology inspired by such figures as Abdul A'la Mawdudi in the Indian context or Muslim Brotherhood if they were Arabs. At the same time, some young leaders from the affiliates have also questioned some of the traditionalist

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[48] This is a reference to Barelvi Muslims who are Sufis and do not accept some the MCB's Islamist colouration. While some argue their proportion within the British Muslim population is significantly higher than that of the Deobandis, their interests are represented by the British Muslim Forum which is not a political organisation and is a relatively weak representative institution.

assumptions and preferred to identify themselves with being post-ideological (Hussain 2012). Some of these organisations, such as the Islamic Society of Britain which had been originally founded on Mawdudi ideas, started to adapt their ideology to the secular demands of the British context. Interestingly, in his recent study on young Muslims, Hamid (2011: 253) classified the MCB as a post-Islamist organisation. However, personal connections between similarly-inspired groups and internal alliances inside the MCB's politics still resulted in a tendency to vote together and support particular leaders. This created a difficulty for bringing change to electoral procedures.

While the Islamist label in its ideological sense may not be entirely applicable to the MCB's affiliates, some studies have described the nature of the 'vested interests' inside the MCB as conservative and heavily influenced by traditional principles of mosque governance (Klausen 2005). Over the last couple of years, the MCB has shown commitment to representing, modernising and empowering mosques, which make up a large number of its affiliates. However, in spite of the MCB's preoccupation with improving mosque capacities, many of its affiliated mosques remain not only traditionalist in their outlook but also undemocratic in their approach to representation.

In particular, the majority of mosques established in the 1960s and 1970s were traditionally built to cater for Muslim religious needs. As they grew larger they expanded their functions to provide community-based services and Islamic education opportunities for young Muslims. Although many mosques continue to adapt to the changing needs of Muslim communities, their day-to-day operation tends to be governed by a committee which provides political and financial leadership to the mosque community. While the committee may diversify its activities to become more community-friendly, its membership continues to suffer from an inbuilt democratic deficit. In her study, Gilliat-Ray (2010: 195) has voiced a common concern that 'becoming a mosque committee member, or Chair, is not necessarily a democratic process, since it is often likely to rest upon kinship and other social ties.' Historically contingent ethnic and sectarian rivalries between mosques have also

contributed to mosque elders wishing to protect particular interests of their mosques by concentrating power in the hands of the few, appointed, but not elected committee members. MCB's own research on British mosques noted that:

> Most mosques are established by the elders of local communities and are therefore also maintained by them. Young people are not often seen as mature, responsible and trustworthy enough to become trustees or management committee members. There are also cultural norms that prioritise elders over youth when it comes to management. (MCB 2006a: 19)

The lack of democratic elections and somewhat cliquish attitudes inside mosque committees may have been an unintended consequence not only of cultural values, but also of historic legacies of the earlier forms of Muslim representation in Britain. However, this has a major implication for the MCB's own capacity to be seen as a democratic institution. The aforementioned evidence suggests that particular selection processes and unaccountable power-sharing arrangements in mosques got locked in within the MCB's own electoral procedures. The MCB believes it has a series of checks and balances to ensure its processes are accountable and to a large extent this is true. However, this does not prevent unelected mosque chairmen from working as community delegates within the MCB General Assembly and speaking on behalf of Muslim communities which may not have elected them in the first place.

There is a rather problematic assumption here that the 'management of organisations speak for their members' (Amin 2011). Whereas this is true for some affiliates with direct election procedures, this is less likely to be true for the mosques as they do not have a formal membership. In fact, 'mosques are run by a self-perpetuating group drawn from the original founders' and then 'by selected younger people as these founders age' (Ibid). More importantly, 'few mosques have a formal membership taken up by all worshippers and democratic election of their management' (Ibid). My research confirms that there is a tension between a nominated community elder, put in charge of catering for everyday needs of the mosque and a community representative who is democratically selected and entrusted by the community to represent its common interests. For example, one of the concerns was that sometimes

a mosque chairman acts as a middle man who attends the meetings, but then does not communicate down to his congregation (Interview 28).

Another issue, recognised by the MCB, is the question of female participation. As was noted earlier, the MCB has tried to mainstream women representation by introducing a quota system. However, the lack of female participation also reflects a degree of conservatism and resistance to change in mosques. Although this may be different for women representatives from charities or educational affiliates, the problem of female under-representation is carried upwards within the institutional chain: from a mosque to a mosque council and then to a larger umbrella body such as the MCB. While commenting on the MCB's elections prior to the Constitutional Review, Bunting noted that 'entrenched conservatism stubbornly persists in the local mosques and dominates the MCB membership, while a younger contingent continues to fall prey to radicalisation' (Bunting 2010).

A study by Klausen (2005: 96) found that most of the religious community leaders she interviewed supported more traditional, conservative views which may not be necessarily shared within Muslim communities. She found that this neo-orthodox, traditionalist thinking, which was particularly widespread among the Pakistani and Bangladeshi religious leaders in Britain, was not of an Islamist nature and did not imply demands to create a Caliphate, but rather it was focused on 'the right to exist as a religious minority and to live, by choice, according to religious law' (Ibid: 99). While mosque community leaders reject an attempt to introduce 'western practices in Islam, they equally regard the Islamist fringe groups as parasitic and abusers of Islam' (Ibid).

Her classification of Muslim approaches to life in Europe, identified the neo-orthodox group as 'men and women based in mosque organisations, engaged in local politics, or affiliated with the new national Muslim associations' (Ibid). My data seems to confirm that it is this conservative thinking which gets reinforced within the larger national bodies through rather undemocratic processes, reluctance to share power, or a simple inability to do so due to insufficient human and financial

resources. Extensive measures to reform the MCB would threaten not only the political or religious interests of these leaders, but also a preferred way of doing things in line with the existing traditions and received norms. However, it should be also noted that not all organisations within the MCB share this thinking which is probably why there is still a healthy discussion about which representational changes are feasible, considering the nature of these constraints.

Gradual changes and implemented measures

A closer look at which measures were implemented by 2013 and which were not provides a useful way to explore the idea of gradual change within the MCB's organisational structure. The MCB's approach to reforms should be considered in the larger historical context of mosque governance in Britain. Mahoney and Thelen (2010) classify patterns of gradual change in relation to the presence of strong/weak veto players and high/low enforcement or interpretation of rules. In the previous part of the chapter, I mentioned that different ideas had been offered in the course of the Review aimed at improving the MCB's representational capacities. By briefly matching the list of the so far rejected measures with the typology offered by Mahoney and Thelen, it is possible to suggest that the MCB's strategy of gradual reform corresponded to the layering dynamic of change, rather than the one of displacement, conversion or drift.

For example, the discussed introduction of individual membership would have meant a displacement strategy as it would have offset the vested interests of the affiliates as collective actors. Had the MCB opted for not changing anything within its institutional governance and just waited for gradual changes to filter through less reactionary affiliates, this would have corresponded to the drift dynamic. If the MCB's delegates were to reformulate the functions of the Central Working Committee and extend the number of external advisors by granting them wider voting powers, this would have signalled a conversion, or a reinterpretation of the

existing rules. However, none of these measures appear to have been implemented yet. In line with the concept of decoupling, they were discussed but not acted on.

Based on the proposed classification, the MCB's reforms and practices conform to the layering dynamic, which is characterised by the presence of strong veto players (i.e. entrenched interests) and a rather low discretion for rule enforcement (i.e. the existence of prescribed rules and regulations which the affiliates need to adhere to). The introduction of female quotas was an additional and a rather gradual arrangement which did not offset the vested players as much as individual membership or new arrangements would have affected the nature of the Central Working Committee. Similarly, the right to elect key posts was extended to the General Assembly in 2012. This was a significant achievement as it created an additional mechanism to improve the MCB's democratic legitimacy. This was done alongside the existing procedures that remained unchanged. In other words, it produced an extra provision without substantially changing the existing rules, particularly since the changes were expected to take place in two years' time. These measures may have suited the entrenched interests inside the MCB who were interested in preserving the status quo as far as it was possible. However, in line with Mahoney and Thelen's ideas (2010: 17), every new step 'may be a small change in itself, yet these small changes can accumulate, leading to a big change in the long run.'

Therefore, the data supports the premise that the nature of organisational changes is not only contingent on the sociological assumption that all organisations are inherently resistant to change or the rational choice preferences of the groups seeking to preserve their power. The MCB's efforts to change its organisational structures and make them democratically accountable have also been constrained by historically entrenched interests and previous practices of governing mosques. The MCB's decision to undertake reforms was shaped by the changing needs of Muslim communities and strong criticism which encouraged it to re-evaluate its way of engaging with Muslim communities. Nonetheless, its own institutional limitations, rooted within the deeper historical structures of power-sharing arrangements have

constrained the extent to which it has been ready to let go of its organisationally-conservative approaches and implement more substantial reforms.

Conclusion

The chapter discussed the MCB's engagement with Muslim communities in light of changing expectations and demands on collective representation and Muslim diversity. In line with theoretical expectations about social movement organisations, the data supported the claim that the MCB's ability to position itself as a legitimate representative of Muslim interests has depended on its abilities to mobilise support and adapt to its institutional environment.

Once a more active phase of collective action passes, a previously popular and engaging challenger may lose its supporters through a general disillusionment with its too radical or overly moderate approach to mobilisation (McAdam and Zald 1996). While this approach recognises the importance of building consensus among supporters and developing engaging strategies, it does not necessarily explain why a potential legitimacy gap can still occur once the organisation's own processes do not keep up with the changing needs of those in whose name they act. A closer look at the growing diversification of Muslim interests and different approaches to Muslim identity presented the MCB with a real challenge of how to be inclusive of this diversity. This was exacerbated by what the MCB saw as its duty to present a united front against Islamophobia and articulate common concerns for greater protection of Muslims in Britain.

My research suggested that the MCB's approach to engaging with Muslim communities has been based on the need to justify its status as a representative institution. In other words, the MCB leaders have struggled to provide an authoritative voice on Muslim issues to the government, while its own organisational structures were criticised for being insufficiently democratic, accountable or inclusive. A better understanding of the MCB's rhetoric of engagement, combined

with limited initiatives to widen its ranks, helped clarify how the Council had sought to counteract some of these criticisms. The analysis of its official statements and communication documents reveals that the MCB framed and institutionalised its actions by combing a discourse of civic engagement and democracy with similar notions grounded in Islamic values.

The final section explored why the MCB's effort to reform its processes through the Constitutional review was rather limited, in spite of a widely-held belief that this was the right strategy to represent Muslim interests in fairness and diversity. A closer analysis of historically entrenched interests helped understand the impact of the earlier stages and patterns of power relations on the Council's present approach to representation and change. Arguably, the MCB's own processes, rooted within the deeper traditional structures of power relations within the earlier forms of Muslim representation through mosques committees, continue to hamper the extent to which it can fully reform itself. Therefore, in practice, its real or perceived ability to represent all the different groups, including younger Muslims and Muslim women, other ethnic and sectarian groups and secular Muslims, is constrained.

Chapter 5

The SMR's relations with the Russian State

Introduction

In Chapter 3, an approach based on political opportunity structures was applied to analyse the MCB's engagement with the British government. In this chapter, I will use a similar process to define the institutional and organisational arena of state-Muslim relations in Russia and explore the relations between the Council of Muftis and the Russian state. Before examining the changing nature of the SMR's engagement with the Russian authorities, I will explain how the Russian context has been shaped by a specific set of opportunities and constraints. I will outline the same four dimensions which were used to describe the British case, namely the nature of religious divisions, institutional patterns of interest mediation, informal ways of resolving conflicts in state-religion relations and opportunities for making alliances with other religious and non-religious groups.

Over the last two decades, the SMR's engagement with the Russian state underwent a series of changes. I will examine the extent to which the Council's engagement with the government conforms to Russia's predominantly corporatist context, exemplified by a strong paternalistic state, weak civil society and a limited number of centralised organisations. In light of these institutional conditions, I expect the SMR's engagement with the government to be strong, whereas its cooperation with other organisations should remain weak. Moreover, the SMR is unlikely to risk disengaging from the state because without the support of the government, there are few alternative platforms from which Muslim claims can be made.

These assumptions will be analysed in relation to the data gathered in 2011 and complemented by the earlier research conducted in 2008. The analysis will centre mainly on the SMR's relations with state officials under the Putin-Medvedev administrations. However, some references will also be made to the earlier years of

the Yeltsin presidency to better illustrate the intensity of the corporatist norms of state-religion relations which were to follow. First, I will outline some of the POS specificities of the Russian context. I will then discuss the SMR's increasing cooperation with the government within the Russian framework of 'traditional religions'. Finally, I will focus on a brief but atypical period of tensions in state-council relations that took place in 2010-2011 and examine how informal structures and paternalistic norms of the Russian political system may have helped to resolve them.

The SMR's relations with the Russian state were marked by periods of strong cooperation as well as temporary animosity. In this chapter, I will argue that the SMR's engagement with top figures in the government, as well as with civil servants engaged in religious affairs was influenced by the two shifts that took place in institutional patterns of religious governance and official interpretations of the existing religious divisions, particularly between the Russian Orthodox Church and Islam. The first shift involved the re-institutionalisation of corporatist approaches to state-religion mediation and state efforts to pacify religious divisions by officially recognising the Muslim faith as one of Russia's traditional religions. The second change resulted from increasingly negative perceptions of Islam and Muslim migrants in Russian society and a partial attempt by the state to diversify its engagement with official Muslim organisations. These shifts in corporatist arrangements and religious cleavages were also accompanied by more volatile changes in informal relations between religious and political figures and the potential (or the lack thereof) to form alliances with other institutions, confessions and Muslim groups. The scope of these changes will become apparent in a more detailed discussion of the SMR's relations with the government in light of the empirical data.

Russia's corporatist context: past legacies and recent shifts

State-Muslim relations in Russia have been an integral part of Russia's long-term engagement with different religious and ethnic traditions. In this section, I will apply the POS-based approach to explain a series of institutional and organisational features of state-religion relations which, in the Russian context, can be characterised as corporatist. A better understanding of the existing religious divisions, state co-optation of spiritual leaders, informal rules of state patronage, coupled with the rather mixed nature of cooperation and competition between Russia's major confessions provides insights into the institutional context of state engagement with official Muslim organisations.

With over ten per cent of Russians being Muslim, Islam has been endorsed as Russia's second official religion. Together with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), Judaism and Buddhism, it is one of four traditionally-recognised faith groups. However, with the growing tensions over Islamic radicalisation and increased flow of Muslim migrants from the former Soviet republics in Central Asia, the Russian state has become preoccupied with bridging the gap between different ethnic, religious and cultural groups, as has been exemplified in numerous speeches of state officials. For example, in his address to Muslim leaders, President Putin (2007) spoke of 'an absolutely new form of cultural cooperation between different peoples and religions [which] constitutes Russia's inner strength as a great and important world power'. The long history of Muslim communities living side by side with other religious and non-religious groups has resulted in complex patterns of interaction, particularly between Islam and the ROC. However, beneath the unifying rhetoric of peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Christians, there has been a degree of rivalry, not only at the official level, but also in the everyday interaction between different communities (Karpov and Lisovskaya 2007, Shlapentokh 2008, Shutov 2007, Warhola and Lehning 2007).

Ethnic divisions, and in particular the importance of ethnicity as a strong identity marker, have long roots in the Soviet period. Ethnic and cultural dimensions of

different peoples and their traditions were promoted, while all religions were suppressed in equal measure. However, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, a newly acquired freedom of worship, coupled with the lack of financial resources to rebuild religious infrastructure resulted in increased competition between different established confessions, not only for membership of the faithful, but also for state support. Without neglecting the importance of ethnic cleavages I will mainly focus on the tensions between the Muslim and Christian faith groups, particularly in relation to the corporatist nature of the Russian state. The structure of religious cleavages will be conceptualised as a series of opportunities and constraints shaping the existing divisions between Muslim minorities and the Christian (at least in culture, if not always in faith) majority of the Russian population.

Article 14 of the Russian Constitution states that the 'Russian Federation is a secular state' and 'religious associations shall be separated from the State and shall be equal before the law.'[49] However, in practice, the ROC has often enjoyed a more privileged position of not only representing a majority religion, but also being a close partner of the Russian state. While state-Islam relations have been modelled on state relations with the ROC, at times the interests of Muslim minorities came second to those of the Orthodox Christians (Krasikov 2004, Laruelle 2008). Senior leaders of the recognised religious groups take part in inter-religious affairs and meetings with state officials designed to promote religious harmony, articulate different religious perspectives and demonstrate readiness to provide the government with the spiritual backing of their respective congregations. However, in practice, the privileged position of the ROC has also created obstacles for the Muslim leaders in securing equal treatment for Muslim institutions and communities. Some of these tensions will be explored in relation to the mosque shortages in Moscow.

Moreover, the specificities of Russia's past and present approaches to constructing and consolidating the Russian identity have led to a partial blurring of the ways in

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[49] The Constitution of the Russian Federation. Available at: http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-02.htm, accessed 20 March 2014.

which ethnic and religious divisions were discussed in relation to the changing composition of the Muslim communities in non-Muslim areas. It is not, therefore, surprising that on the societal level religious and ethnic tensions have contributed to anti-Muslim feelings which resulted in the growing salience of religious cleavages.

State-religion relations in Russia have historically developed within a predominantly corporatist system of interest mediation. Russia's mixed legacies of authoritarian and more tolerant ways of managing religious diversity from the top have shaped the current practices of selective co-optation of senior religious figures (Hunter 2004). Although there were different levels of state control over the matters of religion and religious expression over the course of Russia's Tsarist, Soviet and post-Soviet periods, state-religion relations were influenced by the establishment of the religious or spiritual bureaucracy. While these religious civil servants would have access to the government, they would also be responsible to the government.

It goes without saying that state-religion relations were complicated by the egalitarian atheism of the Soviet Union and its repressive policies aimed at suppressing religion and replacing it with purely cultural and folkloric traditions of different ethnic groups.[50] However, while the spiritual dimension of religious representation was systemically rooted out together with its leaders, the organisational structures of the Christian, Jewish and Muslim institutions survived and were revived after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The early 1990s were marked by the emergence of new religious organisations which were free from state control and interference. This newly discovered degree of pluralism was exception to the systematic application of corporatism and state intervention into matters of religion. While this period witnessed a proliferation of different religious and civil society organisations which acted outside of state control, it was short-lived. As will be discussed later in the chapter, by 1997 there was already a desire to control religious diversity and to regulate the nature of state-religion relations.

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[50] For a more detailed exploration of state-religion relations in the Soviet Union, please see Anderson 1994. On the role of Islam in the Soviet state, see Ro'i 2000, Benningsen and Wimbush 1979.

Russia's institutional environment of state-religion relations may not fully conform to Schmitter's definition of the ideal type of corporatism because of the complexities of these state-religion relations under different political regimes. However, it contains many of its features, particularly considering the ways in which different interests of civil society are linked with the state. From the days of Muslim communities being officially recognised by Catherine the Great, the Muslim clergy (which is something rather oxymoronic considering the lack of hierarchical structures in Islam) were incorporated as religious officials into the vertical structures of the Russian state and entrusted with representing the interests of Russia's Muslim regions along the Volga River.[51] Official engagement between the Russian state and Muslim communities was conducted through the institution of the system of Muslim Spiritual Boards (DUMs) in its different organisational and regional forms. As will be explained later in the thesis, this means that a limited number of state-endorsed Muslim organisations is expected to show loyalty to the state in return for particular privileges. These formal structures facilitate the work of officially recognised groups, but also create competition for state patronage and affect opportunities for establishing alliances with other religious groups or political interests.

Russia's corporatist system is characterised by a high level of state intervention and weak civil society institutions. State patronage, vertical approach to resolving conflicts and strong reliance on personal connections represent some of the informal structures of Russia's state-religion relations. Centralised structures of government support for religious and social institutions, combined with control and close monitoring of their activities has become institutionalised under President Putin's administration. While unofficial organisations continue to remain relatively weak, paternalistic relations between top government officials and senior representatives of different confessions provide a key opportunity to resolve religious issues and

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[51] The idea of organised institution of clergy is generally rather alien to Islam. Religious authority resides with Islamic scholars while the role of imams is not to organise the life of Muslim community but rather lead and facilitate prayers. Therefore, there are no ordained clergy with authority over Muslim rituals. In the next chapter, I will elaborate on the ways in which the functions of imams in the Tatar tradition have become associated with responsibilities and hierarchical structures of religious governance, more fitting a Christian than an Islamic tradition.

overcome some of the prejudices on the local level. As was noted by one interviewee, 'once muftis complained to the President…about how local officials had stopped the building process of the mosque and minaret…I saw how following these meetings works would resume (Interview 7).

The data highlights a wide-spread perception that centralised forms of governance help consolidate the flow of financial resources required to improve the Muslim infrastructure which was almost destroyed under the Soviet regime. Although attempts to unify centralised Muslim organisations and to build the 'Islamic vertical' had failed, the state continued to 'engage[] with the system of centralised Muslim organisations… as if it were part of its governance structures… not integrated with state political structures by closely following advice from authorities and responding to their directives and requirements' (Interview 14). Some unofficial Muslim organisations, which tend to accuse their official counterparts of corruption and dependence on the state, are forced to interact with the state to get approval and financial backing for their own activities (Interview 3). According to another interviewee, 'a specific feature of the Russian state is that everything is permeated by the state' (Interview 1).

The Russian corporatist environment facilitates access to the government for officially endorsed organisations and disadvantages the ones deprived of state patronage. This dependence on state patronage implies the growing importance of personal connections and good relations between senior Muslim clergy and state officials. Clearly, personal connections are crucial to strengthening relations within any type of political system. However, within the corporatist context, their presence or absence is highly noticeable.

The complex nature of the transitional period of the late 1990s meant that while civil society organisations had increased opportunities to develop and advertise their activities, efforts to form alliances within the political system itself remained restricted. Fish (2001: 22-23) emphasised the limited incentives for civil society groups to engage in traditional forms of lobbying political parties or parliamentarians

and instead stressed the preferred style of establishing personal connections with particular insiders. During Putin's administration, the work of civil society institutions was increasingly constrained by selective backing of organisations based on their loyalty to the state – ultimately undermining their autonomy. McIntosh Sundstrom and Henry (2006: 316) noted that Russia's long tradition of 'monopoly on organisational resources ha[d] led to control over many of the institutions and funds…commonly associated with civil society development.'

The corporatist nature of the Russian system and weak civil society imply the lack of alternative social and political platforms to mobilise support for Muslim communities and a gap between official and unofficial Muslim organisations. For example, centralised Muslim Spiritual Boards have few opportunities to build alliances with civil society institutions. In light of internal divisions and rivalries within the Muslim field itself, the over-reliance on the state is, therefore, not surprising. Although there are many religious funds and Muslim charities, their work is monitored by the state. The lasting legacy of the Soviet authoritarian practices of suppressing bottom-up initiatives, coupled with Putin's desire to consolidate his political regime, contributed to a shared belief among civil servants that unofficial organisations are simply irrelevant in the Russian political system. As was noted by one interviewee:

> Nobody is really interested in unofficial organisations…they could exist, in great numbers, but nobody would engage with them…it is like the parties, which are not registered and do not take part in elections – you know, they can be many, but for the Electoral Committee they just do not exist – the same here… interests of Muslims can only be represented through official organisations (Interview 17).

Although there is a degree of cooperation on developing spiritual and moral values and formulating the national idea on the state level, the lack of unified structures in Islam makes it 'vulnerable in its engagement with the state and the ROC, which prefers to deal with equally hierarchical systems' (Malashenko 2007: 125). With

both religions dependent on state support, interfaith cooperation between Islam and the ROC is constrained by competition over religious spaces.

The POS theory suggests that shifts in formal and informal political structures influence actors' behavioural strategies. To analyse the extent to which the SMR's relations with the government conform to these theoretical expectations, I will examine the process of engagement within the changing nature of institutional opportunities and constraints. While state-religion relations in Russia have largely remained corporatist in nature, there were small shifts which occurred in the period from 1997 to 2013.

As will be explained in the next section, the first shift marked a move away from a more diversified style of state-religion engagement of the 1990s to an increasingly corporatist approach which has become fully re-institutionalised under Putin's presidency. After that, there were two smaller fluctuations within the corporatist regime, namely a relative pluralisation of state engagement with Muslim organisations under the presidency of Dmitri Medvedev (2008-2012) and the gradual return to the corporatist norm under the third administration of Putin.

Some important changes have also occurred in the nature of religious cleavages and the ways in which they have been perceived and interpreted by senior Muslim representatives. The first change was characterised by increasing attempts by the state to pacify religious divisions by institutionalising state engagement with officially-recognised religions on the turn of the 21st century. The second shift involved a reopening of religious cleavages between Muslim communities and the rest of the Russian population as a result of the growing securitisation of Islam in light of real or perceived threats of Muslim migrants in large cities. As will be explained in the chapter, the aforementioned shifts and fluctuations would prove significant in influencing the behaviour of the SMR and the nature of its engagement with the state. This is particularly important in relation to the ways in which the SMR articulated Muslim claims for equal treatment and framed its decisions to cooperate with the government or openly criticise its policies.

In the next two sections of the chapter, I will elaborate on the shifts in light of the empirical findings and consider their influence on the SMR's engagement with the government. Russia's corporatist framework of state-Muslim relations would suggest a strong cooperation between the Council and the government and limited engagement between the SMR and civil society organisations. However, the data indicates that the nature of the SMR's relations with the government was more nuanced. The following discussion analyses how and under which conditions the SMR decided to engage with the Russian state in the period in question. I will demonstrate that although the SMR fully cooperated with the government throughout the period, there were significant changes in its choice of rhetoric. This is indicative of its ambition to challenge the state and lobby the government for greater protection of Muslim religious rights, while remaining an institutionalised partner.

The SMR's engagement with the government: 'traditional religions'

The formation of the SMR in 1996 took place on the cusp of a short-lived period characterised by a rather atypical pluralist engagement between the Russian state and civil society and a subsequent re-introduction of an increasingly corporatist approach. The change involved a move from relatively non-interventionist policies on religious diversity during a liberal phase of the 1990s to the state's stronger cooperation with selected representatives and greater controls over religion in the 2000s. State efforts to promote religion in the public sphere provided an opportunity for strong cooperation between the SMR and the government as the latter aimed to pacify some of the previously exposed religious tensions of the early 1990s.

Re-institutionalisation of corporatist practices

The short period of political liberalisation under Yeltsin (1991-1999) helped create a pluralist framework in which freedom of religion was constitutionally protected from the encroachment of the state. In its desire to distance itself from the repressive atheism of the Soviet era, the Yeltsin administration had initially adopted a largely liberal approach to minority religions and ethnic groups (Marsh 2005, Rousselet 2000). While the passive nature of state relations with Islam in the 1990s was later criticised for being too *laissez-faire*, a temporary lifting of state control stimulated religious revival and proliferation of Muslim organisations, which was beneficial for rebuilding the previously destroyed Muslim infrastructure.

However, this was also accompanied by the proliferation of Muslim groups and the growing external influence of Islamic organisations from Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, which were ready to provide financial and educational assistance to Russia's Muslims. The government's concern over the growing flow of foreign funding outside its control disadvantaged Muslim parties and prevented them from receiving funds from groups engaged in religious activities. By 1997 Muslim political and social activism was already significantly limited when the government tried to regulate Muslim activities by consolidating them into smaller entities (Hunter 2004: 47).

Ironically, the Soviet legacy offered a ready-made corporatist template for restructuring state relations with Muslim minorities. All that was needed was to replace the cultural and ethnic markers of national identity with religious ones and identify Russian Muslims as a religious category. In spite of its democratically misleading title, the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations established state control over religious life in 1997. A key consequence of this legislation was the institutionalisation of the concept of traditional religions, which gave a particular legal advantage to Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism over any other religious beliefs. However, the idea of traditional religions and interfaith initiatives was a 'Soviet-inspired religious policy paradigm' (Fagan 2012: 121). In its

institutional dimension, the corporatist nature of state policies towards religion was somewhat reminiscent of the Soviet-style secular management of religion which was stripped of its repressive excesses.

Mainstreaming faith within the framework of traditional religions constituted a gradual transition from a more pluralist style of state-religion engagement to a more corporatist engagement with selected religious groups. The concept of traditional religions served as an ideological prop. In his critical assessment of the apparent discrepancy between the selective concept of traditional religions and the freedom of religion guaranteed by Article 14 of the Russian Constitution, Buriyanov (2012) commented on the state's authoritarian tendency to regulate religion and civil society. Although the extent to which the proposed model was truly authoritarian is debatable, it provided a way to re-institutionalise state-religion relations.

Gvosdev's concept of 'managed pluralism' (2002) helps understand the process of transition from selectively applied pluralism to an increasingly corporatist model of religious incorporation. While explaining the way in which state-religion relations were defined in the Preamble to the Law of 1997 and amended in 2002, his research suggested that managed pluralism allowed for 'competing and diverse ideologies to be filtered and vetted for compatibility with the ethos of society' (Gvosdev 2002: 77). However, it was the government that managed the process by providing 'a menu of acceptable "choices" from which the population [was] free to choose' (Ibid).

'Managed pluralism' appears to be largely applicable to the last couple of years of the Yeltsin administration and the beginning of Putin's first presidency (2000-2004). After the initial recognition of religious diversity, state engagement with religions gradually solidified into a corporatist system of interest representation marked by selective co-optation of categorised religions, endorsement of preferred spokesmen from each tradition and allocation of state patronage in exchange for loyalty. As a result, the institutional approach to engaging with Muslim organisations became

more managed and controlled by state officials and civil servants.[52] However, official recognition of Islam as Russia's traditional religion with an equal status (at least on paper) to other religions, and namely the ROC, has also meant that religious divisions (at least on the official level) were somewhat levelled out.

As Muslim religious figures were institutionalised in state-religion relations, they gained further opportunities to cooperate with the state, provided both had a shared agenda. First, they could use their endorsed status to lobby government officials. Improved opportunities of access ensured that while defending Muslim minority rights, Muslim representatives could use more conciliatory rhetoric. Although Muslim mobilisation 'never encroached on the political system or its ideological base', Muslim communities could now defend 'their own corporate interests' (Filatov 2007: 43).

Second, when in favour with the government, the SMR could reposition itself as a leading organisation and engage with the government directly. In line with terminology used to describe corporatist patterns of interest mediation, the SMR aimed to become a 'peak' organisation, in other words, the most influential voice of Muslim interests before the state. Filatov suggests that 'a status of traditional religion facilitate[d] the establishment of contacts with the government' (Ibid: 42). Over the last ten years, further evidence of incorporation of senior religious figures into the system of governance has manifested itself by the tendency of senior Muslim clergy, together with other faiths representatives, to sit on various government bodies, including the President's Committee on Religious Affairs, State Duma of the Federal Assembly for Public Associations and Religious Organisations and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The SMR tried to make full use of its close relations with senior

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[52] A further discussion on Russia's 'managed pluralism' can be found in Balzer 2003. In his study, he applies the term to Putin's first administration, emphasising the 'managed' element over the 'pluralist' one, thus highlighting the limits of pluralism in the Russian context. The term 'corporatism' is more generally applied to the Soviet period, while the developments in the post-Soviet Russia tend to be examined from the pluralist (or 'managed' pluralist) perspective. However, the nature of relations between Putin's second and third administrations and officially endorsed and co-opted representatives not only from the political and business sectors, but also from civil society and religious groups, has increasingly resembled more corporatist arrangements, see also Markus 2011, Ryzhkov 2014.

government figures and contacts in municipal authorities. However, the cost of co-optation meant that officials could keep Muslim leaders in check.

A case for cooperation

The SMR's engagement with the Russian government has been based on the idea of an informal contract by which the Council demonstrates loyalty to the state and the state protects Muslim minority rights. What has traditionally distinguished the SMR's style of engagement with the government from other official Muslim organisations, such as the TsDUM or the KTsNSK, is its relatively independent political position, with its activities being akin to a social movement organisation working within the system rather than being simply a state-endorsed interest group, uncritically supporting every policy. Disagreements with the ROC over religious spaces and its campaign to ensure that Islam is not treated as a secondary religion illustrate its endeavour to secure greater recognition for Muslim communities.

The SMR seeks to protect Islam from the politically-motivated decisions of local officials who are often reluctant to offend the interests of the non-Muslim majority in matters of Muslim facilities or public display of religious symbols. Within the Russian corporatist context, the spheres of influence for traditional confessions rarely intersect and there is little battle for Russian hearts and minds. However, the ROC often exerts an informal influence on local officials in charge of granting permissions for Muslim spaces of worship. The data suggests that there is a general feeling that 'the lack of understanding of Islam among some civil servants at the local level, or those civil servants who are strongly influenced by the Russian Orthodox Church results in problems for Muslim communities' (Interview 7).

The idea of rights and responsibilities is most clearly developed in the SMR's Social Programme for Russia's Muslims written in May 2001 (Kanevsky 2003). The programme was drawn up to bring together two discourses on civil liberties and Islamic principles. It was also a response to the 'Fundamental Principles of Social Concepts of the Orthodox Church' and its engagement with the state. The Orthodox

Church Programme presented church-state relations based on the Byzantine principle of symphony – cooperation without interference. This idea would later develop into 'separate', yet 'harmonised sharing of interests and responsibilities' between the church and the state (NEWSru 2009).

The Muslim Social Programme rests on the Islamic understanding of a contractual agreement between the state and its citizens. The state is expected to prevent any forms of religious discrimination by protecting 'freedom of religion, equality of all religions before the law and state institutions' as well granting freedom to 'engage in religious practices and activities, including religious rituals, publication of literature, educational and charity work' (SMR 2001). In return, Muslim organisations are expected to fulfil their obligations by recognising 'the legitimacy of the laws of the Russian Federation… demonstrate loyalty to the legally elected state authorities…strengthen patriotic feeling…[and] promote religious tolerance' (Ibid). The Programme provided an opportunity for the SMR to work with the state as an equal of the ROC. Its acknowledgement of the secular nature of the state and its own recognition of constitutionally guaranteed freedoms of all religions helped create an image of a moderate state partner, in favour of multi-confessional harmony and against any extremist interpretations of Islam.

The Soviet legacy of under-developed religious infrastructure combined with the competitive nature of predominantly Tatar-based Muslim organisations working under rival jurisdictions within the European part of Russia provides very limited opportunities for making alliances. Commenting on internal divisions, one respondent noted that in the 1990s many organisations were fragmented, leading to 'a wave of atomisation and people declaring themselves muftis' (Interview 2). Moreover, many respondents expressed a commonly-held view that the SMR's closeness to official structures made it an unlikely partner to poorly-developed unofficial networks of civil society organisations. Unsurprisingly, the SMR's leadership focused on building stronger alliances with similarly official, corporatist structures such as the mayor's office and municipal authorities in Moscow and government committees.

The SMR's chairman, Ravil Gainutdin, engaged in cultivating good contacts with the Russian government and used every opportunity to lobby the President directly. For example, when the Vologda mosque was under threat of demolition in 2000, Gainutdin complained directly to Putin, comparing the campaign against the mosque to 'an echo of the militant atheistic campaign of the 1960s' (Rotar 2001). First, he received a reply from the deputy governor Pozdnyakov who remarked that it was 'inappropriate to interpret the authorities' demands for the law to be observed as a political imperative and an expression of Islamophobia' (Ibid). However, by 2002 the situation was resolved after a personal meeting between Mufti Gainutdin and President Putin. This highlighted the benefits of personal connections and direct involvement of high-ranking politicians (Hunter 2004: 70).

This meeting was generally regarded as the starting point of close relations between the SMR and Putin's administration. The same year Putin attended the Moscow Cathedral Mosque and the official residence of the SMR next door, indicating that the SMR was treated as a favoured Muslim organisation. In 2002-2003, Gainutdin was regularly invited to the Kremlin and praised for his work on developing Muslim infrastructure and educating young Muslims in patriotism (Makarkin 2005). Moreover, the SMR's efforts to develop a trusting relation with the government were unexpectedly facilitated by Talgat Tadjuddin's emotional response to the US invasion of Iraq which temporarily discredited the TsDUM in the eyes of the government (Konstantinov, 2003).[53]

The SMR's advantage over other official and unofficial Muslim organisations lies in its ability to defend Muslim religious rights while remaining an officially acceptable partner for the state. In his book on Islam in Russia, Gainutdin (2004) echoed the

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[53] In April 2003, Talgat Tadjuddin, made a controversial statement, declaring *jihad* on the United States in response to the American actions in Iraq. Sergei Nikulin, a senior Justice Ministry official has acknowledged the moral desire of the leader of the TsDUM to support believers in Iraq, but noted that any actions aimed at military assistance to Iraqi insurgency will be considered illegal by the Russian state. For more details see Konstantinov's article in the *Novaya Gazeta*, 4 April 2003).

point expressed earlier by Victor Zorkaltsev (2003) that there should be a social partnership between the state and traditional religions because religious organisations are 'one of the most important institutions of civil society.'[54] He shared these words by reiterating that traditional religions can support the state by representing 'pivotal, supporting structures of civil society' (Gainutdin 2004:56). While acknowledging that Muslims 'have received a number of opportunities they have never had before' he acknowledged that if used properly, they could become important factors to enhance the role of Islam in society (Ibid: 56-57).

The SMR's cooperation with the Kremlin focused on the mutually-beneficial efforts to promote Russia's spiritual values and develop a legal framework of state assistance to Muslim communities, particularly in the areas of youth engagement and Islamic education. The rhetorical underpinning of the SMR's partnership with the government was framed through patriotic statements on Russia's moral and spiritual strength derived from its multinational heritage. For example, public speeches by government officials were saturated with references to Russia's spiritual revival and the need to consolidate and protect peaceful coexistence of different peoples and confessions by engaging with religious leaders (United Russia 2007). The SMR's spokesmen placed an equally high value on their cooperation with the state. In one of his interviews, the chairman of the SMR expressed his desire for the Russian state to develop relations with Muslim communities on the level of partnership, taking into account the interests of religious organisations (Gainutdin 2003).

Mutual efforts to raise awareness among young people of patriotism and spiritual values, together with a shared determination to fight social ills, such as drugs and alcoholism, provided a strong focus for a wider cooperation with other traditional confessions. The practice became institutionalised during Dmitri Medvedev's chairing of the presidential administration's Council for Co-operation with Religious Associations in February 2004 (Fagan 2012: 47). Relations between the ROC and the

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[54] Victor Zorkaltsev was chairman of the Committee of State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation for Public Associations and Religious Organisations from 1994-2003.

SMR may have suffered a series of setbacks on the everyday level of securing permits for building new mosques or introducing religious education in schools. However, the politicised idea of harnessing the value of religion to achieve Russia's greatness provided a mutually acceptable platform for senior religious leaders to engage not only with the state but also with each other.

Even when state-council relations reached a low point (see next section), Ravil Gainutdin called on Muslim communities to work together with the government 'to prevent the spiritual decline' and to encourage young people 'to believe in themselves and in the ability of the state' (SMR 2011a). He urged young people not to forget 'about Russian patriotism, which seeks to preserve ethnic harmony and unity in our multi-religious society' (Ibid). More importantly, in his address to the All-Russian Muslim Forum in March 2011, Gainutdin called for building a 'close and trusting relationship between the Russian confessions' and to 'remove grounds for mutual resentment and mistrust between the leaders and people of different faiths' in order 'to save society from the abyss of spiritual impoverishment and degradation' (Gainutdin 2011b).

Another important element of the SMR's positive engagement with the government was strong cooperation between Gainutdin and the Mayor of Moscow Yuri Luzhkov (1992-2010). Within the centralised system of governance, friendly ties with Moscow authorities ensured that many issues were resolved without making special appeals to the President. While still in office, Luzhkov supported the SMR in its opposition to religious education in schools. According to one respondent, 'the Russian Orthodox Church announced its programme of the Foundations of Orthodox Culture, but the government has not yet decided to introduce it in 2009 and Luzhkov is against it, too'(Interview 3).

There were agreements reached on plots of land allocated for construction of mosques in Moscow. The SMR was successful in converting its close relationship with Moscow authorities into tangible improvements of the Moscow Cathedral Mosque. The Council continued to invite the Mayor to celebrate Muslim festivals

and see for himself the growing need to expand the mosque. Continuous efforts to get the Mayor involved in the process of reconstruction paid off when 'the Moscow government … offered the Council an extra 0. 89 hectares of land to build a new extension' (Gizatullin 2009). Considering the land prices at the centre of the city, the Council took this gesture 'as a sign of care and respect for Moscow's Muslims' (Ibid).

Their informal alliance helped shield the SMR from some of the attacks by other Muslim organisations or indeed the ROC. For example, some commentators claimed that church officials favoured a more loyal partner such as the TsDUM who would accept its leading role and would not engage in missionary work among the Russian population' (Makarkin 2005). While Luzhkov remained in power till 2010, there was no need for the SMR's leadership to take a particularly critical stance on Muslim rights in relation to the Church or civil servants if this might have threatened its cooperation with the government.

Islamic education as the shared agenda

The SMR's campaign to develop and promote Islamic education illustrates how positive changes in state policies on religion, including state support for Islam and the increasingly corporatist nature of state-religion relations provided an opportunity for the Council's closer cooperation with the government. In light of constitutional restrictions on the state's direct involvement in religious affairs, it is not surprising that the government's support of Muslim projects was based on their cultural rather than religious dimension. The proposals focused on providing support for educational, charitable and cultural activities. In line with the law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations, the state could 'assist and support the charitable activities of religious organisations as well as the realisation of socially important cultural and educational programs and events' (Federal Law No, 125-FZ, 2004, art 18).

State support for Muslim efforts to rebuild the previously dismantled system of Islamic education (including Muslim schools, universities, and imam training centres) did not technically infringe the legal restrictions. Moreover, this fitted within the common agenda on fighting extremism. There was a mutual agreement between Muslim organisations and state officials that projects aimed at developing training programmes for Muslim clergy, establishing Islamic universities and engaging in publishing and charity work should be supported with state grants. Malashenko (2010a: 82) suggests that the Muslim clergy and the Russian state were united in their rejection of non-traditional Islam, which [was] identified with radicalism and extremism.'

Within the Russian context such paternalistic forms of state support had two implications for state-Islam relations. First, by integrating top Muslim officials within the system of grants, it reinforced the corporatist nature of religious representation. Second, it demonstrated that the government took an active interest in the lives of Muslim communities and consolidated the top-down style of state patronage. While the SMR and other Muslim partners have been encouraged to use the money to help the state in its fight against Islamic extremism, the government could prove its care for Muslim minorities. In his comments on state support for Islamic education and state-Muslim relations, a senior Muslim official praised the way in which the 'state machine turned itself towards Muslims and Islamic education and concerned itself with helping Muslims to prepare their own elite' (Interview 7).

The joint efforts of government officials, the SMR, other centralised Muslim organisations and Russian scholars of Islam resulted in the establishment of the Foundation for support of Islamic culture, scholarship and education (hereafter the Foundation) in 2007.[55] Young Muslim leaders from the DUM in the Nizhny

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[55] Earlier in the chapter, I briefly mentioned that during the Yeltsin period, in the climate of increased freedom in Russia and its policy of open borders, there were many Islamic organisations, namely from Turkey and Saudi Arabia who were keen not only to re-establish connections with Muslims in Russia, but also to bring their own interpretations of Islam. A lot of foreign funding was channelled into reviving Islamic education and publishing in Russia. In this context, the establishment of Russia's

Novgorod Region (*Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musul'man Nizhegorodskoi Oblasti,* DUMNO) played a key role in developing Islamic education and acted as a useful ally for the SMR.[56] The group's active participation in developing curricula for Islamic institutions and its publishing sector found a positive response from the authorities interested in monitoring Russian Islam and limiting foreign assistance. Damir Mukhetdinov, the head of the DUMNO, praised the creation of the Foundation as a step 'in the right direction in relations between the government… communities, and the Spiritual Board of Muslims…in tackling problems in the name of Russia's prosperity and inter-national peace' (Mukhetdinov 2007). Within the Russian corporatist context, where individual efforts of small Muslim organisations struggle to secure sufficient funding, such type of collaboration with the SMR proved beneficial (Interview 1).

The Foundation's primary objective was to provide an 'open, honest forum for cooperation between the state and Islamic religious organisations in Russia', guaranteed by 'active engagement with the President's Administration, the Government and Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (Foundation Website). The SMR, together with the TsDUM and the KTsMSK were all registered among its official founders. The Foundation engaged in channelling resources to Muslim communities, while carefully monitoring where the money went. For example, to qualify for funding, communities or organisations had to be officially registered and prove they have not been involved in any extremist activities (Interview 3)**.**

In the past, state officials were reluctant to admit their actual financial support to Muslim religious organisations and tended to emphasise their moral rather than financial backing (Grishin 2009). However, in his written address to the delegates at

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own body which would support Muslim communities and provide funding to individual projects which it would be able to monitor has become particularly important.
[56] The Muslim Spiritual Board in Nizhny Novgorod is part of the DUMER, which is under the jurisdiction of the SMR. Ravil Gainutdin is chairman of both organisations, the DUMER and the SMR.

the conference on fighting terrorism, President Dmitri Medvedev (2008) praised the 'unifying force of religion' and emphasised the importance of funding the 'missionary work' of traditional Muslim leaders on the grounds that it helps people to 'separate true faith from attempts to manipulate faith by the self-styled preachers.'

The SMR valued the importance of state funding in educating young Muslims and protecting them from radical teachings. Mirroring government rhetoric on the need to fight extremism, the Council gained an opportunity to secure further funding to develop Muslim infrastructure and support Muslim communities in building new mosques, publishing Muslim literature and opening educational establishments. In 2009, Gainutdin praised the work of the Foundation as a 'wonderful example of cooperation between the state and religious organisations, especially for youth…as an opportunity for systematic fighting against extremism by humanitarian means' and a great help to 'many educational activities based on religious beliefs and traditions of our fathers and grandfathers' (Gainutdin 2009).

Large-scale funding programmes and state patronage of Islam within the officially secular Russian state were met with some criticism (Ponkin 2008). Following allegations of corruption and money laundering in the beginning of 2010, there was an increased emphasis on financial transparency.[57] The government continued to channel financial resources to the Foundation, even though the SMR's status as the main recipient was challenged by other Muslim organisations, as will be discussed in the next section.

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[57] For the charges of alleged corruption see *ROSPRES* 23 March 2010 and *Islam RF* 25 March 2010.

The SMR's strategy of disengagement: securitisation of Islam

State support for Muslim official organisations in exchange for loyalty was not surprising, particularly in the light of increasingly corporatist relations, official institutionalisation of Islam as Russia's traditional religion and incorporation of Muslim leaders in state-religion relations. What is interesting in the Russian case is a period of tensions, during which the Council openly challenged the state about Muslim religious rights. These tensions were partly a result of the changed configurations of alliances and personal animosities between the SMR's leadership and the Kremlin's advisors which became more pronounced under a more diversified approach to state-religion relations under the Medvedev presidency (2008-2012). A brief analysis of the SMR's disagreements with the government in 2010 indicates that the Kremlin's advisors were happy to engage with SMR as long as it restrained from openly criticising the government. More importantly, there was a shift in religious cleavages, brought about by the increasingly negative public perception of Islam in relation to the dominant role of the ROC. In this section I will examine how the intensity of religious divisions, and particularly the way they were presented by the SMR's spokesmen, has become more visible in the public sphere as anti-migrant feelings turned increasingly Islamophobic.

Theories of securitisation suggest that behind the refusal to accommodate the needs of minority communities lies a collective fear of the majority that their identity is under threat from foreign traditions (Buzan and Weaver 1998). Local and municipal authorities were often reluctant to approve or promote Muslim activities in Moscow districts. For example, in 2010 the local authorities in the Moscow area of Tekstilschiki caved in to the pressure of nationalist groups and the general public protesting against the plans to build a new mosque for 3,000 Muslims living in the area. After a series of petitions and demonstrations, they assured the public that no mosque would be built in the vicinity (Yegorova, 2010).

In the previous section, I suggested that religion has become an important marker of the Russian identity, following the collapse of the Soviet ideology and religious

revival of the 1990s. Official recognition of Islam and its reintegration as one of Russia's four traditional religions facilitated cooperation between Muslim clergy and high-level officials, thus partly pacifying religious divisions. However, towards the mid-2000s, the salience of religious cleavages on the societal level increased in light of rising levels of Islamophobia. This was partly due to increased migration from Central Asia, partly from global security concerns and Russia's own attempts to deal with the spill-over effect of terrorist threats from the North Caucasus.[58]Attempts to build new mosques in large cities, coupled with large numbers of migrants from Central Asia, coming to celebrate Muslim festivals and cramming inside and outside the four official mosques in the capital exposed and fused together strong anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim feelings. These feelings were fuelled by negative publicity of Muslim practices in the media, combined with local officials giving in to public fears over Islamic symbols in their predominantly non-Muslim areas.

The previously mentioned Soviet preoccupation with ethnicity, combined with the subsequent positive promotion of religion, established a degree of fluidity in public perceptions of ethnic and religious identity. In their study on Islamophobia, Engelgardt and Krymin (2003) suggested that Russian xenophobic feelings were often directed at members of other groups because of their different ethnicity rather than religion. Pain suggested that negative attitudes towards Islam were often ethnically-determined (Pain 2012). However, according to Verkhovsky (2007), it is difficult to separate religious intolerance from ethnic intolerance, because 'Russian society tends to confuse religious and ethnic identity.'

Moreover, in the aftermath of terrorist bombings in Moscow in 2010 and media reports about Muslims 'flooding' the area around the Moscow Cathedral Mosque, some opinion polls indicated a rise in negative attitudes towards Islam. Between 2003 and 2006, the Public Opinion Foundation (FOM) noted a small increase in positive attitudes towards Islam (FOM 2006). By 2012, they found that 23%

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[58] This was exemplified by hostage crises in the Moscow 'Dubrovka' theatre in 2002, in Beslan in 2004 and more recent bombings in Moscow underground in 2010.

expressed a negative attitude towards Islam and 39% believed that Islam played a negative role in Russia in general (FOM 2012).

A brief analysis of my data gathered in 2008 and 2011 suggests that over a short period, anti-Muslim rhetoric has increased. In 2008, some respondents noted that anti-Muslim feelings were generally expressed in xenophobic, anti-immigrant terms (Interview 1). However, by 2011 more people focused on the rise of Islamophobia, not only in Russian society, but also among state officials (Interview 5). Some anti-Muslim feelings were coloured by pejorative references towards migrants from Central Asia, while others revealed a growing fear and dislike of Muslims from the North Caucasus, based on real or perceived links to terrorism and crime (Interview 6). The selective nature of Islamophobic feelings becomes evident in relation to Tatar communities. As one caller noted on Russian radio, these people are 'our local Tatars who we love and respect', as opposed to people from Central Asia 'who are not welcome here' (Russian News Service 2010).

Arguably, a rise in general xenophobia contributed to the negative politicisation of Islam, and the securitisation of Muslim religious identity. The growing Islamophobia highlighted religious divisions and provided Muslim organisations with opportunities to mobilise against discrimination on religious grounds. Malashenko (2007: 98) highlighted that '[r]eligious minorities tend to consolidate on the basis of their confession, especially when they feel a real or perceived threat to their rights and status.' In the Russian context, such a threat to Muslim identity was only too apparent (Ibid).

In the following section, I will argue that as an institutionalised actor, the SMR campaigned to pacify the tensions by articulating the need for more religious spaces which could accommodate the growing number of Muslim believers, regardless of their ethnic origin. However, exacerbation of these tensions in society and a parallel problematisation of the issue by the SMR's leaders provided the Council with rhetorical ammunition to challenge the state and re-position itself as a key defender of Muslim minority interests. In line with the POS expectations, the growing

securitisation of Islam resulted in a change in the SMR's rhetoric. The Council became more critical of the government which, in turn, had a serious impact on its relations with state officials. Moreover, it began to use the securitised rhetoric of a community under threat to challenge the parallel fears of the majority population. For instance, in his address to the All-Russian Muslim Forum in 2011, Gainutdin (2011b) argued that a real threat was not the development of Muslim infrastructure:

> The first and most significant threat to all citizens of our country, including Muslims, is the sharp rise in xenophobia and chauvinism in Russian society, particularly a rapid growth of Islamophobia.

A case for contention

A series of tensions emerged between the SMR and state officials over the freedom of religious worship and equal treatment of Muslim communities. The key issue was the extent to which the Russian government and municipal authorities protected Muslim minority rights. For the SMR, the authorities' reluctance to alleviate mosque shortages in Moscow provided a clear example of unfair treatment of Muslim communities, regardless of whether they were Moscow-born Tatars, ethnic Russians from the North Caucasus or migrants from Central Asia. The SMR was not prepared to make a distinction between Russia's ethnic Muslims and new migrants because it considers Muslim solidarity above any ethnic and cultural divisions. Within the larger space of the former Soviet Union and a long history of ties between former Soviet republics and Russia's previous centralised Muslim organisations, the SMR's present engagement in establishing close relations with Muslim migrants was hardly surprising.

Although there are many unofficial places where Muslims can worship, there are only four officially-recognised and purpose-built mosques for 2 million Muslims living in Moscow. There are similar tensions over mosque shortages in other large cities which occur during Muslim festivals, as the Russian media produces some inevitably shocking images of many Muslims praying in the streets around the

existing mosques. Whereas representatives from the TsDUM took a more conciliatory stance and accepted the offer of alternative, temporary venues for Muslim celebrations, the SMR used the salience of religious cleavages to place pressure on the government and mobilise support for more mosques to be built. The SMR raised its expectations of the government, while it became more critical of officials advising on state engagement with Muslim organisations.

A turning point in the SMR's engagement with the government came in 2010, after the failed attempts to unify the three main centralised Muslim organisations in 2009.[59] Gainutdin was expected to be the preferred chairman of such an organisation, which would have reinforced the SMR's influence within the Russian *ummah*. Such a development would have considerably changed the existing power configurations and alliance structure within the Muslim field. While many commentators attributed the failure to unite to internal rivalries and personal animosities between the SMR and TsDUM, some of the SMR supporters noted the involvement of particular state officials working behind the scenes and interfering in the process. Both reasons were summed up by one interview who noted:

> there were different conceptions of how unification can be done, but there were also those in authorities who did not want this greater unity…because there are some forces…which are afraid of strong, unified Islam in Russia… if there are many Islamic centres, it is easier to manipulate them (Interview 5).

In the corporatist setting, state endorsement of a particular institution depends on the latter's loyalty. Unsurprisingly, Muslim leaders were expected to limit their critical comments on the government's lack of action. Some noted a certain cooling in the government's engagement with the SMR as a result of uncovered or alleged corruption among the Council's top officials (Interview 17). However, others suggested that the Kremlin's advisors did not welcome the SMR's more proactive position on the lack of prayer provisions and accusations of Islamophobia. As a

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[59] The three centralised Muslim organisations at the time were the SMR, TsDUM and KSNSK. In 2009, the DUM of Tatarstan was still part of the SMR and RAIS had not been yet created.

result, the SMR's members were temporarily excluded from some of the committees, while in the Public Chamber its chairman was replaced by a new Moscow representative from the TsDUM, Albir Krganov. This created an impression that the SMR had lost its favourable position with the government. As one supporter of the SMR remarked:

> Because of critical statements of the government, some Muslims were taken off the posts…and now many people write badly of the Council – but let them write, it is nothing but provocation (Interview 6).

The SMR suffered a series of blows as a result of the altered alliance configurations in state-Muslim relations in Moscow. The first change involved the dismissal of the Mayor Luzhkov in September 2010 and the breakdown of the long-established informal relations with municipal authorities. The second change was a shift in the Kremlin's close cooperation with the SMR and a search for different partners. On one hand, this might have been a result of internal fighting among officials responsible for regulating religious matters under the Medvedev administration. On the other hand, a more differentiated approach to religious governance might also suggest a small fluctuation in the corporatist nature of state-religion relations at the time.

The SMR was unhappy about the ongoing smear campaign against its leaders and their efforts to reconstruct the Moscow Cathedral Mosque. Its leadership expressed suspicion that the smear campaign had been orchestrated by particular officials within the advisory circles to the Kremlin. By 2010 there were bitter exchanges between the SMR spokesmen and figures such as Aleksei Grishin who was a key advisor on state relations with Muslim organisations and also in charge of funding initiatives for Muslim communities. Another key player was Roman Silant'ev who, among his other titles and responsibilities, including his work at the ROC, was keen to promote the interests of the TsDUM, the SMR's key competitor and increase its influence in Moscow. Moreover, from the SMR's perspective, he was ready to support any other Muslim player willing to undermine the work of the Council.

The dismissal of Luzhkov in September 2010 significantly weakened the SMR's position in securing land for religious purposes, rendering some of the previously favourable, informal agreements between the Moscow authorities and the SMR ineffective. A new administration under the Mayor Sergei Sobyanin had a more cautious approach and reversed some of the previous decisions, particularly following the conflict over the mosque in Tekstilschiki. Some interviewees acknowledged the difficulties of working with the new team of officials engaged in policies of mosque construction and expressed hope that with time, a greater understanding might be reached (Interview 5; Interview 7). The appointment of Sobyanin constrained the SMR's abilities to promote Muslim rights and encouraged it to be more assertive in voicing its demands. This is in line with Tarrow's (1998) argument that too much coercion by the state may lead to increased contention on the part of the social movement organisation.

A second blow to the SMR's engagement with the government was the creation of the Russian Association of Islamic Accord (RAIS) in December 2010. The new Muslim organisation united the DUMs of Perm, Stavropol and Mordovia and had close links with security services (Interview 16). The same month saw the opening of the TsDUM branch in Moscow. The SMR viewed both developments as attempts to undermine its authority in Moscow. These moves were interpreted by some of the SMR's leaders as attempts by state officials working on religious affairs to exert pressure on the Council and criticise its increasingly militant rhetoric as unpatriotic. Moreover, the RAIS and TsDUM's branch in Moscow were praised, for example by Grishin and Silant'ev, for their loyalty, accommodating position on matters of mosque shortages and close relations with the ROC. The RAIS engaged in a lengthy campaign to discredit the SMR's controversial work in rebuilding the Moscow Cathedral Mosque and called on the new mayor to grant the building permissions to the TsDUM instead. It also capitalised on the failed efforts to open a mosque in Tekstilchiki and accused the SMR of using the Islamophobic card against the authorities (RAIS 2010a).

The period of tensions between the SMR and the government occurred during the Medvedev administration which was marked by an attempt to introduce some elements of political decentralisation and (at least rhetorical) manifestation of greater democratisation of the Russian system, including modernisation of its political, social and religious institutions (Fagan 2012, Jonson and White 2012). Arguably, the Medvedev administration might have been more reminiscent of the 'managed pluralism' of the first Putin presidency. However, as some of these discourses permeated state-Muslim relations, the policy of state-regulated pluralisation and an attempt to engage with more civil society players have only intensified internal rivalries between the official Muslim organisations seeking state endorsement. In theory, an extended invitation to more Muslim voices to engage with the state would have been a more suitable mode of engaging with the non-hierarchical nature of Islam. However, I will demonstrate in the next section that in light of personal rivalries between Muslim leaders and the high benefits of being favoured by the state, the more diversified pattern of state-Muslim relations has led to more confrontation between the SMR and government advisors.

Moreover, the SMR's increasingly militant tone offended the officials in charge of distributing funds and state patronage. The failure in personal, informal connections manifested itself in the growing support and development of alternative Muslim voices. Russian scholars and commentators on Islam tend to agree that alternative organisations played a part in altering, if only temporarily, the balance of power among Muslim organisations. Malashenko (2010b) highlighted that it was an attempt to lower the prestige of the SMR, particularly at the sensitive period following 'the resignation of the mayor of Moscow…with whom Gainutdin developed the closest relationships.' Similarly, Silant'ev (2011), arguably the SMR's strongest opponent, was keen to conclude, perhaps rather hastily, that the 'creation of the RAIS precipitated the demise of the SMR.' In an interview to *Islam Ru*, he also remarked that although state officials were not directly told not to engage with the SMR, they talked to alternative organisations, including the TsDUM and the RAIS (Guliayeva 2011).

The war of words

Following the growing salience of ethnic and religious cleavages in the aftermath of nationalist demonstrations in Moscow in December 2010, as well as the creation of the RAIS earlier in the month, the SMR's engagement with state officials became still more confrontational. Arguably, this was the combined effect of mobilised anti-Muslim feelings, confrontations with local authorities over prayer spaces and the creation of the RAIS. The Council's previous statements expressing regret over the issue of mosque shortages tended to be more sympathetic towards local officials whose choices could have been restricted by the wishes of the Christian majority (Gainutdin 2000). In December 2010, there was a clear change in how the SMR framed Muslim discrimination and challenged the authorities to respect Muslim minority rights as was documented by a series of public exchanges between the SMR's leaders and state officials.

A change of rhetoric became apparent in the SMR's letter addressed to the new Mayor and distributed upwards along the vertical of power to Putin and Medvedev. The SMR used a triple discursive frame of collective action by first identifying the salient and resonant issue, then apportioning the blame, and finally suggesting what needed to be done to get the issue resolved. It emphasised the constitutional rights of Muslim communities to have religious spaces for prayer (SMR 2010). In reference to protests in Tekstilschiki, it was careful not to apportion blame to the government but rather to the media and 'individual informal social organizations who urge[d] residents to oppose the building of mosques in the capital' (Ibid). The letter warned that such actions would 'incite religious and ethnic hostility' hinder the government attempts to ensure 'social order, inter-religious and inter-ethnic harmony', and be 'damaging to church-state relations' (Ibid). In its calls to resolve the situation it reminded the authorities of the exemplary role Moscow was to play in state-religion relations in Russia and made a powerful appeal 'to the leadership of our state and the city of Moscow to provide the required amount of land for the construction of mosques in Moscow' (Ibid).

Three days later, the SMR's frustration with the issue was betrayed by the rather harsh opinions expressed by its chairman in an interview to Radio Liberty in the Tatar language (Radio Azatliq). The importance of the interview was three-fold. First, it was a clear statement against civil servants involved in trying to contain the SMR by endorsing the RAIS. By calling them 'pocket muftis' and 'marionettes', it accused the RAIS of 'working within the state together with such Islamophobes as Grishin…to crush Islam in Russia' (Gainutdin 2010). Second, it now blamed the government for the failed efforts to unify different Muslim centralised organisations earlier in 2009 and called its policies 'anti-Islamic' (Ibid). Third, it voiced one of its most direct criticisms of the lack of religious provisions for Muslim communities. Gainutdin painted a picture of Muslims forced 'to make public prayers in the street, on the tramways, even in the church yard' during the major Muslim festivals and called it an unchecked 'humiliation of Muslims and infringement of their civil rights' (Ibid).

In response to these comments, the RAIS called for the SMR's work to be suspended. Although its actions may be interpreted as more evidence of internal rivalries between Muslim organisations, there is evidence to suggest that some officials used the RAIS as a proxy to level criticisms at the SMR and attack its legitimacy. The RAIS muftis called Gainutdin's words 'unpatriotic' and 'ungrateful' and accused the SMR of 'inciting religious and ethnic hatred' and 'working against state security' (RAIS, 2010b). Similar sentiments were later voiced by the Moscow office of TsDUM. One of its spokesmen commented that over the last 15 years of working in Moscow, the SMR had not lived up to the expectations of the authorities or ordinary Muslims (Krganov 2011).

Although the SMR lost the patronage of the Mayor's office and was in open confrontation with competing Muslim organisations, it continued to take risks and challenge the authorities because it was bolstered by direct support offered by a younger generation of muftis from Nizhny Novgorod. These were the same group of Muslim leaders who had previously contributed to the development of Islamic

education and worked closely with the SMR. First, they offered to the SMR their extensive publishing resources and Muslim media to promote a positive image of the SMR. For example, Mufti Damir Mukhetdinov wrote an article in *Medina al-Islam* defending the SMR's militant rhetoric and questioning the motivation of its opponents (Mukhetdinov 2011). Second, as will be discussed in the next chapter, they joined the SMR's central apparatus in the process of internal restructuring. Although some interviewees linked their support for the SMR with personal career aspirations, others emphasised the extent to which the Council benefited from such an internal alliance. For example in his interview to *Islam RF*, Umar Idrisov, a close supporter of the SMR and the former Chairman of the DUM in Nizhny Novgorod (1993-2008), mentioned that Damir Mukhetdinov joined the organisation 'in the midst of the information war waged against the Mufti Ravil Gainutdin personally by Grishin' (Islam RF, 5 March 2012).

The historic legacies of Muslim representatives working within the system and strongly relying on authorities to protect Muslim minorities, coupled with the restrictive nature of the Russian corporatist, authoritarian state, ensured that even in its most critical statements the SMR was careful not to openly criticise the first figures of the government. The SMR continued to express its discontent at the existing provisions for Muslim communities, but it focused its attack on state advisors and middle level officials directly involved in issuing permits for land or distributing funds for Muslim projects. Moreover, the SMR's spokesmen were keen to emphasise that even at the most challenging stages of their engagement with the government and during 'personal attacks on the mufti from competing organisations', Ravil Gainutdin was given a prominent seat at the Congress of the ruling party United Russia, which showed that 'he [was] still getting the government's support' (Interview 6).

Therefore, a short period of tensions revealed a breakdown in the SMR's communication with government advisors. As a result, according to one interviewee, tolerance towards the SMR's rhetoric in defending Muslim rights was reduced as 'authorities [did] not forgive as much as they used to because they got fed up'

(Interview 17). The same official suggested that the SMR's 'words and stories abroad' that 'Muslim rights in Russia [were] not protected and discriminated against…harmed the authorities' (Ibid) As a result, 'the state started to support more state-friendly organisations' (Ibid). Arguably, this is what the SMR found particularly offensive as it perceived such actions a direct manipulation of Muslim leaders and direct interference into the lives of Muslim communities.

The SMR and the Russian state: a case for re-engagement

The paternalistic nature of Russia's corporatist approach provides an informal mechanism for resolving tensions. Within the Russian vertical context of state-Muslim relations, there is a shared agreement that disputes with officials can be successfully resolved by eventually by-passing middle-level officials and addressing the Kremlin directly. Initiated by Putin and continued by Medvedev, official meetings have become a regular feature of Russia's corporatist style of state-religion relations. They provide a real opportunity for heads of traditional religions to voice their concerns and get assurances that issues will get resolved by cascading instructions to the right level of the power vertical. One respondent expressed concern that 'you have to complain to Putin, the Tsar, but that's how things work in Russia' (Interview 7).

The informal mechanism of resolving tensions from the top proved useful for the SMR in rebuilding its relations with the Kremlin after bitter exchanges with officials. A key opportunity presented itself in 2012, just before the Duma election and guaranteed return of Putin as President. The timing was pertinent as Putin wanted electoral support from traditional confessions. He was ready to offer a more sensitive and accommodating approach to state-religion relations that could pacify some of the recent disputes. The official meeting between Russia's religious leaders and Vladimir Putin was initiated by ROC Patriarch Kirill, with the aim of giving support to Putin's presidential campaign in return for assurances that state patronage and support of traditional religions would continue. Within the overall corporatist framework of

such meetings, it came as no surprise that senior representatives from different Christian confessions, Buddhism, Judaism and Islam openly supported Putin's candidature in the coming elections, particularly in light of the public protests in the aftermath of the Duma elections in December 2011.

In his address to religious leaders, Putin articulated a need to reformulate the definition of the secular nature of the state. By distancing himself from the Soviet era, when the separation of the Church from the state meant that 'the rights of the Church and traditional religions were infringed', he argued for a different understanding of Russia's secularism, suggesting that 'the nature of relations between the state and religious organisations…should be one of partnership, mutual help and support' (Putin 2012). This meant that traditional religions would continue to 'play a large positive role in spiritual revival of the county' and the state would compensate religious organisations for previously confiscated buildings and forward the required funds, with 3.5 billion roubles projected for the period 2012-2014 (Ibid).

The idea of financial support to religious organisations has been firmly institutionalised in the official discourse of state-religion relations, seen as an achievement of Putin's administration over the turmoil of the 1990s. Following the protocol and similar rhetoric from other religious leaders, the chairman of the SMR praised Putin's role in achieving inter-confessional harmony and unity and placed special emphasis on his contribution to 'safeguarding and strengthening the spiritual unity of Muslims' (Gainutdin 2012a). A key point, however, that distinguished Gainutdin's speech from other religious leaders was that he voiced criticism of what the SMR saw as artificially created centres of Muslim influence (Ibid). Hinting at the failed attempts at unification, he expressed a wish for Muslims 'to be united, to be together with the leadership of the state and…contribute to strengthening the unity and integrity of our country' (Ibid). Finally he made a direct link between mandating Putin to contribute to the spiritual unity of the Russian nation, and 'not to fragment Russia along regional, national, religious lines' (Ibid).

In his response, Putin (2012) promised that the government 'would not interfere in the affairs of religious organisations' either by pushing them to fragment or forcing them to consolidate. He, therefore, provided verbal assurances that his administration and civil servants in charge of religious policies would steer clear of the previous attempts to restructure the existing field of official Muslim organisations. Neither would they introduce any new players to keep the existing institutions in check. Some respondents suggested this may have signalled the government's fatigue with managing the highly contested Muslim environment (Interview 9).

Whatever the underlying motivation, certain figures within the SMR saw this as a positive development and used it as a sign that the existing tensions were resolved. Commenting on Putin's words, Damir Mukhetdinov reiterated the SMR's readiness to endorse Putin and remarked that he was 'extremely pleased with the position of Prime Minister (and presidential candidate) on the secular nature of the state, running in full compliance with the Constitution of the Russian Federation' (DUMER 2012a). He also made a strong statement against officials, who 'in recent years have demonstrated a completely different understanding of public policy' and thought they could 'play with Muslim organisations as if they were toys' that they thought they could 'divide and crush them the way they liked' (Ibid).

He developed this idea a year later in less emotional terms by arguing that some officials were mistaken in thinking that muftis must be loyal to authorities, and if not they could simply give their backing to a new parallel structure (Mukhetdinov 2012a). However, speaking against political manipulation of the Muslim space, he was careful to attribute such actions not to the malicious nature of some officials, but rather to the 'general failure of some approaches in relations with the Muslim community' (Ibid).

Throughout the period of tensions, the Kremlin valued the Council's contribution to fighting extremism and dealing with problems of immigration. The government was also aware of the SMR's authority and high esteem among Muslim communities in Central Asia and the CIS, as well as its extensive network of contacts in the Middle

East and the Muslim World. By 2012, there was clear evidence that the SMR had regained some of its lost prestige with the authorities, which was even noted by its most radical opponents (Silant'ev 2013).

A series of measures were taken from both sides to rebuild the partnership. In an attempt to clear themselves from some of the alleged charges of corruption and mismanagement of funds, the SMR replaced its representatives in the Foundation and the Moscow Islamic University.[60] Among the Kremlin's advisors, Aleksei Grishin, who had been particularly critical of the SMR, was replaced by Ilya Barinov. In his capacity as Head of the Department for Cooperation with Religious Organisations, Barinov (2012) stated his readiness to build a constructive partnership with Gainutdin and reassured the SMR that there would be sufficient funds to support their activities. In particular, he emphasised that the question of funding would not be a 'matter of taste' but would be allocated according to the particular usefulness of the projects (Ibid).

In 2012, the SMR's representatives were happy to confirm that out of 1,683 grants distributed by the Foundation to Muslim organisations, 308 were given to the Russia Council of Muftis (DUMER 2012b). From their perspective, this was an indication that they had recovered a central position in state-Islam relations. However, the question of mosque shortages remained unresolved as Moscow authorities decided that the existing number of mosques was sufficient (Maltsev 2013). In spite of this deadlock, the SMR believed that it had increased its opportunities to lobby the government directly. In response to the Mayor's reluctance to build new mosques, a representative from the SMR commented that they would continue to defend Muslim religious and civil rights and, if necessary, would ask President Putin to intervene on their behalf (Ibid).

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[60] Damir Khairetdinov became a new rector of the Moscow Islamic University and Ildar Nurimanov became the SMR's new representative in the Foundation's official committees.

Conclusion

Within the largely corporatist context of state-religion relations, the SMR's interaction with the Russian government and state officials was generally based on close cooperation. Moreover, it was marked by state support for Muslim official organisations on one hand and their increasing co-optation and expectations of loyalty on the other. Such forms of engagement had a long historical tradition, interrupted by a short pluralist interlude during the Yeltsin administration. However, by 2002 state co-optation of the SMR and its temporary endorsement as a peak organisation appear to support the POS expectations that formal structures play an important role in shaping actors' behaviour.

In light of theoretical expectations, the data indicates that the positive promotion of traditional religions has provided the SMR with an easier access to the government and religious committees and facilitated its work on promoting Islamic education. Endorsed by the state, the SMR had a stronger basis to challenge the privileged position of the ROC and the ineffectiveness of particular local officials rather than general state policies. Furthermore, strong alliances with Yuri Luzhkov's office provided some temporary assurances that the shortages of religious spaces might be resolved.

State policies towards promoting religion may have increased opportunities for Muslim organisations to mobilise support for Muslim rights. Nonetheless, some of the strategies proved difficult to implement in light of the newly-exposed religious cleavages. Within a very short time, relations between the SMR and state officials soured, particularly over the issue of religious spaces and Muslim visibility in large cities. During a brief phase of increased pluralisation of Muslim organisations under the seemingly more democratic interlude of Medvedev's administration, a series of tensions emerged between the SMR and state officials which culminated in open animosity by the end of 2010. They were partly due to activities and involvement of other Muslim organisations and individual advisors to the Kremlin who did not approve of the SMR's privileged position. However, their institutional nature can be

better explained by the securitisation of religious cleavages. Negative attitudes to Islam increased in light of Moscow's terrorist acts, coupled with the increasingly Islamophobic nature of xenophobic feelings towards migrants from Central Asia and ethnic Muslims from the North Caucasus. The growing salience of religious cleavages created friction with the Kremlin, as the Council's increasingly critical rhetoric was perceived as a sign of its ingratitude and lack of patriotism.

Good personal relations and the presence of friendly allies should not be neglected either. The Council's mobilising tone may have been bolstered by its internal alliance with the DUM from Nizhny Novgorod. However, the dismissal of Moscow's Mayor also revealed its isolation and the extent to which the presence or absence of allies could constrain its activities. Within the highly competitive field of Muslim organisations, the SMR's rivals, namely the TsDUM and the RAIS, tried to benefit from the situation. This was indicative not so much of alliances, but rather rivalries and divisions which proved to be vital in shaping the balance of power within state-Muslim relations.

Finally, the subsequent re-engagement with the government and normalisation of relations illustrated the benefits of internal mechanisms of paternalism and the inter-dependence of official Muslim organisations and the Kremlin, not only on the matters of common ideology and rhetoric, but also electoral support and influence. The highly centralised, 'manual' (to use the Russian analogy of the driving mode) regime of direct engagement between the President and religious leaders reveals the authoritarian nature of state-religion relations in Russia. However, paradoxically, it equips the vertically structured corporatist system of interest mediation with a rather unexpected degree of flexibility. The SMR's re-engagement with the state demonstrated that middle-level barriers and prejudices of some officials could be overcome, provided top religious leaders knew how to work the system. The SMR's ability to challenge the state, while remaining its loyal partner, has provided it with key opportunities to defend Muslim rights. However, its failure to secure support of municipal and local officials has continuously frustrated its efforts and constrained its work.

The SMR's close engagement with the state may have helped secure concessions from the state and promote Muslim minority interests in Russia at the official level. However, the Council's inevitably bureaucratic behaviour and the lack of close connections with Russian Muslims meant that its engagement with Muslim communities was not without its problems. In the next chapter, I will examine the ways in which the SMR tried to improve its legitimacy among Muslims in Russia. As an intermediary institution, the council's effectiveness in protecting Muslim minority interests depends not only on its ability to gain access to the state, but also on the extent to which it can gain respect and support from those whose interests it claims to represent.

Chapter 6

The SMR's engagement with Muslim communities

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed the ways in which the SMR structured its relations with the Russian state under the two different scenarios of cooperation and confrontation. It was argued that in the corporatist context, paternalistic mechanisms of interdependence between senior Muslim leaders and the Kremlin led to a subsequent normalisation of close relations. In this chapter, I will examine the Council's engagement with Muslim communities and the ways in which it sought to improve its legitimacy in light of the changing expectations and competition from other Muslim organisations.

Before analysing the ways in which the SMR sought to gain support, I will briefly present the changing context of Muslim communities in Russia and discuss the ways in which ethnic, religious and generational differences within the Russian *ummah* have created a compound set of challenges for the SMR. I will then focus on the Council's discursive strategies and practical initiatives aimed at healing some of these intra-communal tensions and improving its own credibility as a representative institution – inclusive of different interests and mindful of creating a collective Muslim identity.

Organisational theories suggest that as interest groups age they dedicate more effort to improving their organisational maintenance. Moreover, their internal strategies unfold in line with the received norms and expectations of their external context. In the next section, I will examine how the SMR's strategies to gain support from Russian Muslims were affected by the corporatist setting of interest mediation, particularly by its centralised forms of administration and emphasis on technocratic,

rather than democratic legitimacy. I will examine this linkage in relation to a series of communicated and implemented initiatives and the Council's strategies to make its organisational more efficient and inclusive.

Russia's enduring legacy of representing Muslim interests though the system of DUMs resulted in historically institutionalised patterns of resolving Muslim issues within the existing constraints of these administrative structures. In the final part of the chapter, I will evaluate the nature and scope of SMR's reforms by drawing on historical institutionalist approaches which highlight the importance of entrenched interests and help explain the gradual nature of institutional change.

Over the last two decades the nature of Muslim minorities in Russia, particularly in large urban centres, has undergone a series of transformations in relation to its ethnic, generational and religious composition. In this chapter I suggest that the SMR's institutional proximity to the state and detachment from Muslim communities have made it difficult for the Council to respond to these changes. Similarly to the MCB, the Council sought to reform its organisational structure to legitimise itself in the eyes of Russian Muslims. However, these efforts were constrained by past patterns of Muslim representation and the present corporatist character of state-Islam relations in Russia.

The polarisation of Muslim interests in Russia

Islam in Russia represents a complex religious, cultural and ethnic mosaic with individual regional differences and traditional forms of Muslim administration.[61] Muslim minorities settled in the Russian territory have been affected by different historical legacies of state integration. These different collective memories ranged from relatively peaceful and now distant assimilation policies towards Tatar and

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[61] For a regional comparison see Pilkington and Yemelianova 2003. On Tatarstan: Nabiev, Ishakov and Khabutdinov 2002. On the North Caucasus: Bobrovnikov 2002, Zelkina 2000.

Bashkir groups to more militant campaigns in the North Caucasus, both past and present.[62] The older generations had also been exposed to the ideological melting pot of the Soviet period and its principle of 'brotherly peoples', regardless of their ethnic origin. The younger generation was raised with a more pronounced sense of ethnic and religious identity on one hand, and a more global transnational outlook on Islam on the other.

A series of Russian and Western studies provide detailed accounts of Muslim diversity in Russia (Dannreuther and March 2010, Hunter 2004, Pilkington and Yemelianova 2003). For example, Malashenko (2013) commented that Muslim composition in many Russian regions has changed which means that 'the Muslim space in Russia is continuously expanding.' As was mentioned in the introductory chapter, Muslim minorities living in Russia represent a complex mix of different ethnic and religious groups. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the process of Islamic revival, traditional forms of Muslim representation through the existing centralised institution of the DUMs was challenged by the need to develop a more differentiated engagement with a variety of Muslim groups. The interview data supports the claim that ethnic, religious and generational differences are reflected in the complexity of the Russian *ummah*. Moreover, it suggests that over the last five years, some of the internal cleavages have become more pronounced, which has resulted in a greater polarisation of Muslim interests.

Internal diversity, accompanied by increased intra-communal tensions, contributed to the changing attitudes towards Muslim leaders, particularly toward representatives from the DUMs. Some emphasised that such centralised organisations as the SMR failed to provide an equal representation to different ethnic and religious groups. Others commented that the actual ways in which Muslim official organisations operate were outdated and did not reflect the current concerns of Russian Muslims. A brief analysis of such comments on ethnic, religious and generational differences

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[62] On the war in Chechnya, and the conflict in the North Caucasus, see Souleimanov 2005 and Sagramoso 2007.

reveals the nature of criticisms directed at the SMR and its style of leadership. It helps understand why the SMR's authority has become challenged by other organisations, while many ordinary Muslims continued to express a degree of indifference towards it.

Greater polarisation: changes in ethnic, generational and religious demands

The first and the most problematic factor has been the growing internal polarisation of Russian Muslims based on their ethnic identity. The SMR is essentially a Tatar-based organisation which claims to speak on behalf of all Russian Muslims. Before the influx of Muslim migrants from Central Asia and increased internal Muslim migration from the North Caucasus, the Council was mainly in charge of providing representation and managing the religious demands of ethnic Tatar and Bashkir communities. They made up the majority of Muslims living within the SMR's geographical jurisdiction, i.e. mainly the European part of the Russian Federation.[63] However, in light of economic and social pressures, migrants from Central Asia have also settled in large cities and required access to religious spaces. The changed composition put extra pressure on the SMR, particularly considering high levels of religiosity among Muslims from the Central Asia and the North Caucasus. For example, one senior Muslim leader commented that:

> 60-80% migrants are practising Muslims from Central Asia…it is a
> serious problem for Russia …for the next ten years the issue will be
> how to adapt these immigrants' (Interview 5).

In spite of the overall rhetoric of Muslim solidarity, many respondents highlighted the growing tensions between different ethnic groups living in mixed areas, namely between the Tatar communities and the new arrivals from the North Caucasus and

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[63] The SMR also included Muslim communities which were consolidated under the jurisdiction of the DUM of Tatarstan in the Volga-Urals. However, over the last couple of years, Tatarstan muftis were reluctant to recognise the SMR's authority in light of personal relations, power struggles and accusations of corruption.

Central Asia. Some acknowledged successful stories of peaceful coexistence of different Muslim communities in the Memorial Mosque, under the leadership of Shamil Alyautdinov (an imam of Tatari origin). Others mentioned intra-communal tensions between Tatar imams and the changing nature of mosque congregation, mainly referring to new Chechen members. One respondent explained:

> New Muslim minorities who come and see that they are no longer minorities and are equal to Tatars…. start to behave differently, have different demands, require new spaces for worship and so we have confrontations – we are not against you, but this is a Tatar mosque, it has been built by Tatars (Interview 7).

Some interviewees expressed concern that if another ethnic community was to become a majority in the mosque, there was a possibility that they may take over the mosque and drive Tatar members out. In the words of one interviewee, 'if there are no Tatars, then the Caucasians will come… and if this happens…there is a risk they will leave from the jurisdiction of the Council [the SMR]' (Interview 6). He went on to provide an example of such an alleged takeover in a Yaroslavl mosque where a Chechen imam left the jurisdiction of the DUM (Ibid).

Moreover, ethnic tensions also happen over religious practices and the language of the sermon. Whereas the majority of Tatar imams (particularly of older generation) prefer to speak Tatar, Muslims from the North Caucasus are often unable to understand their sermons. The same respondent phrased the issue in the following way:

> Chechens come, they don't like the ways things are done in originally Tatar mosques…so they bring their own traditions and customs…before there was an old generation of Tatars who maintained order and were more strict, now they cannot do that anymore (Interview 6).

While some Muslims from the North Caucasus moved from the south to the more central areas, there are still few Muslim organisations representing their interests in large cities. Although there are some diasporic groups, the KTsMSK does not have

any jurisdiction over the Muslims outside its regional jurisdiction of the North Caucasus. One respondent remarked that 'people from the Caucasus feel that their rights are not being respected... [or]…their voices heard' (Interview 19).

There are also further tensions between some members of the Tatar community and migrants from Central Asia in relations to the negative perception of Islam in Russian society. With a high percentage of Muslims who attend religious festivals being from Central Asia, some Muslims have expressed concern that such high numbers near the mosques have tarnished the reputation of the Russian *ummah* as a whole. One interviewee regretted that the image of Islam has suffered from the arrival of migrants as there was 'an impression that Muslims are all terrorists, market traders and are all from Central Asia' (Interview 1) This was different from how the Tatar community was perceived by the non-Muslim majority: accepted on the grounds of shared culture and historic tradition.

The second factor creating a serious obstacle in representing Muslim interests is the widening generational gap between old and young Muslims. The already-mentioned gap in understanding between the old generation of imams and some young Muslims from other regions is part of a bigger picture of internal generational cleavages and different demands on Muslim clergy. The Soviet period of religious persecution and disengagement from religion resulted in a missing generation of Muslim leaders who would have been now in their 40s or 50s (Interview 7). Moreover there is a gap between the older and younger generations because of a rather official, bureaucratic language used by the senior imams and their lack of educational expertise. For many young Muslims who had a chance to study abroad, the old ways seem outdated:

> Today we see that 90% of Muslims are young people who don't accept the old leaders…their understanding of the world is different, especially if the old do not have enough knowledge about Islam (Ibid).

The generational conflict is also about the importance of tradition in relation to the global nature of Islam. In this respect, there is little difference between the changing

nature of the Russian *ummah* and its British or European counterparts. In the words of one interviewee 'for older generations it is about their popular traditions, but the younger generation has a global outlook' (Interview 1).

While some young Muslims feel their interests are not represented through the official organisations, they begin to organise themselves. With the threat of such informal groups becoming radicalised as their activities fall below the official radar, there is a growing feeling among the Muslim clergy that they need to include these groups. Although there are officially organised large-scale forums for young Muslims, the fact that they are sponsored and therefore monitored by official organisations does not always inspire trust among ordinary Muslims.

The third factor which is closely identified with both ethnic and generational cleavages is a growing divergence of religious expectations. Commenting on the wider appeal of more radical Islamist movements, Malashenko (2013) remarked in a rather gloomy fashion that:

> The traditionalists are gradually losing their popularity among Muslim youths in Russia. They have few charismatic and professionally educated clergymen and have been tarnished by collaboration with the secular authorities, to whom they remain loyal.

Besides the religious diversity of the different schools of Islam and the state desire to support 'traditional' and 'moderate' forms Islam against the threat of Islamic radicalisation, some studies indicated a growing religiosity among Russian Muslims. The latest figures based on the ethnic and regional markers of religion showed little change in the number of Muslims (Census 2010).[64] However, the aforementioned study by the 'Levada-Center' (2012) suggested that between 2009 and 2012, the number of people who indicated their adherence to Islam increased from 4% to 7%. Moreover, while commenting on the changed composition of Muslim communities

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[64] There was, however, a small reduction in the Bashkir population (Census 2010).

in large cities, Malashenko (2013) noted that Muslims became more religiously observant.

However, increased religious observance does not necessarily imply respect for official Muslim organisations, such as the DUMs, because of their bureaucratic qualities, close identification with the state and the lack of religious expertise. In the final part of the chapter I will return to the question of spiritual authority to explain why more progressive Russian Muslims may have viewed the SMR as an outdated and co-opted relic of the top-down approach of Muslim integration.

Collective identity representation: questioning the SMR's legitimacy

Internal divisions and diverging expectations have hindered the effort to provide collective representation of Muslim interests and put extra pressure on official spokesmen to cater for everybody's needs. While this was an inevitable development of the changing Muslim environment, the proliferation of different interests and the polarisation of opinions provided a fertile ground for intra-communal rivalries and personal attacks on the SMR's leadership by other centralised organisations. Increasingly, the SMR was criticised for its inability to respond to the challenges facing Muslim communities, particularly on the issues of mosque shortages or radicalisation. Some of these issues were exploited by other organisations within the context of state-Muslim relations, as they tried to use every opportunity to challenge the SMR's reputation in the eyes of the government (see previous chapter).

However, some comments were also made in relation to the SMR's inability to provide leadership for Muslim communities and represent their interests. For example as was noted by a one interviewee:

> Today we have some questions for the SMR, because when they say they claim to speak on behalf of all muftis of Russia, they are misleading Muslims in Russia and abroad because this is not

> so…around 40 muftis are not part of SMR and have never given
> them any right to speak in their name (Interview 20).

As discussed in the previous chapter, the SMR's authority was being undermined by the increasingly critical comments from the two other official organisations, the TsDUM and the RAIS. The TsDUM has been the Council's traditional rival from the early days of inter-communal leadership disputes of the 1990s. The RAIS was formed in 2010, allegedly with the intention of offsetting the existing balance of power among Muslim leaders in Moscow (see Chapter 5).[65] Determined to increase their influence in the capital, the two organisations challenged the Council's actions in relation to the proposed plan to extend the Moscow Cathedral Mosque and tried to rally Tatar Muslims against the SMR's plans to demolish the old building of the mosque.[66] Whereas conflicts over mosques and their jurisdiction were nothing new, the unfolding campaign illustrated the extent to which intra-communal divisions could be galvanised and exploited in an attempt to discredit a particular organisation.

Together with its supporters, the TsDUM's leadership issued a joint statement of condemnation against the SMR's plans to demolish the old mosque and build a new one in its place. The statement opened with the words that 'over the last few years the chairman of the DUMER, has plunged the Russian Muslim *ummah* into different kinds of political and religious turmoil' (Interfax-Religion 2011).[67] Whereas such rhetoric was not new, a more serious and divisive implication was that the SMR's leader were 'headed in the direction of *de-tatarisation* of Moscow Islam' (Ibid). Referring to the need to reconstruct the mosque to accommodate the growing number

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[65] RAIS was instrumental in challenging the SMR's position in Moscow, particularly in 2010-2011. However, its role in state-Muslim relations has decreased significantly by 2013, following internal struggles and organisational fragmentation within its own institution.

[66] On the arguments against the demolition of the old mosque see a series of articles and publications by the TsDUM, for example in *Iman* (a monthly newspaper published by the Regional Muftiyat of Penza (RDUM Penza Region) affiliated to the TsDUM, October 2011, pp. 11-18 and p.25. Conversely, for the SMR's arguments, see articles published in the autumn 2011 in *Islam RF*, for example, Khairetdinov, 7 September 2011.

[67] This was a charge levelled against Ravil Gainutdin who was the chairman of Muslim Spiritual Board of the European part of Russia (DUMER) and the SMR. The DUMER remains the most influential organisation within the SMR.

of Muslims from Central Asia, the statement implied that the SMR spoke on behalf of foreign Muslims at the expense of the local Tatar community.

The SMR struggled to project a positive image in light of the growing demands for more inclusive and differentiated representation, coupled with internal attacks on its reputation. As more young Muslims began to question the old ways of Muslim representation riddled with personal rivalries of the ageing generation of leaders, it was only a question of time before similar criticisms would be directed at the SMR. A product of the same bureaucratic system of representation, the council also faced disapproval from more progressive-thinking Muslims in search of bottom-up forms of Muslim mobilisation (Interview 1).

However, democratic principles of community engagement were difficult to introduce in the Russian corporatist context which was strongly associated with vertical forms of interest mediation. As one commentator remarked, 'any normal religious organisation is bureaucratic, because they don't exist in a vacuum and have to follow the same laws… and following of the laws requires bureaucracy' (Interview 18). Although in comparison to other religious figures, Gainutdin was ahead in some online opinion polls, the overall perception was that the Council was closer to the Russian state than to Russian Muslims.[68]

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[68] In 2009, according to an opinion poll published by *Islam Info* (http://www.info-islam.ru//publ/statji/rejting_musulmanskikh_liderov_rossii_2009/5-1-0-11270), Ravil Gainutdin's enjoyed 19.2 % of support, while Talgat Tadjuddin of the TsDUM had 8.3 %, Ismail Berdiev, Head of the KTsMSK had 2.4%. Similarly, *Islam News*, 30 December 2011 (http://www.islamnews.ru/voting-161.html) asked which leader had the most impact on the Russian *ummah* in 2011 and found that Gainutdin had 12.8%, Tadjuddin – 4%, while younger leaders such as the imam of the Memorial Mosque, Shamil Alyautdinov enjoyed the support of 12.2% and Damir Mukhetdinov, Deputy Chairman of DUMER – 14.6%. Although the validity of the sample of both surveys is rather limited, they give an indication of the SMR leaders enjoying stronger ratings. This is in line with the interview data which indicates that while there is little support for any member of the official Muslim clergy, Muslim communities are more familiar with the work and authority of the SMR.

Organisational strategies to improve effectiveness and inclusiveness

Within the growing polarisation of interests and ethnic tensions on one hand, and a tough competition from other centralised organisations on the other, the SMR struggled to present itself as an authoritative and credible voice. First, it was accused of being an unrepresentative institution, out of touch with the concerns of young Muslims. Second, it was criticised for providing a rather asymmetrical representation of Tatar interests and not doing enough to help Muslim migrants from Central Asia, particularly in light of the growing fusion of anti-migrant and anti-Muslim feelings. Conversely, the rival organisations interpreted its measures to improve provisions for Muslim migrants as being directed against the rights of Tatar Muslims (who were Russian nationals).

In response to the criticisms, the council tried to develop a series of strategies to mobilise support for its work and reconcile some of the existing tensions. This is in line with theoretical expectations of how social movement organisations integrate themselves with their constituents (Kriesi 1996). The Council undertook and publicised a series of practical initiatives aimed at increasing its own engagement with a range of previously under-represented groups. One of the theoretical expectations was that the strategies available to the institutionalised challenger are influenced by its external environment. Within the Russian corporatist rules of state-religion engagement, official Muslim organisations seek to represent Islam as a single religious category. Within the struggle between different centres of Muslim influence and centralised blocks of Muslim organisations, the SMR's legitimacy depends on its ability to present itself as an authoritative and influential organisation.

Traditionally, the Council has positioned itself as a 'federal, centralised, religious organisation' that 'unites the efforts of Muslim religious organisations…to resolve important issues… and develop a unified position in relations to different aspects of spiritual, moral and political life' (SMR Website). However, in light of the growing tensions and reduced support, it also acknowledged that there was a need for 'Muslim organisations to become more open and engage with society on different

levels, formally as well as informally' (Gainutdin 2012c). Moreover, while reporting on its achievements between 2007 and 2012, the SMR's chairman stated that while the last couple of years proved to be the most difficult, the council showed its 'stamina and vitality' and 'retained its authority…in spite of those who wished to blacken its name and discredit it' (Ibid).

Whereas the MCB's work centred on inviting women, young people and influential members of the British business community, the SMR's approach was designed to attract young educated Muslims, including some of those believed to adhere to more radical ideas. There were already some women working in the SMR and while the respondents did not draw any particular attention to the issue of women's participation in Muslim organisations, the members of the SMR were keen to introduce me to their female members working not only in the communication department but also responsible for promoting Islamic finance. Other measures to widen participation involved working with migrant communities in the areas of welfare, advice and education. It is difficult to assess the extent to which the measures actually resonated with Muslim communities. However, as will be discussed in the next section, the SMR's use of specifically-tailored rhetoric indicates that it wished to become more popular with Russian Muslims by portraying its organisation as more efficient and inclusive.

Inevitably, some of the Council's rhetoric was aimed at gaining a tactical advantage over its rivals. In the past, the disputes often involved mutual accusations of misinterpreting Islam and spreading radical ideas or centred on the issue of mosques and affiliation of new communities with the SMR or TsDUM (Silant'ev 2007, Tulsky 2003). The divisive statements by Muslim leaders and their spokesmen have done little to heal the rifts within the Muslim communities or change the image of centralised organisations. A brief analysis of more positive rhetoric and statements aimed at promoting Muslim solidarity, consolidating Muslim institutions and empowering Muslim communities to deal with the growing Islamophobia illustrates how the SMR has tried to build support for its initiatives.

Muslim unity and solidarity

Muslim unity is one of the key principles of any Islamic organisation and it is not surprising that the Council's leaders have tried to engage with Muslim communities by making extensive references to unite in Islamic faith. Intra-communal tensions coupled with the worsening situation for migrants in large cities encouraged the SMR to elaborate a more nuanced and inclusive rhetoric based on Muslim communal solidarity and religious unity. Ethnic and cultural diversity were still acknowledged and celebrated, but official speeches made increasing references to the common values between Russian ethnic Muslims and Muslim migrants from Central Asia. For example, during a special event dedicated to the legacy of Ismail Gasprinsky,[69] the Chairman of the SMR stated that the council was 'committed to achieving the unity of the Russian *ummah* while preserving ethnic and regional identities of our peoples' (Gainutdin 2011a: 6).

In the SMR's rhetoric, the idea of Muslim solidarity reflected both Islamic and community activist principles. By combining both, the council hoped to place itself at the centre of Muslim engagement. The overall importance of such a position was to show that Muslim rights are universal and that the only way to face up to the growing threat of Islamophobia was to stand together. For example, the SMR's deputy chairman, Damir Mukhetdinov, argued that the 70 years of Soviet rule created a lack of any widely accepted religious tradition that could unite Russian Muslims (Mukhetdinov 2012c). Whereas religious practices were eradiated as a useless 'relic of the past', it was important to remember that the 'Russian *ummah* has strong historic ties with its brothers in Central Asia and the Caucasus, as well as throughout the project of the Eurasian Union' (Ibid). Some of the practical initiatives aimed at helping labour migrants from Central Asia to adapt to Russian culture involved creating special centres under the auspices of the regional DUMs to provide legal advice and Russian language courses. For example, the SMR set up language

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[69] A prominent Crimean Tatar educator (1851-1914) - who was the first Russian Muslim intellectual to speak of the need to modernise Muslim communities through education, culture and reform.

courses at the Moscow Cathedral Mosque, while a special team was created within the DUMER to help with legal affairs.

While the MCB tried to avoid promoting a particular school of Islam as it did not wish to upset any sectarian interests, the SMR's approach was different. In an attempt to overcome the existing internal divisions it sought to create a sense of religious solidarity by focusing on religious similarities between religious practices of Russian Muslims and Muslim newcomers from Central Asia. In doing so, it emphasised that Muslims in Russia and Central Asia belong to the same Hanafi school of Sunni Islam. These links had been reinforced by the older generation of religious leaders, including senior members of the SMR who had been educated in Bukhara (Uzbekistan) in the Soviet era. In its engagement with Muslim migrants, the SMR's leaders have used this as a common platform on which to build a stronger sense of Muslim unity. In his presentation at the VIII Muslim Forum held in November 2012, the SMR's chairman used a common rhetoric of Muslims within the former Soviet borders being united in their Islamic creed and historic legacy:

> Islam is…an international religion. This is why we are happy to welcome our brotherly peoples in our mosques and schools, just as our forefathers did before us…to pass on to them the heritage of the Hanafi *maddhab*[70] and teaching traditions of the Bukhara school…studied by many representatives of different nationalities and Islamic schools (Gainutdin 2012d).

Such rhetoric was aimed at breaking down the barriers between Russian Muslims and migrants. For example, in another speech at a conference dedicated to the challenges of migration, Gainutdin (2013a) emphasised religious and linguistic similarities between Tatar Muslims and Muslim migrants from Central Asia. He also noted that his own books on Hanafi *maddhab* had been translated into the Kirgiz language.

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[70] *Maddhab* is a religious school of law in Sunni Islam.

Alongside Muslim forums which were generally attended by the Tatar clergy, the SMR has worked to establish closer relations with Muslim religious leaders in Central Asia, particularly by holding regular meetings, conferences and events. For example, the VII Muslim Forum organised in November 2011 was dedicated to the challenges facing Muslim communities within the CIS. Its agenda included discussions on establishing a common position on Islamophobia and developing adaptation programmes for migrants in Russia.

The SMR lobbied for regular exchanges of imams and scholars from CIS countries to help labour migrants integrate into Russian society (DUMER 2012f). In an interview to a Tajik Newspaper (*Rossiya dlia vsekh* 2012), published in Russia, the head of the SMR Press Office, Gulnur Gazieva, commented that for a number of years the Moscow Cathedral Mosque has taught the Russian language to migrants and provided free legal advice. Furthermore, a special website (www.islamsng.com) was created to publish analytical articles on Islam in the CIS which provided a further opportunity for the SMR to position itself at the centre of intra-communal relations. As was explained by a Moscow imam, 'solidarity means…mutual help and in this process people try to use centralised organisations' (Interview 21). He also noted that the Islamic principle of unity did not mean that 'people should have a single opinion but that they should not be enemies…it is about peaceful co-existence, about being able to listen to the opinion of others' (Ibid).

The issue of Muslim solidarity is enshrined in the Qur'an (3: 103) which makes it natural that the SMR would call on Russian Muslims to reconcile their differences and unite. For example, while commenting on the intra-Tatar divisions, one interviewee remarked in a rather disappointed way that 'before there was Islamic renaissance… now they got 'reborn' and just ended up in arguing…any high principles or ideas are gone, now it is just a big squabble' (Interview 9). Juxtaposing the developments in the Russian *ummah* at the end of the 1990s with those around 2010s, he blamed the lack of support for Muslim clergy on their personal rivalries. Interestingly, within the highly divisive environment of Muslim centralised organisations in Russia and the arrival of Muslim migrants from outside, the issue of

solidarity between Russian Muslims and their brothers from Central Asia created a useful mobilising frame for the SMR to show that it understood the changing problems of the Russian *ummah*. It also provided an opportunity to shift the attention from internal rivalries to more universal issues. Although it is difficult to gauge the success of these initiatives, these steps were designed to overcome some of the previously exposed divisions.

Community consultation

Another criticism was levelled at the lack of discussion and consultation between Muslim leaders and Muslim communities. Similarly to the MCB, the SMR's leadership tried to improve its image as a more democratic institution that listens to the opinions of others, or at least engages with a wider range of actors. The SMR's rhetoric and approach to consultation have been two-fold. Closed-door consultations with senior representatives of the DUMs were framed to demonstrate the Council's efficiency as a well-structured and effective institution, capable of solving community problems. There were also wider public consultation with Muslim experts, scholars and public figures during Muslim congresses and forums which were often initiated by the SMR as a more inclusive platform for exchange of ideas. One respondent described this two-stage process of consultation by noting that 'the SMR comes together sometimes once a year or once in a couple of months…different groups, presidium advise how to do things in certain situations - so it is an exchange of opinions…and when [muftis] meet properly – they think it over and come to decisions (Interview 21).

The SMR's chairman is not generally elected by the people or a broader conference of Muslim delegates, but its candidature is voted on and endorsed by a rather small governing council committee of regional muftis in charge of their respective centralised Muslim boards. The Council's spokesmen have argued that 'this is exactly the form of governance which reflects the principle of Islam, when authority in the Central core is not usurped or abused by specific officials or clerics, but is

concentrated in the hands of the [governing] council (Interview 7). Based on the Islamic concept of *shura*, such an arrangement helps ensure that that the head of the council discusses its decisions with the members who are 'the most equal, most authoritative scholars who are financially independent from each other' (Ibid). Moreover, the leader is hired to undertake certain governing obligations and if needed is expected to listen to the council's members and act 'in accordance with the received statutes' (Ibid).

Interestingly, the lack of direct consultation with Muslim communities, coupled with discussions with (or among) the heads of the DUMs who make up the governing body of the Council, reflects the Russian corporatist context. While the senior representatives from the centralised organisations report to the chairman, the council works out a common agenda. In his address at the senior-level of the Council, its leader reiterated that the 'SMR was created…to develop a common position [for Muslims in Russia] based on information from local organisations and to coordinate activities of voluntarily affiliated DUMs' (Gainutdin 2011d).

However, apart from its administrative functions and closed plenary sessions, the Council plays an active part in organising wider Muslim forums and congresses. On one hand, it continues past traditions of Tatar forums initiated before the Revolution. As was noted by some respondents, this demonstrates a sense of continuity of grassroots engagement and self-organisation, which had been interrupted by the Revolution of 1917 (Interview 16). On the other hand, it is an opportunity for the SMR to reconfirm its position within the Russian *ummah* as an organisation that is not removed from Muslim communities. The joint statements and resolutions made at the end of the forums illustrate that any new directions and initiatives are being confirmed by the representatives attending the forums. In a move to improve institutional transparency, speeches and discussions from some of the forums and congresses were recorded and broadcast on the SMR's website. For example, the official report on the All-Russian Muslim Congress that took place on 24 November 2011, highlighted that the event 'provided the first ever platform of such a scale after the Revolution for Muslims from all over Russia to come together for work and

discussion' (SMR, 2011b). Moreover, it stated that it was a 'result of cooperation between Muslim spiritual boards with public organisations and state authorities under the leadership of the Council of Muftis' (Ibid).

Muslim empowerment: education and consolidation

Similarly to the MCB's rhetoric of 'community under threat' the SMR advocated the need to educate Russian Muslims and consolidate Muslim institutions to empower Muslim communities. The SMR has made extensive references to the need to improve the standards of Islamic education and consolidate Muslim organisational structures to improve the image of Muslim communities and combat Islamophobia.

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, with the help of state funding, the SMR embarked on rebuilding Islamic education in Russia. However, poor training of imams continued to present a serious barrier to the development of an enlightened and empowered Russian *ummah*. By acknowledging the problem and seeking to improve the system of education within the institutional framework of the DUMs, the SMR leaders demonstrated their willingness to bridge the gap between the older generation of muftis and young Muslims. In his official blog, Damir Mukhetdinov framed this issue in two ways. First, he emphasised the role of the DUMs in facilitating the development of Islamic education in Russia. Second, he noted that not all centralised *muftiyats* have been able to empower young members of their communities which is damaging to the cohesiveness and unity of the *ummah* (Mukhetdinov 2012b).

Moreover, unable to use their skills and get employment within the existing organisations, young imams tended to be disillusioned, thus creating internal sources of opposition (Ibid). By publicising the ongoing cooperation between young Muslims and the older generation within the SMR and developing further opportunities for training within its affiliated Islamic universities (e.g. in Moscow and Kazan), the Council emphasised its contribution to the development and consolidation of the

Russian *ummah*. The council's inclusion of young Muslims and attempts to use their energy and expertise to help the older generation of leaders to reconnect with Muslim communities will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

The discourse of consolidation was aimed to demonstrate to Russian society that Muslim minorities are an organised force ready to protect their rights within the Russian institutional framework. As with the idea of unity and solidarity, the SMR used the notion of community consolidation to show that it was leading the way and empowering Russian Muslims by helping them organise their interests within the existing structure of the DUMs. For example, at the All-Russian Muslim Congress in 2011, the SMR's spokesmen argued that 'their most important task is the consolidation of the Muslim community in the face of contemporary challenges faced by Russian society' (SMR 2011b). A series of conversations took place to discuss the issue of consolidation and it was agreed that that it required 'official religious institutions, religious communities and groups' to work on their 'common values, goals and objectives... to conduct regular… meetings, debates, discussions [and] develop remote interaction with the use of the modern media' (Ibid).

Despite the obvious overlap between the ideas of Muslim unity, solidarity and consolidation, there was discursive variation. Whereas the SMR made references to unity and solidarity as a way of overcoming intra-communal tensions, the notion of consolidation had more organisational connotations and was aimed at developing institutional mechanisms to represent Muslim interests within the Russian corporatist context.

Internal restructuring: the Modernisation programme (2011-2012)

In the previous section, I discussed the SMR's strategies to mobilise support through a series of discursive frames and individual measures. By fusing together the rhetoric of Muslim activism and Islamic values, the Council sought to publicise its work and try to heal some of the intra-communal tensions. However, a key decision taken by the SMR to improve its legitimacy was to realign its own institutional practices not only with Muslim demands for greater inclusiveness but also in line with external corporatist rules for greater administrative efficiency. As an already established organisation the SMR embarked on a series of internal reforms in order to improve its organisational capacity and engage with Muslim communities.

The SMR's programme of organisational restructuring was officially announced at the All-Russian Muslim Congress organised by the SMR on 24 March 2011. In his opening address to over 500 delegates and guests, the SMR's chairman voiced the need to fight extremism, improve relations with local authorities and develop the programme of Islamic education. He also focused on the question of reforming the organisational structure of the DUMs. In particular, Gainutdin (2011b) criticised the centralised Muslim organisations for the lack of human resources and spiritual credentials to engage with young Muslims and deal with contemporary challenges. While the chairman acknowledged that the DUMs were 'in need of deep and large-scale modernisation', he also noted that such reforms should 'involve[e] the younger generation, and …effective communication with the public' (Ibid).

The need to introduce reforms was dictated partly by the changing nature of Muslim communities and partly by internal pressure from other Muslim organisations, increasingly critical of the SMR's style of leadership. Similarly to the MCB's approach, the proposed measures provided an attempt to make the organisation more inclusive, to engage with its regional members and improve internal communication between the executive committee and regional organisations. Essentially, the programme of modernisation was designed to improve its internal legitimacy and show that the SMR's senior leaders were receptive to new ideas from the younger

generation. The proposed reforms focused on three areas: cooperation and consultation with younger generations and Muslim intellectuals on the everyday running of the SMR (and eventually its affiliated members), regional consolidation of member *muftiyats*, and a better communication strategy between the SMR's head office in Moscow and regional DUMs.

Engaging with young Muslim experts

Over the last couple of years, the SMR has become aware of the need to work closer with younger generation of Muslims activists and intellectuals to breathe new life into its organisational practices and improve its reputation. The first impetus for reforms came from a group of young leaders from the DUM in Nizhny Novgorod, who had first joined the ranks of the DUMER and then the SMR in 2011 (see previous chapter). In his statements on modernisation, Ravil Gainutdin (2011c) praised their professional skills and Islamic diplomas and expressed hope that their energy and qualification would reform the institution and build support within Muslim communities:

> We have largely started to rely on the younger generation of Muslims. We have repeatedly stated that the reformed structure of the council's head office will be represented mostly by young professionals.

By working within the SMR, they gained an opportunity to undertake internal restructuring of the council in close consultation with its senior leaders. Their previous work on publishing Islamic texts, developing the system of Islamic education and their theological and rhetorical grounding in *Jadidist* (progressive) Islamic tradition helped present the reforms not as externally-imposed, but rather as a natural home-grown tradition, particularly relevant to the Muslim Tatars and Muslims in Central Asia. During the VII Muslim Forum on 'Modernisation in Russia and the CIS countries', the SMR's leader Gainutdin (2011e) highlighted the

importance of reformist rhetoric of *Jadidist* Islam. He made an explicit link between Islamic reformist spirit and the current needs to modernise Muslim governance:

> In the late 19th - early 20th century Tatar intellectuals raised the slogan that modernisation (*Jadidism*) comes from the Hadith in which Allah at the beginning of every century sends a reformer. In our time, such a reformer is a collective mind of the *ummah*.

The SMR's older generation had been brought up within the same Tatar traditions and Islamic training. However, they were out of touch with an increasingly international outlook of younger Muslims and their more thorough Islamic and secular education.

Evidence from official statements suggests that the SMR's leaders took on board their reformist rhetoric. Gainutdin's speeches made direct references to the articles of this group of young scholars on how to modernise Muslim organisations from within. Echoing President Medvedev's more general rhetoric on modernisation of Russian society, Gainutdin (16 March 2011) suggested that young Muslim scholars were the first to sense the need to introduce modernisation to the Muslim sphere. Notably, in one of his speeches he quoted directly from the arguments developed by Yusupov (2009) and later by Mukhametov and Kurbanov (2011) on 'the needed modernisation of Russian Islamic space…[required]…to transform frozen society into a mobile, developed, pluralist social system…flexible enough to respond to… the challenges' (Ibid). The idea of modernisation implied an interesting strategy of fostering and developing the pluralist expression Islam within the centralised, vertical structures of Muslim administrative practices.

The programme of internal reforms was aimed at improving the Council's organisational efficiency and communication with member organisations. A key change involved the creation of new departments within the SMR's head office under the leadership of young experts. For example, under the direction of Rushan Abbyasov, three new departments were set up to deal with international relations, economic and social affairs, and educational matters (Abbyasov 2011a). Moreover,

another department was added to 'engage with public and particularly with youth organisations' (Ibid). Commenting on a series of reforms implemented within the DUMER and SMR, one interviewee remarked:

> We didn't come alone, we came with our teams….my team consists of 25 people, they head different departments, they have all graduated from Islamic Higher Education institutions – and the same can be said about the SMR… when you have young people who are educated, have contact between themselves…that's all you need to work on the issues (Interview 7).

Drawing attention to the generational gap and the problem of authority in the eyes of young Muslims he remarked that 'the leaders cannot govern the way they are used to and the congregation does not want to live in the old way' (Interview 7).[71] The majority of the respondents praised the gradual rejuvenation of the SMR. For example, an older representative from the SMR spoke in favour of the 'renewal of people…new faces, people who are around 30 years old' (Interview 5). However, he also highlighted that the SMR needed 'the old guard…to counterbalance the energy of the young, because they could appreciate the situation better' (Ibid). Another respondent outside of the SMR appreciated Gainutdin's efforts to attract young people from the North Caucasus, for example, the late Muhammad Karachai, and to engage with more radical figures, who would speak their mind but channel their religious fervour through moderate activities of the Council (Interview 19).

The SMR's cooperation with young Muslim scholars, such as Mukhametov, Kurbanov, and Khabutdinov, and publication of their work on Islamic reformers and Muslim communities in Russia provided a scholarly foundation for the SMR's reformist agenda. Moreover, rather than being a redundant relic of the outdated system of Muslim representation, the SMR used their support to position itself as a moderniser and a benefactor of the long-established tradition of Tatar-Bashkir reformers, such as Ismail Gasprinsky, Rizaeddin Fakhreitdinov or Abu Nasr

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[71] Here, he is paraphrasing Lenin's famous revolutionary statement that 'the 'lower classes' do not want to live in the old way and the 'upper classes' cannot carry on in the old way'.

Kursavi.[72] By incorporating their ideas on Muslim consolidation and unity into their own agenda the council aimed at bridging the gaps within the divided Russia *ummah*. In presenting his ideas on the current state of Islam in Russia and commenting on the general direction of reforms the Council should take, Mukhametov (2012) wrote:

> Modernisation is the next stage in the development of Islam... the stage of 'coming together and assembling' which meant restoration of mosques and establishing the initial ritual and community and educational activities is now completed ... Today, the Russian *ummah* faces tasks relating to theology, ideology, social services, culture and science. This is what can be called modernisation.

The Council's strategy of harnessing support for its own modernisation agenda was to position itself at the centre of the process and invite the DUMs within and, more importantly, outside of its usual jurisdiction to 'embark on the same path as well' (Gainutdin 2011b). The significance of such an invitation was two-fold. First, it provided an opportunity to apportion some of the blame for being a rather outdated institution on the historically developed patterns of Muslim representation through the DUMs. Presenting itself as an institutional successor of the same system of interest mediation, the SMR would be justified for sharing the systemic weaknesses as well as strengths of the current patterns of Muslim representation.

The interview data suggests a common feeling within the Muslim elites that in their current form the DUMs could no longer cater for the needs of Russian Muslims. However, there is also a shared understanding among the Muslim clergy that the DUMs provide a unique form of Muslim self-organisation. For example, Damir Mukhetdinov (2012b) depicted the system of the DUMs as the only viable option for representing Muslim interests in Russia 'because it provided a mechanism developed by the state, which allowed to structure and organise Muslim community.' A similar

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[72] Kursavi (1776-1812) was a famous Tatar theologian. He is credited with the revival of Islam in Tatarstan and the founding of the *Jadidist* movement. Fakhretdinov (1859-1936) was a Tatar Islamic thinker, writer and historian.

sentiment was echoed by a Tatar spiritual leader who saw the DUMs as a prototype of a Muslim state within the Russian state:

> For us, the Spiritual Board is a kind of a spiritual *caliphate*, so to speak, it is a structure which forms a skeleton of the nation around which we can all unite, and this is a very important aspect… it is our kind of statehood' (Interview 16).

Second, by showing readiness to embrace change and to lead by example, the SMR has attempted to mobilise support within the Russian *ummah*. By doing so, it positioned itself at the heart of the process designed to unify Muslim communities, consolidate their organisational structure and provide leadership on dealing with external challenges of Islamophobia. For example, friendly scholars and Muslim activists made a direct connection between the SMR's willingness to implement reforms and its ability to counteract extremism. Such academic accounts were designed to help the council to convince a wider range of organisations that they should join the council's ranks and not support its competitors. In an article aimed at mobilising Muslim support for the SMR's leadership, Kurbanov and Mukhametov (2011) defended the SMR's process of internal reforms against its critics by warning that:

> a blow to Gainutdin sends an alarming signal to Muslim youth. If such a moderate and loyal mufti will be 'made to leave'…it would mean…a direct threat of the radicalisation of young people who cannot find their place in the archaic structures and reactionary 'spiritual' leaders.

They went on to add that 'only modernised DUMs and other Islamic structures can have authority to influence the outlook of the believers' (Ibid).

Regional consolidation, internal communication and positive publicity

The SMR's measures to coordinate the work of regional DUMs under its jurisdiction and consolidate its own position followed some of the earlier initiatives, such as the

The SMR's engagement with Muslim communities

opening of the SMR's regional offices in the Ural region, Siberia and the Far East in 2008, as well as in the Volga region, North-West region, South and Central regions two years later (Interfax Religion 2010). The regional heads in each of the four newly created offices were given a rank of a mufti and a status of being a deputy chairman of DUMER. In line with the aforementioned pivotal role of the DUMER within the running of the SMR, each mufti was also responsible for promoting the SMR's agenda. Arguably, this was indicative of the DUMER acting as a pilot project for reforms which would be then introduced within the SMR's other members.

The measures to improve the council's organisational capacity and cohesiveness were similar to the previous efforts to structure the work of the DUMER. Highlighting the need to improve internal communication between the DUMER and its regional members, one of the interviewees noted that:

> because of particular weaknesses of our structures before, we could not deal with regional issues, we did not have enough resources…and so over the last 15 years many issues accumulated in terms of the relations and communication between the centre and the regions…so we have to deal with this and make things right today' (Interview 7).

With the chairman of the SMR heading up the DUMER, it is not surprising that there is an exchange of expertise on improving communication and standardisation practices. For example, in line with the Russian approach of vertical, rather than horizontal engagement, top leaders of the DUMER developed a strategy of internal communication between the central office and regional bodies. The centralised approach was designed to channel a particular set of messages down to the regional level. In his speech during a high-level meeting at DUMER, Gainutdin (2012b) praised the usefulness of such a top-down, corporatist approach:

> I think that this [vertical] structure based on the establishment of centralised regional Muslim organisations in the form of regional

DUMs and *mukhtasibats*[73] within the DUMER is the best and most acceptable to all. This is the work which needs to continue … First and foremost I would like to call upon everybody present here….to spread the influence of our *muftiyats*.

Echoing a rather bureaucratic discourse of organisational restructuring, designed to infuse confidence in the proposed steps, Gainutdin expressed conviction that the year 2012 would be 'a year of changes in the religious sphere' (Ibid). Moreover he urged religious leaders to 'actively support…all the projects, to come up with new initiatives to strengthen faith and increase … the level of education' (Ibid). While any suggestions were welcome, the idea of active participation was aimed at the heads of the DUMs rather than independent bottom-up contribution from ordinary Muslims.

Within this reformist spirit of the *'ummastroitel'stvo'* (i.e. construction or consolidation of the *ummah,* Mukhametov 2011) the leaders of the DUMER and the SMR developed guidelines to facilitate the work with regions and to keep them up to date with the modernisation agenda. Close cooperation with the registered Muslim communities was aimed at providing regional bodies with opportunities to share best practices and express their concerns on administrative matters to the senior muftis. This process was set up as a two-way communication which was made easy by the same senior figures working within the central administration of the SMR, and heading up regional Muslim administrations.

For example, during one of the meetings, Rushan Abbyasov (Head of staff in the SMR but also *imam-mukhtasib*[74] in the Moscow Region) presented the SMR's leaders with a list of local grievances over land allocation and difficulties in securing permits to build mosques in his jurisdiction (Abbyasov 2012). This provides a good illustration of the SMR's modernisation programme in action. As was already mentioned, young leaders were put in charge of individual projects or departments

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[73] *Mukhtasibat* is an Islamic territorial division (of several Muslim congregations) which makes up a larger regional unit of administration: Muslim Spiritual Board (or *muftiyats*).

[74] *Mukhtasib* is a Muslim official in charge of religious and administrative affairs of the *mukhtasibat.*

which would focus on particular issues (e.g. mosques and relations with municipal authorities). They sought to empower local organisations to engage with municipal authorities by holding regular meetings. Such activities were also designed to uncover the institutional weaknesses of local organisations, such as passivity of leaders or insufficient training in public relations and legal expertise (Ibid).

While the regional DUMs were actively encouraged to take part in the SMR's programme, the Council's leaders wished to show that they did not force anybody to work with them, nor would they tolerate working with organisations that refused to introduce changes. For example, while commenting on the centralised organisation in the Chuvash region leaving the Council's jurisdiction, Abbyasov (2011b) remarked that whereas the SMR offered support and guidance 'there were also some 'passive' DUMs which could not cope with the programmes developed by the Council of Muftis.' He went on to add that 'there was little point to keep organisations if they did not do anything [and] had no authority in their region' (Ibid).

Within the highly competitive environment of new organisations and mosques being created and registered under different jurisdictions, the extent to which the SMR could afford to focus on the quality rather than the quantity of its organisations remains debatable. For example, in the words of its critics, the SMR lost its authority and prestige when some of its own affiliated organisations switched loyalty and either simply left the SMR or joined the TsDUM (Interview 15 and Interview 18). Moreover, a number of the interviewees, regardless of their attitude towards the Council, noted that the SMR's legitimacy has been based on the actual number of affiliated organisations. In the words of one respondent 'the level of influence of each centralised organisation depends on the number of affiliated communities' (Interview 15). Exact numbers of the currently affiliated organisations are difficult to ascertain. However, official figures suggest that over 1,400 are affiliated to the SMR and 2,500 to the TsDUM (see Introduction).

The SMR's own approach to building support took into account the need to create and register new communities under its jurisdiction. For example, one of the strategies involved the creation of new local religious organisations within the jurisdiction of DUMER and consolidating them into centralised organisation or a *mukhtasibat*. As was noted in the DUMER Resolution of 1 March (DUMER 2012), the aim was to 'create no less than ten centralised religious organisations and up to 100 local organisations during the course of 2012…And speed up the work of the central apparatus with the regions.'

An integral part of regional consolidation was not simply the creation of new organisations and the centralisation of the existing ones, but also efforts to publicise such actions. In order to improve the public image of their organisation, young leaders of the DUMER promoted the extent to which their work with the regions was popular with local organisations. The DUMER's Annual Report had a specific section dedicated to positive feedback from the regions and their praise of such activities. Some of the cited statements included comments by the *imam-mukhtasib* of the Ryazan region on Gainutdin's work in the international arena. He saw his efforts 'as an undeniable proof of invaluable role the SMR and its chairman…play, acting as a leader of Russia's Muslims' (DUMER, 2012c). Similarly, the chairman of a local organisation in the Ivanovskaya region noted a 'feeling of movement, [and] the real work of DUMER's departments' (Ibid). Moreover, the head of a local Muslim organisation of Smolensk commented on the importance of better understanding the 'work, achievements and mistakes in the regions' and that 'now, thanks to the technology of mass media, there was an opportunity to stay in contact' (Ibid). While these comments may have reflected the process of streamlining communication between the centre and the periphery, they were used by the SMR to boost its authority and consolidate its position, at least among its affiliated organisations.

In line with these comments, the newly created PR department focused on publicising the modernisation and consolidation initiatives through the use of online technologies. With the help of internal marketing campaigns and a new website they

aimed to develop online awareness of the SMR's key activities for the broader audience. In her annual report on the department's achievements, Dilara Akhmetova (2012) noted that 'the press service of the DUMER was established within the modernisation programme of the Council of Muftis of Russia and the DUMER in May 2011'. The key contribution to the overall process of reforms was to deliver:

> coverage to the widest spread of Muslim life and local organisations, to provide a high quality, objective and truthful information…with a particular emphasis on the Council of Muftis of Russia as the largest and most serious centralised religious organisation in Russia' (Ibid).

The website was developed to create a space under the auspices of the SMR where Muslim organisations could learn more about each other, exchange information and mobilise support for individual projects. In a way, this was similar to the previous efforts to disseminate information about Russian Muslims by publishing reference books on individual regions and Muslim communities to create a sense of unity. In her speech to the delegates of the DUMER, she went on to say that the aim was to 'showcase the good work of our organisations on the ground in a positive light, but at the same time to convey…the activities of our staff unit' (Ibid).

By inviting organisations to use the electronic resources developed by the SMR and to share their news and achievements with member organisations, the SMR spokespeople sought to engage with regional muftis and their teams. While this reflected the overall intention of the SMR to consolidate the Russian Muslim space, it also provided an attempt to improve its legitimacy and standing within the communities. In her closing remarks, Akhmetova expressed regret that:

> sometimes…instead of talking to us and cooperating with us, you give preference to certain websites, which in recent years engaged in defamation, slander and attack on the Council of Muftis of Russia (Ibid).

This was a direct appeal to regional organisations to support the SMR and its leadership on the grounds that, unlike its competitors, it had embraced the spirit of

reform. Moreover, it was an attempt to show that the SMR cared for its affiliated organisations and was ready to help them deal with the everyday challenges of Muslim representation. As was noted earlier, within the Russian vertical context, the SMR has seen its role not so much in empowering Muslims as individuals but rather directing and consolidating the work of Muslim organisations.

A new generation of leaders also dedicated time to engage with Russian Muslims through personal blogs and discussion forums.[75] This was clearly a more direct approach to discussing such issues as migration, Islamic values and ideas on modernising the outdated forms of Muslim representation with the computer-literate audience. However, institutional measures and communication rhetoric were largely designed to improve legitimacy through organisation maintenance on a more general administrative level. By 2013, the head of the SMR (Gainutdin 2013b) reported on the first results of the modernisation to the All-Russian Muslim Congress:

> I am pleased to note that the course on modernising the Council of Muftis of Russia and the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the European part of Russia ... has brought tangible benefits. Young qualified specialists and graduates from the leading Russian universities joined the ranks of the SMR and DUMER which has led to an increase in publishing activity and research work.

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[75] For example, see the two blogs available on Livejournal.com: Damir Mukhetdinov (http://damir-hazrat.livejournal.com/) and Rushan Abbyasov (http://rushan-abbyasov.livejournal.com/). Dilyara Akhmetova is a regular contributor to *Islam RF*.

Internal resistance to change and historically entrenched interests

Organisational theories shed light on the SMR's efforts to modernise its internal processes in response to the challenges of building support and engaging with Russian Muslims. However, just as in the British case, they do not provide a sufficient explanation as to why the proposed reforms were rather limited in scope and not always welcomed by all member organisations. The interview data reveals a common assumption that Muslim leaders in charge of the regional DUMs have tended to resist changes because of their own old-fashioned, conservative views and reluctance to see their powers challenged by the younger generation (with DUMER and its young muftis being a notable exception). Moreover, whereas the institutional framework of the DUMs has been traditionally associated with the spirit of Muslim autonomy and self-organisation, in reality its everyday work was hampered by divided loyalties and inability to develop a consolidated position.

A strong preference for centralised processes and internal efficiency in line with the corporatist preferences of the external context has lent the SMR's programme of reforms a technocratic character. A series of more profound changes based on improving the SMR's democratic credentials and bottom-up representation based on direct elections may have been discussed but they remained on hold. While some argued that the Russian *ummah* was not ready for such changes (Interview 7), others suggested that there was no leader who could appoint himself and 'claim to speak on behalf of all Muslims' (Interview 20). In the words of another respondent, 'to modernise the Russian Muslim community you need large-scale reforms for which nobody is ready yet – neither the Russian state, nor Muslim religious leaders' (Interview 13).

Historical institutionalism provides a series of helpful insights to understand the extent to which historical legacies of entrenched power configurations and past practices may have created significant barriers to consolidate Muslim interests. While the concepts of critical junctures and positive feedbacks help explain how and why traditionalist interests had become entrenched within the system of DUMs in the

first place, the notion of gradual change is particularly useful in understanding the extent to which the vested interests and passive nature of the DUMs may have influenced the narrow scope of organisational changes.

One of the things that distinguishes the Russian Muslim space from its British counterpart is its complex and enduring legacy of traditionalist and reformist approaches to Muslim representation and self-organisation within the Russian state. On one hand, there is an assumed reluctance of the DUM leaders to change their ways, share power and transform the system of Muslim administration into one based on representation. Similarly to the MCB case, no fundamental changes were attempted that could have upset the status quo. For example, the data suggests that the idea of unification which would have consolidated different *muftiyats* from competing jurisdictions was debated with great excitement. However, it was stopped in its tracks.

On the other hand, the reformist spirit and rhetoric of the Tatar-Bashkir Islam and its emphasis on progressive modernisation and community self-organisation, grounded in the aforementioned ideas of the late 19th century Tatar thinkers, provided theological and moral backing for the reforms. In the next section, I will discuss how the bureaucratic nature of the DUMs, coupled with historically entrenched structural fragmentation and divisions into parallel *muftiyats* may have been responsible for creating institutional barriers and resistance to accept change. I will also consider how these factors were negotiated within the reformist rhetoric, which kind of gradual changes materialised and which did not.

Regional muftis and 'spiritual bureaucracy'

As was described in the introductory chapter, the existing system of mediating Muslim interests through the institution of Muslim Spiritual Boards was set up by Catherine the Great in 1789. Whether this was a top-down state initiative of establishing control over Muslim subjects and granting them Russian citizenship, or

whether the Empress simply institutionalised the already existing practices of Muslim self-governance introduced in the Ottoman Empire remains unclear. The interview data and academic sources indicate that this issue is still debated among Russian Muslims themselves. However, the inauguration of the first Orenburg Mohammedan Spiritual Assembly by the Empress on 22 September 1788 has been historically regarded as a 'critical juncture' paving the way for the current forms of official Muslim representation through the institution of the DUM. Moreover, the leadership of TsDUM (2012) has regarded itself as a direct successor of the Spiritual Assembly and dates its history from this point in time.

The SMR was established in an attempt to develop a more progressive, less hierarchical system of governance. However, it was a product of the same system of Muslim administration, affected by the same historical legacies of bureaucratic style of leadership and internal rivalries. There were two reasons which help explain why the programme of modernisation was rather modest. First, it was held back because the old-style regional leadership was reluctant to change its internal processes of administration and open up their institution to young leaders. Second, the institutionalised divisions and personal rivalries between the TsDUM's supporters and the followers of the SMR created a significant barrier to creating a single system of Muslim representation in the same regional jurisdiction.

The regional DUMs had been created within the Russian historical tradition of corporatist, top-down engagement with Muslim communities and have remained rather bureaucratic institutions with close connections to local and regional authorities and strong vested interests to preserve their own authority. Open elections of muftis were rare and in many instances they were selected and endorsed by the DUM's council or by the chief mufti. This has been a particularly common practice for the DUMs under the jurisdiction of the TsDUM. Many senior leaders in charge of the DUMs today belong to an older generation educated within the Soviet system. They have typically been brought up in a tradition that required the ability to compromise with authorities without showing excessive initiative and enterprising spirit. Being used to managing their organisations in a rather passive way, many have

remained reluctant to let in new faces and embrace new ways of engaging with ordinary grassroots. In his evaluation of the original structures of the DUMs, Kurbanov (2010) noted that they excluded 'any degree of co-optation of new leaders from the Muslim community' and were 'far from the modernisation process…tak[ing] place in a Muslim environment.' In light of historically close relations between the DUM leaders and state authorities, be it in the Tsarist period or during the Soviet era, young Muslim intellectuals had found themselves excluded from these organisations and 'have increasingly tried to use their own knowledge and energy outside official religious structures' (Ibid).

In the first part of this chapter, I noted that the system of the DUMs was increasingly perceived as a highly bureaucratic institution, especially by young Muslims. Some commentators, such as Markus (2011), suggested that it had been based on a 'prototype of the Orthodox Church corporation with strong subordination and a president at the top.' Authoritarian practices of governance and excessive bureaucratisation of the DUMs are an integral part of the corporatist rules of interest mediation in Russia. Although this makes it easier to engage with civil servants, little power is shared within the DUMs and the major decisions are taken at the senior level. Markus concludes therefore, that 'the corporatist nature and authoritarianism creates an insurmountable barrier for people, who view the waiting room of the spiritual board as that of Gazprom or Lukoil' (Ibid).

Over time, these hierarchical forms of Muslim representation became an institutionalised practice which was difficult to reverse. The political turmoil of the 1990s may have resulted in a rather chaotic proliferation of Muslim bodies. However, their organisational governance followed similar bureaucratic patterns of being far removed from Muslim communities and their everyday concerns. For example, in her assessment of the Muslim clergy and regional leadership Akhmetova (2011) remarked that 'over the last few years we have seen an obvious crisis of spiritual boards as an institution at the regional level: for community it is just a spiritual bureaucracy….which does not care for the interests of ordinary Muslims.' A similar view was expressed by one respondent who suggested that the 'clergy'

cannot deal with today's problems, they belong to a different era – Soviet days…a period of stagnation' (Interview 13). The same respondent also remarked that the current attempts to modernise the system reminded him of 'preventive half measures, when the body needs surgery' (Ibid).

The extent to which representation of Muslim interests through the centralised organisations has become institutionalised is supported by the SMR's rather cautious, national-based approach to introducing only gradual changes rather than attempting a complete institutional makeover. For example, Akhmetova (2011) expressed a view shared within the circle of young Muslim intellectuals working with the SMR that:

> it is only by reformatting the existing system…by strengthening it from within that we can save it from collapsing…we argue in defence of the system not from the point of defending '*muftiyats* for their own sake' but because the system…provides Russian Muslims with a sense of autonomy to regulate spiritual life, to take the initiative into their hands, to revive and create a cultural and spiritual space.

Damir Mukhetdinov (2012b) also acknowledged that over-bureaucratisation of power structures within the large DUMs has contributed to generational conflicts and aloofness of religious leaders. The DUMs may be difficult to reform, but they are believed to represent a backbone, the official channel of Muslim representation to state authorities. The reformist leaders of the SMR believe that they provide the only way to preserve Muslim autonomy from the state and their institutional weaknesses must be addressed.

Parallel structures and institutionalised fragmentation

As was already mentioned, before the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, there were only two organisations responsible for administering Muslim affairs on the

territory of the Russian Federation.[76] One was called DUMES, which was later renamed the TsDUM. It was based in Ufa and was responsible for managing Muslim religious life in the European part of the USSR and Siberia. The other was the Muslim Spiritual Board of the North Caucasus (DUMSK) and was established in Dagestan. However, since then the *muftiyats* sprang up in different regions and were largely (albeit not exclusively) grouped under the jurisdiction of one of the three centralised organisations. The self-reinforcing pattern has continued unabated.

Internal competition between the Tatar and Bashkir organisations such as the SMR and the TsDUM resulted in internal divisions and further fragmentation of the Muslim organisational field. As new leaders sought to create administrative units to represent their local interests, they would join one organisation or the other, often depending on their personal loyalty to Ravil Gainutdin or Talgat Tadjuddin. In her assessment of Muslim organisations, Hunter (2004: 46) noted fluidity in the 'patterns of allegiance of these spiritual boards vis-à-vis the centralised religious organisations.' This practice of registering local organisations under the jurisdiction of the SMR or the TsDUM resulted in a rather confused picture. Based on personal preferences, such an illustration of Muslim pluralism inadvertently weakened the authority of individual muftis and undermined the institution of the spiritual board.

In an attempt to increase their influence, the centralised DUMs looked to create and register an even greater number of local organisations under their respective jurisdictions. As a result, a series of parallel institutions sprang up in the same region, representing the rights of the same local communities, administering their affairs and engaging with local authorities on their behalf. In an interview on the challenges of Muslim unification in Russia, Damir Khairetdinov (2009) noted that 'up till now we have such a crazy situation when, for example, two muftis living in one street of the same village report to the two different centralised organisations.' Within the

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[76] The other two regional organisations were the Muslim Spiritual Board of Kazakhstan and Central Asia, based in Tashkent (Uzbekistan) and the Muslim Spiritual Board of Transcaucasia, based in Baku (Azerbaijan).

Russian corporatist context and its centralised dynamic, such a way of representing Muslim interests has only deepened internal divisions and hindered any attempts by the SMR to empower Muslim communities within the official framework of Muslim governance.

A key critical juncture in the process of fragmentation was the departure of Ravil Gainutdin and like-minded muftis from the TsDUM and the subsequent creation of the SMR itself. While personal ambitions and rivalry may have fuelled the ongoing dispute within the Muslim leadership, generational conflict and different approaches to the way Muslim organisations should be run played a part in this decision. For example, in 1994, young leaders such as Mukaddas Bibarsov, Nafigullah Ashirov and Abdul-vahed Niyazov[77] supported Gainutdin's relatively democratic approach based on greater consultation and regular elections of the chairman and its deputies by the Muslim Council (*mejlis*).[78] Although the newly formed organisation would also become constrained by previous patterns of power-sharing and strong preferences for endorsement of the appointed leaders without proper community-wide elections, by the mid-1990s the SMR stood for a more progressive form of Muslim representation.

The extent to which the internal split had become locked in became apparent in 2009, when (as noted above) the joint efforts to create a single structure of Muslim administration came to nothing. The inability to come together and reconcile internal differences also exposed the extent to which the organisational structure of the DUMs struggled to present a common Muslim agenda. In his study on the history of Muslim forums in 2005-2012, Khabutdinov (2013) noted a degree of internal disillusionment:

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[77] Bibarsov is the head of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Saratov Region, Ashirov is in charge of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Asian part of Russia, while Abdul-vahed Niyazov is President of the Islamic Cultural Centre in Russia. All three are important figures in the SMR.
[78] The leader of the TsDUM is elected for life in accordance with its organisational statutes (TsDUM 1999: 9).

> By 2010…the inability to create an All-Russian body, the process of the ever-deepening schism within the Muslim Spiritual Boards and the slowing down of the real integration within the Eurasian space felt oppressive.

Reformist opportunities and implemented changes

To better understand the scope of reforms and their level of success within a particular set of historically entrenched barriers, it is useful to focus on which measures were eventually introduced and which were not. Similarly to the MCB, the SMR undertook a series of changes, which can be described as layering new institutional rules, without completely displacing the existing ones. This is in line with theoretical expectations of gradual change suggested by Mahoney and Thelen (2010) which is typical of the constraining context of strong veto players and low enforcement of rules.

As in the British case, the Russian Council did not replace institutional principles of power sharing within the DUMs with something radically different. For example, one interviewee mentioned the idea of Islamic centres as an unwelcome alternative (Interview 20). This would have meant a displacement strategy and would have offset the vested interests of the Muslim clergy. Another alternative could have been just to leave everything as it was (the drifting scenario) which would have implied simply waiting for a gradual change in the Muslim elite without opening the doors for a younger generation of leaders. Widening the voting rights to ordinary members of Muslim communities or grassroots organisations, rather than the heads of the centralised DUMs, would have corresponded to the idea of conversion, or a complete reinterpretation of the rules.

The data suggests that the SMR's style of modernisation corresponded to the layering pattern of reforms. The creation of new departments within the central office of the SMR and stronger engagement with young leaders working alongside the 'old guard' (Interview 5) created an additional set of rules without upsetting the already

established practices. Similarly, the idea of inviting regional organisations to share their concerns and expertise online worked alongside the existing offline framework of Muslim forums.

In 2005, the late deputy mufti of Tatarstan, Valiula Yakupov (2005) criticised the SMR and the TsDUM for being 'far removed from the principle of Muslim democracy.' In particular, he regretted the absence of direct elections within the SMR and the lack of national Muslim congresses. The Council addressed the second criticism by calling the All-Russian Muslim Congress every 5 years and holding regular work meetings and consultations. This was partly designed to reflect the SMR's adherence to Islamic principles of consultation and partly as a legal organisational requirement introduced by the Ministry of Justice.[79] However, the accountability and transparency of the selection process and endorsement of the SMR's chairman and his deputies remained largely unchanged.

The latest elections of the Chairman of the SMR and his deputies took place in August 2012 during the VI *Mejlis* of the SMR (i.e. the meeting of the SMR's governing body). The press release from the DUMER stated that 'following preliminary consultations among members of the SMR and representatives of its member organisations…delegates voted unanimously for the candidature of Ravil Gainutdin' (DUMER 2012d). Interestingly, the right to vote was only given to 28 delegates, with five of the votes allocated to the DUMER and six to the DUMAChR. The remaining 17 votes were, therefore, distributed among the remaining regional DUMs within the jurisdiction of the SMR. The same congress approved the proposed figures for the chairman's deputies. Thus, the top leadership of the SMR was reconfirmed for another 5 years in line with the reformed organisational statutes (DUMER 2012e).

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[79] In response to legal claims that the SMR's statues and code of practice was out of step with state requirements, the SMR stipulated that it would run its Congress every five years and its working sessions not less than once a year (SMR Press Release 2 October 2009).

Although it was possible to increase the number of meetings and consultations with Muslim delegates, no serious attempts were made to change the power-sharing arrangements within the SMR or ensure that its leaders would go through a more democratic style of elections. Similarly to the MCB, the programme of modernisation was not designed to change the internal power structure of the SMR but rather to introduce a gradual change that would consist of creating extra layers of rules and practices rather than undoing the existing ones. One respondent claimed that it was important to 'prepare a gradual transition within the Muslim elite' (Interview 7). Moreover, it had to be done in such a way that 'muftis with considerable experience, who have worked over the last 20 years have not been….crossed out from history… but so that their experience would serve new leaders in the spiritual boards'(Ibid).

Finally, in light of the existing bureaucratic inflexibility and the inability to work out a unified position, the reforms were successful in improving administrative rather than democratic legitimacy of the institution. It is difficult to gauge the extent to which the reforms helped the SMR to secure stronger support among Russian Muslims. However, alongside the constraining legacy of bureaucratic structures and the dynamic of fragmentation, past patterns of Muslim mobilisation and self-organisation may have provided the basis for further consolidation, which, in turn, would strengthen the links between the Muslim clergy and Muslim communities.

The young intellectuals working with the SMR wished to resurrect the reformist legacy of the *Jadidist* teachings and channel it to support the modernisation efforts. For example, they were strong advocates of the idea of recreating an interrupted tradition of the All-Russian Muslim Forums. While the *Medina* publishing house organised conferences on influential Tatar thinkers, the SMR's leaders used reformist rhetoric to build a sense of Muslim unity. For example, a special event was organised to celebrate the ideological legacy of Ismail Gasprinsky and build on his ideas of Muslim integration and the value of education. A special attention was paid to the autonomous nature of a local Muslim community with its own independent clergy. Gasprinsky (1881, reprinted in Mukhetdinov, ed. 2011: 88-89) argued that such units

of Muslim administration represented a 'miniature state with its own laws, customs and traditions kept fresh by the spirit of Islamism.'

Drawing a parallel between his ideas and the present challenges of modernisation, Khabutdinov (2011: 34-36) emphasised the creation of a new national group of Muslim secular intelligentsia and the establishment of network engagement between small communities through education and cultural activities. Similarly, Makarov (2011: 67) argued that Gasprinsky's ideas on positioning the Russian Muslim identity above ethnic markers would be beneficial today to unite and bring together Muslim communities, particularly in ethnically-mixed cities. A closer engagement with progressive ideas on modernisation and Muslim self-organisation created an opportunity for the SMR leaders to embrace the reformist spirit by re-engaging with the positive ideology of Muslim representation and self-organisation within the Russian context.

Although it may be too early to see the extent to which the internal restructuring was beneficial to the SMR's attempt to be seen as an authoritative and representative institution, a closer engagement with a younger generation of Muslims and a series of introduced and widely-publicised measures were used to restore at least some of the previously lost influence. This was further exemplified by a series of articles published by the council-friendly internet resources and portals such as *Medina*, *IslamRF*, and *Ansar*.

Conclusion

The chapter addressed the challenges faced by the SMR in positioning itself as an authoritative and credible voice of Muslim communities. While its official status ensured support from the government and historical legacies implied that it was one of the few platforms available for Muslim organisations to come together and lobby for common interests, it had a rather mixed level of support from Muslim communities.

The data suggested that there were three possible reasons for this. First, the SMR's own organisational structure was not robust enough to respond to the changing expectations of the Russian Muslims, overcome criticisms and diffuse internal tensions. Second, the council's leadership was increasingly criticised by other centralised organisations, also seeking to increase their influence and boost a number of registered communities. Third, in spite of the SMR's determination to make its organisational structure more inclusive and efficient, its efforts were constrained by the existing forms of Muslim representation, the bureaucratic nature of the Muslim clergy (which it was an integral part of) and the highly fragmented field of Muslim official organisations.

These barriers help account for the limited nature of reforms. The conservative interests of the traditional elite in the DUMs, coupled with the Russian corporatist context, made it difficult to introduce more direct forms of Muslim representation. Within the existing set of constraints, the work of the SMR centred on developing stronger administrative and communication mechanisms aimed at representing collective Muslim interests in their organisational, rather than the individual dimension. In other words, the SMR's programme of consolidating the Muslim civil society was aimed at empowering Muslim communities by strengthening the role of Muslim organisations and bringing them together under its leadership. The Council aimed at both quantitative and qualitative representation. While the former would give it a numerical advantage, a stronger sense of cohesion and better communication within its affiliated organisations, the latter would facilitate its role in uniting the Russian *ummah*.

Organisational theories suggest that as new social movement organisations mature they realise that government officials prefer to deal with similarly-structured organisations. Therefore, they ensure that their own working processes fit within the same requirements. The SMR's programme of internal restructuring partly fits this logic as it was strongly influenced by the external corporatist context and focused on issues of administrative efficiency. However, as an institutionalised challenger it

inherited the strengths and weaknesses of the previous patterns of representation, including a mixed bag of the reformist spirit of communal self-organisation and the passive style of bureaucratic governance of the Soviet era.

Finally, another interesting finding was that the case of the SMR supports the claim that mature organisations engage in internal maintenance not only to fit within the external rules or to be better organised to deal with the state, but also to improve their reputation among those whose interests they seek to mobilise. By developing a more engaging and inclusive rhetoric to create a stronger sense of Muslim solidarity, the SMR managed to conjure up some of the mobilising spirit that was lacking in its own traditionally bureaucratic practices. In a way this suggests a degree of fluidity between a new social movement organisation and an already established one. While the former may lose some of its mobilising power as it becomes institutionalised, the latter can also try to reverse the process in case the process of institutionalisation has gone too far, as a way of restoring some of the lost trust.

Conclusion

Comparative discussion and theoretical implications

The project provided a detailed analysis of the ways in which the two Muslim councils engaged with state authorities and Muslim communities in the period 1997-2013. Based on the written documents and statements, media articles, opinion polls and qualitative interviews conducted with members of the councils and representatives of Muslim elites in the two countries, I sought to develop a deeper understanding of the ways in which Muslim councils juggle the pressures of co-optation by the state and representation of Muslim communities. The data collected in this way was triangulated to gain insight into the councils' behaviour and rhetorical strategies used to reconcile the challenges of integration and representation in the different contexts of interest meditation.

In this concluding chapter, I will first provide a comparative discussion of the empirical findings and suggest their implications for research on Muslim communities and the challenges of integration and representation. I will then revisit the conceptual framework of the project and outline the thesis' theoretical contribution and comparative value.

Muslim councils compared: co-optation, representation, mediation

In this thesis, I explored the challenges of Muslim collective representation through the lens of Muslim councils acting on behalf of Muslim communities in the pluralist and corporatist contexts of state-religion relations. In light of shared security and integration concerns, both states have sought to accommodate religious rights of Muslim minorities and engage with particular Muslim organisations they could trust. I examined the two Muslim councils as particular interest group organisations entrusted with mediating between state interests and Muslim minority expectations.

The thesis discussed how the two organisations have dealt with the tension between being co-opted by the state, while aspiring to remain a legitimate voice of Muslim community interests.

The councils' engagement with the state

A key argument of this thesis is that the councils' success in lobbying the state on behalf of Muslim communities was determined by the nature of their relations with the state, the level of access to state officials and the scope for taking a critical position towards state policies. A key finding was that close engagement with state authorities provided the dilemma of how to reconcile the pressure of co-optation with the need to openly challenge state policies if and when required. The complexities and shifts in how the two councils engaged with state authorities in Britain and Russia were discussed in Chapters 3 and 5 respectively.

The first question was designed to explain the pluralist and corporatist nature of state-religion relations in Britain and Russia. The data on state-Muslim relations and the institutional processes of integrating Islam in a wider organisational framework of state-religion relations provided sufficient evidence to suggest that this typology was applicable to the two cases. Consequently, the British pluralist context was characterised by low levels of state intervention into religious life and a well-developed civil society; a strong preference for dealing with religious issues on the local level and institutional provisions for interfaith cooperation; a high number of voluntary civil society organisations and alternative, independent platforms for lobbying the state.

Conversely, the Russian corporatist context was exemplified by high levels of state intervention and a rather weak civil society; a strong centralising dynamic of hierarchically structured interest mediation and limited interfaith cooperation; and finally strong state paternalism and institutionalised rivalry for state patronage among official religious organisations. While the two cases were differentiated in

relation to these features in light of the empirical data, the research also revealed rather atypical, albeit short, periods of corporatist and pluralist elements of state-religion relations in Britain and Russia respectively. While these were rather brief, this suggests that some occasional blurring of the two types of arrangements was also possible (see next sections).

The typology used in the thesis corresponded to the pluralist and corporatist patterns of interest mediation, more traditionally used to delineate political and economic contexts, but not so much the politico-religious one.[80] However, it provided a useful way to discuss the nature of council-state engagement in light of the institutional and organisational dimensions of state-religion relations. Against the backdrop of the different approaches to accommodating Islam as a minority religion in the two institutional contexts, both cases showed convergence in policies aimed at recognising faith in the public sphere. Moreover, they also revealed similar tensions in council-state relations on the issue of Muslim religious rights and freedom of expression. Real or perceived feelings of Muslim religious identity being under threat were at the centre of the councils' peaceful as well as more confrontational negotiations with the state.

The second question of the thesis addressed the nature of the councils' engagement with the state. In light of the diverging nature of state-religion relations I examined the ways in which the councils' strategies to lobby the government and articulate Muslim claims were affected by these conditions. My initial expectation was that in Britain, the pressures of co-optation would be lower than in Russia. This was based on the assumption that in the pluralist context, interest group organisations are less compelled to work closely with the state than they are in the corporatist one. The research indicated that over the period in question, the MCB was generally less restricted in its actions and rhetoric towards the government than the SMR.

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[80] A notable exception is a study on Islamic councils and their role in the neo-corporatist context of Europe by Laurence (2006).

To unpack the differences in how the two institutions responded to the pressures of co-optation I examined a series of conditions under which they engaged in cooperation and contention with state authorities. In the British pluralist context, the MCB was found to have more independence from the state but did not manage to retain its initial status of the leading Muslim partner. This was conditioned by a weaker level of state intervention in the religious sphere, a more decentralised approach to interest mediation and the presence of different allies and alternative channels to lobby the state. Conversely, its Russian counterpart managed to position itself as arguably the most influential interlocutor of Muslim interests while its interaction with state officials was largely based on close cooperation and co-optation. This was exemplified by the centralised structures of state-Muslim relations, a strong paternalistic approach and the lack of alternative platforms and alliances with other faiths which could have given the Council more independence from the state.

However, the findings also confirmed the dynamic nature of the engagement process, as it was subject to negotiation and interpretation by both parties. A key expectation of the thesis was that changes in external opportunities and constraints alter the behaviour of interest group organisations. The research revealed that the ways in which the two councils interpreted and managed the pressures of co-optation were conditioned by institutional shifts in state approaches to establishing partnerships with Muslim organisations and ideological changes in state policies on religion. The councils' strategies were also affected by how the two organisations interpreted and mobilised the changing salience of religious cleavages. Their behaviour and rhetoric were determined by whether they believed the government was taking care of Muslim concerns or whether Muslim religious freedoms were being infringed. Therefore, both institutions cooperated with the government as institutionalised partners and both challenged state authorities as representatives of Muslim minority interests.

For example, the councils' cooperation with the government was stronger when their leaders saw the state taking steps to recognise the importance of faith in the public

sphere. In Britain, this was under Labour's first administration during the government's attempts to mainstream religion to achieve social cohesion. In Russia, the SMR established close contacts with state officials: first when Islam was recognised as one of Russia's traditional religions under Yeltsin and second when Muslim senior clergy were integrated into the corporatist bureaucracy of state-religion relations under Putin's first (and increasingly second) presidency. Increased cooperation in both cases was facilitated by corporatist-inspired ideology, matched expectations and good informal relations between the council leaders and state officials.

In the Russian corporatist context, this was not surprising. However, in the British pluralist context, Labour's neo-corporatist values and willingness to endorse the MCB as the main Muslim voice was a rather atypical development. Positive promotion of religion in the public sphere initially helped pacify some of the existing religious cleavages. Consequently the two councils adapted conciliatory rhetoric and acted in partnership with the state. This was evident in the analysis of the MCB's participation in the campaign to introduce religion in the 2001 Census and the SMR's cooperation with the government on the issue of creating and funding a centralised system of Islamic education. In the British pluralist context, the MCB engaged on the issue with a variety of interfaith and civil society groups, whereas in the Russian corporatist context, the nature of council-state partnership was reinforced by paternalistic relations between the state and the Muslim clergy.

A comparison between the two cases also revealed periods of tensions which overshadowed the previous collaboration efforts. In both cases, the salience of previously somewhat pacified religious divisions was exacerbated by the lack of agreement between the councils and the government on what needed to be done. In the British context, there was a clash of interests over ways of dealing with extremism, particularly when the government accused the MCB of not doing enough to denounce terrorism. In the Russian case, tensions were high in capital cities over the lack of mosques and the influx of Muslim migrants from Central Asia. During these periods the Council's use of confrontational rhetoric towards state officials was

motivated by the need to defend the threatened rights of Muslim minorities. In the British case, the presence of allies and alternative platforms meant that the risk of disengaging from the government was low. Conversely, in the Russian centralised context, permeated by paternalism and riddled not only with rivalries between centralised Muslim organisations but also complicated by competition between Islam and the Orthodox Church, the risk of a more permanent disengagement was too high.

The research highlighted that the MCB openly criticised government policies on extremism and regained its independence from the government. However, security concerns increased the co-optation pressures on the MCB, while the gradually worsening relations with government ministers resulted in disengagement from the government. In the British pluralist context the risk of losing government backing was relatively low because there were other venues to lobby the government, including interfaith organisations and broader Muslim coalitions, such as the MINAB. However, the extent to which the critical rhetoric and the breakdown in relations were welcomed by Muslim communities remains debatable.

The SMR's relatively confrontational behaviour towards the Russian authorities on the issue of mosque shortages was rather unusual under corporatist conditions. It was shaped by the increasingly negative perceptions of Muslim migrants in Russian society and the individual attitudes of state officials engaged in religious affairs. The Council's willingness to challenge government officials openly in the media was also in response to what it believed to be attempts to undermine its own reputation by its rivals. By 2010, the Council's leaders felt their messages being increasingly ignored by state advisors. Internal rivalries between Muslim centralised organisations have been an integral part of the Russian context. However, under a short phase of Medvedev's administration, the Russian corporatist system acquired a slightly pluralist colouring, not so much in the democratising nature of the state, but rather a more diversified method of state engagement with religious leaders. With the introduction of new players into the narrow arena of state-Muslim relations (e.g. RAIS and the Moscow office of TsDUM), the SMR felt it was being punished for its rhetoric on building mosques for Muslim migrants. Tougher words were also needed

to fight its competitors who tried to benefit from state advisors distancing themselves from the council. The SMR's confrontational rhetoric was bolstered, however, by the like-minded supporters from the DUM in Nizhny Novgorod joining its ranks in Moscow.

The final phase of council-state relations under the Coalition government in Britain and Putin's third presidency was marked by the return to more traditional forms of pluralist and corporatist interest mediation. The MCB's disengagement from the Labour government over its securitised policies towards Muslim communities and the worsening personal relations marked an end to a rather atypical corporatist phase in the council's engagement with the state. A change in government in 2010 signalled a return to pluralist engagement with religion under the Coalition and another shift in state policies on religious governance. On one hand, Conservative ministers favoured stronger engagement with the Anglican Church and a more local approach to resolving minority issues on the individual, rather than the national level. This has marked a key departure from Labour's corporatist way of organising faith interests associationally.

The MCB could still engage with individual ministers and lobby the government from a variety of platforms. However, a close engagement between the MCB and the British government was constrained not only by Conservatives' distrust of what was perceived as the Council's Islamist agenda, but also by their ideological differences. The MCB's leaders believed that Muslim interests were best represented collectively, while the Coalition ministers saw Muslims as individual citizens. Their policies and statements on social cohesion and community integration indicated that they did not view Muslims as a bounded faith community. During this later period, the MCB did not so much respond to the pressures of co-optation, but rather had to re-evaluate its engagement with the government in light of this cooling in relations. Under the conditions of decreased cooperation, the Council's direct access to the government was reduced. However, the increasingly pluralised organisational landscape of state-religion relations and a well-developed civil society encouraged it to build new alliances with Muslim and non-Muslim groups.

In the Russian context based on the 'vertical of power', the tensions were eventually resolved by taking Muslim grievances all the way to the top, thus bypassing the middle level of state bureaucracy. The council vowed to 'clean up' its act, while the 'newly' elected President Putin promised that nobody would intervene in Muslim affairs and the Council's sphere of influence by backing new players and deliberately pluralising Muslim organisational landscape. Therefore, following this short-lived confrontation, the SMR has re-engaged with the Russian state and continued to lobby the government in a more conciliatory fashion, in fitting with an institutionalised Muslim organisation. It responded to the pressure of keeping in line with state demands by demonstrating that it was skilled in navigating the centralised landscape of corporatist interest mediation, marked by strong personal connections with top officials and rivalries with competitive players. Although the Council leaders acknowledged that close proximity to the state was not always rewarded by support from Russian Muslims, they believed that the lack of direct access to the government would be detrimental to representing Muslim interests and protecting their rights in Russian society.

The pluralist and corporatist contexts of state-religion relations created different levels of pressure on the councils to cooperate with the state, based on how much contention each organisation could afford, without damaging its chances of having sufficient access to the government. The availability of good personal connections was an equally important factor in the two cases of engagement, whereas the centralising or decentralising dynamic of informal approaches to governance helped account for the different strategies used by the two councils. The research also suggested that the changing nature of state ideology on religion, combined with the religious cleavages and the extent to which they were pacified or sharpened, played a key role in the changing nature of council-state relations.

The councils' engagement with Muslim communities

The issue of Muslim representation and the challenges associated with the lack of legitimacy were addressed in Chapters 4 and 6. In these chapters, I focused on the issue of Muslim collective representation and discussed the ways in which the two Muslim councils struggled to legitimise themselves in the eyes of Muslim communities in Britain and Russia. The pluralist nature of Islam and its forms of representation, based on individual religious figures and very diverse ethnic, religious, social and cultural perspectives, are problematic for state efforts to pick a particular interlocutor with whom to engage. While the two organisations have never claimed to be the most representative Muslim institutions, they engaged with the government and general public on behalf of Muslim communities. The research revealed that Muslim communities, including different groups and organisations, questioned the extent to which the councils had enough authority and community support to represent their interests.

The third question identified the challenges and constraints of gaining and maintaining Muslim support in the two contexts in order to unpack how the councils interpreted and tried to tackle their legitimacy deficit. I also examined the strategies and rhetoric the two councils used to rehabilitate themselves and improve their reputation. In spite of the different national contexts of Muslim representation, the changing nature of Muslim communities and the increased competition from other organisations provided converging challenges and undermined their credibility as representative institutions. At the same time, the growing disconnect between the councils' own outdated organisational structures and historically contingent approaches to power-sharing and community leadership constrained their ability to keep up with the changing nature of Muslim expectations.

The growing diversity of Muslim communities and the difficulty of providing inclusive yet differentiated representation of Muslim interests revealed the first challenge, shared by the two councils. Over the last decade, the nature of Muslim identity in Britain has become increasingly plural, whereas the original calls for

collective representation at the national level were challenged by the growing number of Muslim organisations, associations and groups. A shift from Muslim community to Muslim communities was accompanied by stratification along religious, ethnic and generational lines, as well as a different level of self-identification with mainstream society or the global *ummah*, secular ideology or sectarian interests. The interviews revealed that the MCB's style of leadership and representation was perceived as too narrow. Increased monitoring of Muslim communities under the anti-terrorist legislations and Islamophobic attacks following the 9/11, 7/7 and the murder of Lee Rigby, may have increased the need to stand together as a single Muslim community. However, the growing diversity of Muslim interests undermined collective patterns of representation, encouraging the MCB to become a less sectarian and more inclusive organisation.

The SMR faced a similar challenge stemming from the changing nature of Muslim communities and stratification of their expectations along ethnic, religious and generational lines. It also struggled to represent a variety of Muslim interests and particularly those who had become particularly critical of its style of leadership and religious authority. However, the need to provide a more inclusive representation was dictated not so much by the pluralisation of the Russian *ummah*, but rather its increasing polarisation. The data suggests that the changes over the last ten years have led to widening cleavages along generational, ethnic and sectarian lines. Intra-communal ethnic tensions over the shortages of religious spaces and the negative image of Muslim minorities in the press became a particularly divisive issue between the Tatar community and the groups of Muslim migrants from Central Asia. The Council claimed to speak in the name of all Muslims in Russia, regardless of their ethnic origin or Islamic tradition. However, the highly polarised nature of Muslim minorities indicated that a more inclusive approach was required to redress internal divisions. Additionally, these intra-communal tensions were counter-productive to the SMR's efforts to consolidate the Russian *ummah* under its leadership.

The second challenge was the growing competition from other Muslim organisations which criticised the councils' approach to representation and community leadership.

In the British pluralist context, the MCB was criticised by religious and non-religious Muslim organisations because of its close relations with the state and its position on radical extremism. Some also questioned its sectarian legacies and ideology, its narrowly-based approach to identity politics and its internal electoral procedures. In the Russian corporatist context of centralised Muslim institutions and limited unofficial channels to make Muslim voices heard, there were fewer opportunities to challenge the SMR. On one hand, this meant that other centralised organisations could launch more personal attacks, aimed at discrediting the council in the eyes of the Russian *ummah* and the state. On the other hand, many Russian Muslims found themselves already disengaged from the Council and its bureaucratic approach to representation.

In response to these challenges, the two councils developed a series of strategies to mobilise support and improve their reputation. Both engaged in activities aimed at engaging with different segments of the Muslim population. The documentary analysis suggested that the MCB widened its interaction with women, young people and the business community. The SMR invited young educated Muslims and also developed special adaptation programmes for Muslim migrants from Central Asia. A detailed study of the councils' rhetoric towards Muslim communities showed that both institutions sought to unite Muslims under their leadership by combining Islamic discourses on Muslim solidarity, consultation and empowerment.

The logic of solidarity and consultation was used to communicate the message of becoming inclusive and aware of the changing needs of Muslim communities. Even though the nature of the words was similar, the end message was different. The MCB talked about unity in diversity to reconcile Muslim collective representation as a bounded faith community with its internal diversity. The SMR emphasised Muslim unity to heal the existing ethnic tensions. The MCB used an Islamic concept of consultation to show that it welcomed a variety of opinions in an open and inclusive fashion. The SMR differentiated between consultations amongst the DUM's senior leaders and all-Muslim forums aimed at building more general support. The rhetoric of empowerment was also coloured by the pluralist and corporatist connotations. For

the MCB, the focus was on self-governance and empowering British Muslims to represent themselves. For the SMR, the empowerment was linked to improving the educational standards of the Muslim elite and consolidating the outdated system of the DUMs to make it more compatible with the centralised patterns of governance.

The research also revealed that the external norms of pluralist and corporatist approaches to interest representation permeated the councils' internal strategies. The project identified the issue of institutional reforms as the most tangible and direct effort by the councils to improve their legitimacy. Both institutions showed readiness to modify their own organisational structures to put their own house in order. Together with the previously described measures and the rhetoric of engagement, these steps were designed to reject the growing criticisms that the councils were unable to represent Muslim interests in an inclusive and accountable/efficient manner. This is an area where the findings show divergence. The influence of external factors helps explain why the nature of reforms was so different. In the British context, the constitutional review was designed to convince the MCB's critics of its democratic credentials and institutional accountability. In the Russian context, the SMR was more concerned with the lack of administrative legitimacy and effective ways to consolidate Muslim spiritual boards under its own leadership and modernise the outdated system of Muslim administration in line with managerial or technocratic principles.

The two councils took significant steps to restructure their respective institutions. The MCB consulted its affiliates on how to improve its electoral procedures and membership arrangements, as well as increase participation from the under-represented segments of Muslim population. The SMR's approach involved listening to young leaders and restructuring its internal communication with affiliated DUMs to overcome the bureaucratic weaknesses and organisational passivity of these bodies. The SMR's central office wanted to lead by example, to streamline its own processes and administrative practices and communicate them down to their affiliates. Alongside these measures, it registered and affiliated more Muslim

organisations to have a numeric advantage of representing more organisations than its rivals.

A key finding of the thesis was that in Britain, the MCB attempted to make its organisation more inclusive and democratically accountable to Muslim communities. This was in line with pluralist norms of strong civil society, competition and a large number of organisations. In Russia, the SMR strived to make its institution equally inclusive, but also administratively efficient to gain influence within the increasingly fragmented Muslim organisational landscape. This was more in line with corporatist patterns of consolidated forms of interest mediation and few hierarchically structured units of administration.

The research also indicated that the two councils were rather cautious about modernising their institutions too much too soon. The MCB introduced quotas on female participation and opened up the process of elections by making the procedures more democratic. However, for now, it stopped short of radically changing the affiliation structures by introducing individual membership (as was suggested during consultations). The SMR created new departments in its central office in Moscow and put in charge young leaders who were energetic, educated and believed to be in touch with young Muslims. It also instigated further consultations between the central office and regional organisations. However, it stopped short of changing the power-sharing arrangements and democratising its electoral procedures.

A closer evaluation of how these measures were discussed and implemented revealed an important constraint on the institutional behaviour of the two councils. The organisational development of the MCB was restricted by the entrenched, conservative approaches to representation and community leadership. Traditionalist views and the numerical advantage of Islamist-based institutions among the MCB's affiliates have prevented more progressive leaders from having more say. Moreover, the data indicated that while local mosque committees made up a large proportion of the MCB's affiliates, their senior leaders sat on the MCB's committees as Muslim representatives, often without having been previously elected. More extensive

reforms would have threatened the entrenched interests, which arguably resisted more democratic forms of representation.

In the Russian context, the history of highly fragmented and over-bureaucratised regional DUMs and local organisations meant that their senior representatives were reluctant to embrace change and let in younger leaders. While this was not the case with the SMR's own organisational changes, the presence of these interests hampered the efforts to cascade the reforms down to the individual DUMs in order to create a more consolidated, modernised and administratively efficient system of Muslim administration. Moreover, historically institutionalised rivalries between the SMR and the TsDUM encouraged the creation of parallel *muftiyats* which frustrated the SMR's ambition to consolidate the field of Muslim organisations under its leadership.

In light of the aforementioned challenges and constraints, the research demonstrated that the MCB attempted to establish itself as a democratic institution, whereas the SMR was more concerned with improving its administrative legitimacy. Arguably, in the corporatist context, close connections with Muslim communities may have been less important for the Council than building a more flexible yet effective structure to outmanoeuvre its rivals. In the pluralist context, the MCB's legitimacy was more affected by the apathy and the lack of interest from Muslim communities, while in light of the plethora of different organisations, securing an advantage over other Muslim actors was less desirable or indeed feasible.

Therefore, the research indicated that as minority interest organisations, Muslim councils vary their community engagement strategies. As they become more aware of the changing expectations and their own organisational limitations, they show more willingness to adapt to the existing rules of interest mediation. In particular, they try to balance collective efforts to lobby on behalf of Muslim minorities as a unified group with the increasingly pluralising and polarising nature of Muslim interests. The extent to which they succeed in these efforts is contingent on their own

internal resources and the ways these steps are received and interpreted – externally by state officials and internally by Muslim communities and Muslim organisations.

The study focused on the councils themselves and how they interpreted Muslim aspirations and reacted to the changing nature of these opportunities and constraints. Although there are some opinion polls which reflect Muslim attitudes towards the MCB, this kind of data is scarce in relation to the SMR. Further research is required to gauge whether the two councils were perceived as more representative in light of their reformist efforts and whether this had the desired effect of making these organisations popular with their constituents.

The co-optation and representation nexus

The main question of the thesis was designed to examine how the two intermediary institutions engage with the state and seek support from Muslim communities under different conditions. A final consideration worth discussing is whether the two processes of council-state and council-community engagement were interconnected. Put differently, was the councils' respective interaction with the state somewhat conditioned by the real or perceived sense of being a representative institution? Conversely, did the councils struggle to be accepted as representative Muslim organisations because of their relations with the state?

There is an expectation by some state officials that Muslim councils are designed to be an effective instrument to facilitate state-Islam relations, provided that the councils cooperate fully with the government. While this may vary in relation to more democratic/pluralist or authoritarian/corporatist approaches to managing internal social cohesion, in periods of increased security tensions such demands on the councils increase. Inevitably, this creates tensions with Muslim communities who tend to see such actions as increased interference into their affairs. The research emphasised the key dilemma facing Muslim councils in their mediatory capacity between state demands for integration and community expectations for

representation. To be a reliable partner of the state, they had to show that they had sufficient support and legitimacy among Muslim communities. In order to position themselves as a representative voice of Muslim interests, they were expected to have sufficient access to the state and cooperation with its officials without losing their independence and becoming a state instrument for managing Muslim affairs.

The study contributed to the existing literature on Muslim organisations and their participation in religious governance by providing a more dynamic analysis of the challenges involved in building partnerships between Muslim councils, state actors and civil society in the areas of integration and minority representation. A series of studies on participatory governance highlighted the positive and negative aspects of the co-optation processes that such a mode of relations inevitably entails (see discussion in O'Toole and Gale 2014). The empirical data revealed that a participatory mode of governance based on the idea of partnership between state authorities and civil society actors was not limited to decentralised systems of governance In can also be present in more centralised or vertical modes of state-Muslim engagement, albeit with increased pressures of meeting state expectations on security and integration.

The research also indicated that in instances where the state imposed the excessive pressure to cooperate, the protesting activities of the councils and their mobilising rhetoric increased. While this was evident over the MCB's handling of the 'Prevent' agenda, it was also apparent in the SMR's increasingly militant rhetoric over the issue of mosque shortages and protection of Muslim migrants and their religious rights. The study uncovered that following the periods of increased contention with the government, the councils intensified their efforts to win more support from Muslim communities. However, the research was inconclusive as to whether the use of mobilising and protesting rhetoric has really helped the councils to be accepted as legitimate representatives and defenders of Muslim interests. The data collection of the project was limited to identifying the ways in which the two councils have dealt with the opportunities and constraints of Muslim integration and representation between 1997 and 2013. With the councils' fluctuating fortunes, more detailed

research and opinion polls with Muslim communities are required to determine whether in the long run, their internal institutional changes will help improve their popularity among Muslim communities and their credibility among state officials and other religious groups.

Interestingly, the research demonstrated the importance of the changing nature of Muslim civil society and the ways in which this affected the councils' ability to mediate between state and community interests. For example, both councils benefited from the developing landscape of Muslim civil society and the increasing pool of potential partners engaged in collective lobbying for social justice, recognition of Islamic faith in public sphere, as well as creating a sense of 'social cohesion' in Britain and 'civic consolidation' in Russia. However, while the level of support has been important in determining the councils' critical stance on government policies, the very existence of Muslim civil society was a double-edged sword for the two institutions. The pluralist nature of Muslim civil society in Britain and its diversified framework of horizontal ties and alternative platforms from which to lobby the state resulted in a series of checks and balances on the MCB's own claims to speak on behalf of Muslim communities, thus questioning its institutional legitimacy. In the Russian context, exemplified by a rather fragmented Muslim sector of civil society, less-developed civil society and strong patterns of paternalistic dependency on state officials, the RCM's room for dissent was more constrained.

Fewer opportunities for building bottom-up partnerships with grassroots organisations help explain not only a more active role played by the Muslim elites in Russia, but also highly competitive conditions at the top of the Muslim leadership pyramid. By focusing largely on the organisational level of Muslim elites and state-endorsed organisations, rather than ordinary Muslim citizens, the study highlighted particular legitimacy challenges faced by this type of Muslim institutions, struggling to navigate top-down and bottom-up processes of engagement between state actors and Muslim communities. Similarly, in the British case, a study of the MCB's activities through the prism of Muslim political elites revealed some tensions between state-endorsed initiatives of Muslim engagement and bottom-up, grassroots

activities of Muslim civil society. Moreover, the study indicated different expectations of Muslim political elites and civil society actors in the two countries. Further research, however, is required to ascertain the extent to which different political culture and state-society relations can help explain the nature of these differences.

The analysis of the two councils in their contrasting contexts also helped identify possible conditions in which collective forms of Muslim representation through such national umbrella bodies become more feasible and (if not desirable) at least more justifiable. The first condition refers to the presence of a real or perceived threat that the interests of Muslim community (as a group or a category) are undermined. In particular, such was the context in which the MCB was formed in the aftermath of the Rushdie Affair. In light of the British pluralist and decentralised forms of interest organisations, this was a rather unexpected development. However, at that stage it was welcomed by the government and Muslim communities alike. Consequently, in spite of its shortcomings, the MCB has continuously tried to prove its worth once the political, social and religious conditions for Muslim communities in Britain have changed. For the MCB, the idea of 'community under threat' was associated with the need for collective representation of the Muslim agenda on the national level. However, in the British context characterised by local level initiatives and network engagement this objective proved rather difficult to achieve.

The second condition is linked to the organisational or administrative necessity for such a particular organisation to exist in the first place, based on the state approach to managing religious diversity. This was illustrated by the Russian case. The corporatist approach to religious governance creates the administrative need for such an identity-based institution to manage and govern a particular segment of interests. In other words, in the corporatist context, the role of such a Muslim institution can be considered as functional in light of the associationally-organised interests.

Arguably, the corporatist nature of the state requires Muslim communities to establish unified structures with whom the state can interact in a similar way as it

engages with other religious groups. The federal specificities of the Russian context and historical legacies resulted in a series of centralised Muslim bodies with different regional jurisdictions. To be successful in this context, a Muslim organisation tries to model (or bring inline) its own institutional set-up in relation to the bureaucratic practices of the state, while trying to reconcile this with the Islamic principles governing the state of living in the non-Muslim environment. To an extent this may also apply to other corporatist or neo-corporatist cases of associationally-organised interests, including more democratic examples, such France or Germany.

In line with some of the findings advanced by the POS-based studies about mobilisation and accommodation of minority groups, the research demonstrated the value of understanding the ways in which divergent political contexts can create different scenarios of mobilising minority claims. And yet, while acknowledging these important differences, the research also uncovered a series of less expected similarities in relation to internal strategies used by the two Muslim councils to address the issues of their organisational maintenance and the changing external environment of state-religion relations. Some of these internal aspects of organisational structures have been neglected by the existing POS-based approaches to minority groups. The implications of establishing these areas of convergence were two-fold.

First, the findings emphasised an important link between the external processes of interest mediation in pluralist and corporatist contexts and the ways in which these principles permeated the internal environment of organisational reforms. The contextualised comparison used in this project was particularly interesting in uncovering the extent to which the external rules and organisational values of mainstream society have affected the councils' own internal self-legitimating practices. Not only did this emphasise the importance of individual contexts and institutional setting in shaping the actors' behaviour, but it also brought to light the important dimension of informal patterns of Muslim integration. The two councils may have engaged in organisational maintenance in response to the pressure from communities for more inclusive representation. However, by doing so they revealed

the extent to which they have absorbed the informal practices of pluralist and corporatist approaches, thus indicating to state officials their credibility and worth as institutionalised partners.

Second, the research revealed the dynamic nature of the political opportunities and constraints, emphasising not only the previously acknowledged structural nature of formal and informal opportunity structures, but also a series of internal shifts and fluctuations that help account for the changes in how interest group organisations formulate and execute their strategies (as will be discussed in the next section). The study examined how the two Muslim councils developed their strategies and rhetoric of engagement not only under different conditions of interest mediation, but also in light of their own organisational resources and limitations. Moreover, it demonstrated that the character of Muslim collective representation was influenced by the ways in which it was interpreted and framed by interest group organisations.

These findings are beneficial to the future POS-based research on religious or ethnic minority representation as they provide further empirical evidence on how these types of Muslim organisation adapt their mobilisation strategies and rhetoric in light of the changing political context. A better understanding of these challenges and how Muslim councils attempted to deal with them contributes to a wider research on Muslim umbrella organisations in particular and the processes of integration, claims-making and minority representation in general.

Theoretical contribution

From the outset, the project aimed at exploring the behaviour of the two Muslim councils as interest group organisations balancing state and community expectations under different opportunities and constraints. The study sought to examine the inherent tension between the councils' agency as a representative voice of minority claims and the structuring context of state-religion intermediation shaping their behavioural strategies.

To better understand these processes in light of existing theoretical approaches, the study combined a series of insights from social movement theories (Kriesi et al. 1995, McAdam et al. 1996, Tarrow 1998) and institutionalist approaches (Meyer and Rowan 1977, Mahoney and Thelen 2010, Pierson 2004). Each approach was tailored to conceptualise different aspects of this tension and examine the extent to which the councils' actions and rhetoric have conformed to these expectations. Consequently, the notions of contention and political opportunity structures were used to conceptualise the changing institutional context of state-religion relations, while organisational and historical insights were applied to examine the nature of internal legitimacy and institutional resistance to change within the two organisations.

Political opportunities, state-religion typologies and institutionalist approaches

The project sought to contribute to the existing use of POS-based theories by using the basic pluralist/corporatist dichotomy to conceptualise the organisational and institutional aspects of state-religion relations. Previous frameworks were based on typologies of state-church relations characterised by political, religious and legal dimensions of institutionalising Islam in the Western context (Fetzer and Soper 2005). Other studies focused on more dynamic ways of exploring citizen regimes and their impact on claims-making processes of ethnic and religious migrants (Koopmans and Statham 2000). In this thesis, I integrated the two approaches to conceptualise

the institutional dimensions of state-religion relations as a series of political opportunities and constraints.

The data on state-religion relations under the pluralist and corporatist conditions of interest mediation corroborated the proposed theoretical expectation concerning the importance of institutional contexts as a key factor accounting for the different outcomes and changes in council-state relations (McAdam et al. 1996, Tarrow 1998). Drawing on existing literature, the pluralist and corporatist arrangements were taken as a working typology of the thesis to contrast the two institutional contexts of state-religion relations. The differentiation between the pluralist and corporatist conditions helped capture many variations between different elements of the POS-based approach. In particular, it helped to differentiate between formal institutional structures in the two countries and identify a series of opportunities and constraints associated with different alliance structures. However, the different nature of religious cleavages and informal structures in the two contexts proved to be less clear-cut, as was revealed by a series of similar developments in state-religion relations in the two contexts.

For example, the influence of the established Church and opportunities for Muslim councils to introduce new conflicts were different in the two contexts. To an extent, the research confirmed that in the pluralist context, the mobilising potential for the Muslim council was higher than in the corporatist case. However, the changing nature of religious tensions in both cases was also an important factor in the councils' engagement with the state. The councils' behaviour was shaped by the degree to which these divisions were pacified or securitised in the two cases. Notably, both councils used less militant rhetoric in periods when the importance of different faiths groups was publicly acknowledged and promoted through state policies. Conversely, their rhetoric would become equally more aggressive in periods when Muslim leaders felt that Islamic faith was securitised and Muslim religious rights were not sufficiently protected.

Similarly, a close analysis of informal structures in the two cases confirmed differentiation between horizontal and vertical preferences for state engagement with religious groups. These informal practices corresponded to the pluralist or corporatist arrangements and contributed to a weaker or stronger cooperation between Muslim leaders and state officials respectively. However, both cases showed that council-state engagement was also conditioned by reliance on personal connections and informal relations between government figures and Muslim representatives. Good working relations were equally important in the two cases, regardless of the centralised or the network-based approach to engagement.

Moreover, the process of exploring the extent to which the councils' behaviour conformed to the pluralist or corporatist expectations reveals that the two institutional contexts are not static: at certain points of time, they can shift to incorporate elements of the other. This was the case of the atypical phases of corporatist state-religion relations under Labour in Britain and more pluralist elements introduced during Medvedev's presidency in Russia. Although the exception tends to prove the rule, the empirical evidence indicated that in reality the pluralist/corporatist distinction was messier than its ideal typology. Internal shifts in the two institutional settings highlighted further linkages between the meta-typology and theories of social movements. For example, the research supported the claim that contention happened in the mixed systems where the challengers' claims were neither fully accommodated nor fully repressed (Eisinger 1973). This was partly corroborated by the changing nature of state engagement with religion in general and Muslim communities in particular. Consequently, the two councils' decisions to engage with state authorities or disengage from them were facilitated and constrained by the changes in state-religion relations.

The project offered further evidence to the claim that structural shifts in formal structures of political opportunities continued to influence the behaviour of the already established interest group actors and social movement organisations (McAdam et al. 1996: 13). For example, the changes in formal structures and religious cleavages played a key role in the creation of the two councils. However,

internal shifts and fluctuations over a period of time revealed that the institutional conditions continued to affect the behaviour of the two councils. In line with theoretical expectations, the project revealed linkages between the changes in institutional conditions and the actors' choice of strategies. For example, the securitisation of religious divisions resulted in the instances of increasingly mobilised and confrontational rhetoric used by the two councils (Kriesi et al. 1995).

The findings also highlighted the linkages between the external and internal institutional environment in relation to the nature of organisational maintenance and self-legitimating rhetoric (Kriesi 1996). In the two cases, the councils attempted to do both: to integrate themselves with their constituents and absorb pluralist or corporatist organisational practices to gain access to the state and other channels of representation. While this helps explain the behaviour of the two councils, it also supports the claim of organisational theorists that actors incorporate already institutionalised external practices to legitimate their conduct (Meyer and Rowan 1977).

The analysis of the historical dimension of power relations within the two institutions confirmed the initial expectation that historically entrenched interests represented a more powerful barrier to change than everyday organisational inertia. Moreover, the nature of these constraints was indicative of the kind of internal self-legitimating measures the two organisations were likely to implement. The concept of gradual change, provided by Mahoney and Thelen (2010), was particularly useful in its application to the micro-level of institutional reforms implemented by each organisation. On one hand, it helped understand the pressure interest group organisations face in light of their own past practices and entrenched interests. On the other hand, it also revealed how, in spite of these locked-in institutional constraints, the two organisations were capable of gradually reforming their institutional structures.

A combination of insights from social movement theories and institutionalist approaches helped conceptualise Muslim intermediary councils as already established organisations and thus better understand the pressures such institutions have to manage. Although they are no longer newcomers trying to challenge the existing context of state-religion relations, they still mobilise on behalf of Muslim communities and lobby the state to articulate their claims. Although they still use mobilising rhetoric and strategies and engage in contention, they have become institutionalised within the context of state-religion relations and, therefore, their behaviour is now shaped by the context as well as their own resources and organisational capacities. My historically sensitive perspective on organisational change helped examine a series of challenges and limitations they can face in representing the changing nature of Muslim communities as mature interest group organisations.

Between mobilisation and institutionalisation

The study of the two Muslim councils contributed to the debate on how interest group organisations participate in making claims and challenging authorities, while eventually appropriating organisational practices of the institutional settings in which they operate. The data collected on the two councils supported this claim, particularly by providing a more detailed analysis of Muslim councils not only as new challengers, entering the context of state-religion relations, but also as already institutionalised organisations.

The behaviour of the two councils was explored through the dual lens of mobilisation and institutionalisation. Their attempts to satisfy the changing demands for representation were benchmarked against the measures to overcome their own organisational limitations. The use of the dual vantage point while exploring the changing strategies of the intermediary institutions has required a more dynamic theoretical framework. On one hand, I needed a way to explain the multifaceted behaviour of the councils (agency). On the other hand, I wanted to take into account

the ways in which their behaviour was facilitated and constrained by their external and internal environment (structure).

By exploring the pressures of mobilisation and institutionalisation, the study has tried to contribute to the general debate on the interplay between agency and structure. The research demonstrated that the institutional context influenced the level of contention or cooperation between minority group organisations and the state. However, interest group organisations used their own resources to engage with their context, modify their behavioural strategies or dress them in self-legitimising rhetoric. The thesis emphasised that in spite of their limitations, the two Muslim councils have demonstrated ability to adapt their organisational behaviour to the changing conditions.

The project's more general theoretical contribution was thus an attempt to develop an analytical approach based on a combination of static and more dynamic aspects of structuralist and organisational theories. First, the project contributed to integrating some insights on discursive framing and structural opportunities, thus building on similar work carried out by Koopmans and Statham (2000) on migrant groups. Second, the project incorporated the idea of gradual change from historical institutionalism (Mahoney and Thelen 2010) and used it in a more dynamic way on a micro-level. This provided an opportunity to delineate a series of historically locked-in institutional practices acting as organisational constraints and undermining the likelihood of change.

Comparative value of the project

The flexible conceptual framework used in the project allowed for more substantial theoretical contributions to be made in relation to behaviour of Muslim councils in different institutional contexts. The project developed a more innovative approach to better understand the mediatory capacity and predicament of these interest group organisations working under pressure. At the same time, the thesis attempted to extend the comparative leverage of the pluralist and corporatist labels, which have become considered slightly outdated.

The use of the paired comparison provided an opportunity to revisit the original debate on the pluralist and corporatist forms of interest intermediation. Some scholars have suggested that this dichotomy may have become less relevant for the contemporary context of interest group organisations in Western Europe (Beyers et al. 2008: 1104). However, the basic way of differentiating between the two types of institutional arrangements allowed for the incorporation of the Russian example into the comparative framework, previously limited to less contrasting cases. For example, different comparative studies on claims-making strategies of different ethnic and religious groups have explored the bottom-up dynamic of social movement organisations in the pluralist context of Western democracies (Cinalli and Giugni 2013, Statham et al. 2005).

The project's conceptual framework has thus contributed to widening the scope of the comparison, as the Russian experience of representing Muslim minority groups was largely ignored in comparative literature on political opportunity structures, claims-making and institutionalisation of Islam. The study demonstrated the value of such a wider comparison, while acknowledging the importance of the individual specificities of each context and the obvious caveats such a comparison can bring. For example, in light of Russia's geographical diversity and particular regions with majority Muslim population, the project was limited to discussing the issues in relation to the areas where Muslim communities were in a minority so that the issues would be comparable to the British case.

As was suggested earlier, considering the atypical periods in the two cases, the two institutional contexts might not fit the pluralist or corporatist types completely. Interestingly, the data showed that the two cases were flexible enough to accommodate internal variation. This helped identify some potential limitations of the pluralist/corporatist dichotomy for understanding the behaviour of Muslim councils – if the two institutions were studied in isolation from each other.

For example, the limitations of the pluralist approach to understanding the British context of state-religion relations were demonstrated by the process of moving away from integrating Muslim communities on the basis of their ethnic and racial differentiation to accommodating the religious dimension of Muslim faith within the increasingly corporatist approach to religious diversity. This has become particularly apparent under the New Labour administration which had given full backing to such corporatist activities as the introduction of faith-schools, provisions for *halal* food or prison chaplains. However, the corporatist elements of state-religion relations went hand in hand with the pluralist forms of horizontal engagement, multiplicity of religious actors within each faith community and their autonomy from the state.

Similarly, the Russian case revealed some inherent tensions within the corporatist approach in light of state efforts to accommodate religious diversity. In particular, there was an important policy shift from safeguarding 'managed pluralism' of the early years of Putin's presidency to incorporating four 'traditional' faiths into the increasingly corporatist framework of religious governance. In spite of the limited attempts to somewhat pluralise the vertical structures of state-religion engagement under Medvedev, the underlying mechanisms of paternalistic relations and the lack of organisational autonomy remained the persistent features of the corporatist mode of religious governance in general and state-Muslim relations in particular.

While these internal variations in the two approaches to interest mediation within the individually-conceptualised cases are quite significant, the pluralist/corporatist distinction proved useful when the two councils and their institutional contexts were compared. In contrast to its Russian counterpart, the British case displayed more

features associated with the pluralist approach to interest mediation, whereas the Russian case fitted better the corporatist conditions of state-religion engagement.

Moreover, the process in which the Russian context was contrasted with the British context helped better understand the similarities and differences in the two cases. In a way, each context served as a magnifying glass for the other. For example, the Russian corporatist setting brought to light the less obvious corporatist elements in Blair's ideology and policies on religion. Conversely, the British pluralist context of multiple interfaith platforms and a better developed civil society highlighted the importance of horizontal networks as an alternative dynamic to strong dependence on state patronage.

At the same time, while both organisations used Islamic rhetoric, each council complemented it with particular connotations believed to resonate with its respective Muslim audiences in Britain and Russia. For example, in the British case, this was linked to the ideas of self-organisation and individual empowerment, while the Russian council used the notions of modernisation, efficiency and empowerment of Muslim organisations. Similarly, both institutions struggled to implement internal reforms, but in each case, the nature of historically entrenched constraints was different.

Notwithstanding the inevitable contextual differences, the project revealed that the councils' strategies and rhetoric were also affected by other factors, such as exogenous events (e.g. terrorist threats and increased migration), particular decisions of individual actors, and the changing nature of Muslim communities. This is particularly important in the current climate of converging security concerns, pressures of immigration and secular practices of developing and maintaining good working relations between state officials and Muslim representatives.

In conclusion, the analysis of the two different institutions in Britain and Russia yielded a series of comparative insights on state-Islam relations, including tensions between collective forms of Muslim representation and accommodation of Muslim

diversity, mobilisation of Muslim interests and institutionalisation of Muslim organisations in the secular processes of religious governance. While some of these findings can be extrapolated to other kinds of institutions, further comparative research in this area is needed to make a more substantial contribution to the disparate studies on Muslim councils in Europe, America and Russia.

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