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Chapter 6

British Muslims and the anti-war movement

Timothy Peace

Introduction

On 15th February 2003 demonstrations were held around the world to oppose the invasion of Iraq, a global event considered to be the 'largest protest event in human history' (Walgrave and Rucht 2010). The demonstration held in London attracted an estimated 2 million people which dwarfed the previous mass rallies of British political history including the Chartists, the Suffragettes, and anti-Vietnam war protestors (Gillan *et al* 2008). This anti-war movement 'generated not just the biggest demonstrations in British history but also an unprecendented outbreak of direct action, including the biggest wave of school walkouts' (Nineham 2013). Ten years on, it was claimed that this mass protest 'defined a generation', as for many it was the first time they had taken to the streets (Barkham 2013). Images from that day show a sea of people with various placards that were handed out. Alongside those prepared by the *Daily Mirror* newspaper and the Stop the War Coalition (StWC), the main organiser of the event, some of the most ubiquitous were those belonging to the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB). This is just one indication of the role that British Muslims played in both the organisation and participation of the anti-war march that day. Indeed, while it is impossible to garner exact figures, it is certain that this was also the largest mobilisation of British Muslims. Many of them had travelled from all over the country, often on specially organised coaches, in order to make their voice heard in the capital. Others participated in demonstrations in towns and cities up and down the country. Yet the involvement of British Muslims in the anti-war movement goes beyond their participation in that worldwide day of action. They were involved in the movement from the very founding of

the StWC, at a time when the war in question was the invasion of Afghanistan. They also continued to be a part of the movement long after the invasion and occupation of Iraq had begun.

In this chapter I will trace the history of that involvement and in particular some of the key figures and activists who were involved. Data comes from interviews conducted in 2008 with these actors as well as secondary sources on the development of the anti-war movement. I will argue that the involvement of Muslims in the British anti-war movement acted as a springboard to the development of what we might call 'Muslim civil society' and also created opportunities for a new generation of Muslim leaders to emerge from the shadows of the first generation. Since 2003 we have witnessed increased politicisation and awareness regarding political participation amongst British Muslims. The chapter also highlights the varied modes of engagement with the anti-war movement, including progressive forms of political involvement and that of more conservative groups. Indeed, the movement provided a point of unity around which all Muslims could rally, irrespective of their ideological or sectarian differences. For Muslims to be embraced by the wider movement, barriers of mistrust and hesitancy had to be overcome. These tensions will be outlined and discussed as well as the reasons why certain Muslim figures were pushed to the forefront in order to display a 'united front' of Britons of diverse origins and backgrounds. Firstly however, it is necessary to put this activism in the context of earlier mobilisations of Muslims in Britain.

The Rushdie protests and the beginnings of British Muslim activism

The campaign to ban Salman Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses* was the first example of a social movement that managed to mobilise British Muslims *en masse*. This is not to say that it was the first time Muslims had been involved in political protest. They had been involved in various forms of contentious politics such as industrial disputes or demonstrating against racism in society. However there was nothing 'Muslim specific' in these actions and the mobilising identity was more likely to be their status as either immigrants or ethnic minorities and the discrimination they faced as a result. Religious identities were simply not salient at the time. The Asian Youth Movements of the 1970s were keen to stress unity across the various South Asian religious groups but were essentially secular in character (Ramamurthy 2013). It was not until the 1980s that the first explicitly Muslim demands were made in the public sphere, this most commonly related to provisions based on religious needs such as providing halal food or prayer facilities. The formation of the Bradford Council for Mosques at the beginning of the decade had some early success in persuading the local government to enact policies that would reflect the specific needs of what we would now term the 'Muslim community'. Such concessions were not obtained merely through discussion or lobbying of local politicians. As documented by Phil Lewis (1994) in his groundbreaking book on the city, direct action was also employed in Bradford such as the 1983 boycott of schools and a demonstration outside the town hall to demand the provision of halal meat. Similar action was also taken in the wake of the 'Honeyford affair' when a local head teacher sparked controversy after he published an article in a right-wing journal in which he complained about the problems caused by large numbers of Asian children in his school and the influence of the 'race relations lobby'. Such mobilisations, which were not limited to Bradford, remained at a local level. The Rushdie affair changed all that.

The publication of *The Satanic Verses* in 1988 politicised a generation of Muslims in Britain. It contributed to the formation of a specific Muslim political identity (Meer 2010)

and also provided the foundation for future mobilisation 'as Muslims' rather than a racialised minority such as Blacks, Asians, Pakistanis etc. Bradford was again the focus of attention when a copy of Rushdie's novel was publicly burned in a square in front of the town hall on 14th January 1989 (Samad 1992). However, the mobilisation by British Muslims was national in character and managed to unite the various religious trends and political divisions that had hitherto been present amongst them. The United Kingdom Action Committee on Islamic Affairs (UKACIA) was set up in October 1988 as a national body to co-ordinate dissent and call for the book to be banned in Britain just as it had been in other countries such as India. A secondary aspect of this protest was the call for Rushdie to be put on trial for the offence of blasphemy. Indeed, the UKACIA even went to the House of Lords with their case but a previous ruling was upheld which stated that the English legal system only recognised blasphemy against Christianity, and in particular the Church of England (Weller 2009).

The high point of the co-ordinated protest by Muslims in Britain was the demonstration on 27th May 1989 in London, gathering an estimated 70, 000 protestors. Hundreds of coaches took groups of Muslims down to the capital for the demonstration. The event could be described as a PR disaster. Demonstrators were photographed burning the British flag and effigies of Rushdie, some even carried portraits of the Iranian leader Khomeini. The methods of political protest seemed to be directly imported from the Indian sub-continent and demonstrated the importance of first generation migrants in their organisation. The protest turned violent and battles broke out between Muslim youths and the police as the march reached Westminster. The images from that day as well as those from the book burnings did irreparable damage to the perception of British Muslims in the eyes of the wider public. Unsurprisingly, none of their demands were ever met and their claims failed to resonate with the wider public who perceived this to be an attack on the freedom of expression from an illiberal minority. This prompted Kalim Siddiqui, founder and director of

the Muslim Institute in London, to publish a 'Muslim Manifesto' in 1990 which proposed a Council of British Muslims. Two years later he created the Muslim Parliament, arguing that Muslims needed to form a separate political system. These initiatives remained marginal and beyond the mainstream of British Muslim opinion. In fact, it was not until March 1994 that then Home Secretary Michael Howard called on Muslim leaders (mostly those involved with the UKACIA) to establish a representative body. This eventually led to the creation of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) in 1997 however the Rushdie protests actually retarded such a process because of the negative interpretation of events that was shared across the political spectrum. It did however prove that Muslims could be mobilised across the UK and also encouraged the formation of new national organisations such as the Islamic Society of Britain (ISB) that was set up in 1990.

British Muslim activism in the 1990s

The 1990-1991 Gulf War was the next event to mobilise the Muslim community in Britain although on a much smaller scale and without the vehemence and fervour that characterised the anti-Rushdie protests. Many Muslims opposed the intervention by Allied forces against Iraq, but more specifically, opposed the stationing of Western troops on Saudi Arabian soil close to Islam's most holiest sites. They also directed their anger at Saudi Arabia for allowing this to happen and some were bitter about what they perceived to be a lack of leadership the Saudis had shown during the Rushdie affair by not putting more pressure on the British government (Lewis 1994, Werbner 1994). Unlike the Rushdie affair, there was not a wide consensus amongst British Muslims regarding the war that was waged against Iraq in response to the invasion and annexation of Kuwait. However, what this event did have in

common with the Rushdie protest is the general bemusement and misunderstanding from mainstream society with respect to those Muslims who opposed military intervention. Pnina Werbner, the anthropologist of Pakistanis in Britain, describes her reaction to the beliefs of a group in Manchester to the Gulf crisis:

> What struck me most forcefully, however, even in these early conversations with moderate non activists, was that once again, as in the Rushdie affair, British Pakistanis seemed to be setting themselves morally apart from British society, denying categorically what their fellow British nationals regarded as axiomatic moral imperatives: 'our boys' were in the Gulf, risking their lives, threatened by chemical warfare, poised to fight the fourth largest army in the world, to defend democratic values against a man who, at the very least, was a ruthless dictator who had invaded and taken over another country (Werbner 1994: 213)

Muslim demands for the withdrawal of troops fell on deaf ears and this perceived lack of patriotism also led to attacks on Mosques and other forms of violence. For a number of second generation British Muslims, the Gulf War was their first experience of political activism. Anas al-Tikriti, whose family had fled Iraq in the early 1970s, was one such activist. He claims that people were wary about protesting against Operation Desert Storm because the reputation of the Muslim community had been badly damaged after the Rushdie affair. It was 'a badly managed campaign where Muslims came out looking worse than they did before.'[1] For this reason, it became more of a letter writing protest. The mainstream anti-war movement at the time was overwhelmingly made up of leftist activists who made no attempt to reach out to ethnic minorities. 'Black people against the war in the gulf' was set up by a small number of activists who felt the anti-war movement didn't reflect their concerns.[2]

Another significant episode that mobilised Muslims prior to 9/11 was the plight of the Bosnian Muslims during the war in the ex-Yugoslavia and in particular the British government's reluctance to intervene in the conflict. British Muslims who were aware of the atrocities suffered by their co-religionists in Bosnia became extremely concerned that not enough was being done by the international community to help and that it was even

preventing the Bosnians from arming themselves. This galvanised the Muslim community to mobilise and attempts were made to lobby the UK government. The Muslim Parliament organized a demonstration outside the European Foreign Ministers Conference in London in July 1995 to demand an end to the arms embargo (Radcliffe 2004). Others travelled to the former Yugoslavia itself to work as aid volunteers. The 'Convoy of mercy' organised by British Muslims sent over 80 land convoys to the Balkans which transported medicines, medical equipment, clothes, books and aid workers. Much has been written on the radicalising effects of the Bosnian conflict on young Muslims in Britain, and some of those who travelled to Bosnia for ostensibly humanitarian reasons did end up fighting as *Mujahideen* (Wiktorowicz 2005, Husain 2007, Bhatt 2010). Indeed, there are interesting parallels with the Bosnian conflict and that which has engulfed Syria 20 years later. Nevertheless, most British Muslim activism regarding Bosnia remained non-violent and focused on providing aid.

September 11th and the formation Just Peace

It is difficult to underestimate the effect that the events of 11th September 2001 had on the British Muslim community. Amongst the older generation, the immediate reaction of many was to 'lay low and hope that it would all blow over'.[3] Whereas others decided to mobilise in order to 'defend what they saw as the civilised nature of their faith, to take a stand against their own extremists and to prevent the logic of revenge dictating an approach that would claim innocent Muslim lives with no connection to the original crime' (Birt 2005: 92). It is in this context that we can understand why many British Muslims later chose to join the anti-war movement. However, this involvement had rather humble beginnings. The Stop the War

Coalition (StWC) was set up at a rally on 21st September 2001, just over 2 weeks before the start of 'Operation Enduring Freedom' in Afghanistan on 7 October 2001.[4] At the second meeting of the Coalition, attempts were made to organise various interest groups such as 'nurses against the war' or 'lawyers against the war.' This meeting was attended by Shahed Saleem who suggested creating a group that would mobilise Muslims against the war. They coalesced into a group of about 10 people including South African born activist Shahedah Vawda. It was Shahed and Shahedah who would take a leading role in this group of Muslims against the war and the two would later marry.[5] The group was named Just Peace and aimed to 'promote Muslim participation in movements that campaign for freedom from oppression and injustice.' It recruited many of its members from the City Circle, a network set up in 1999 for young Muslim professionals in London (Lewis 2007). The group regularly met up in order to mobilise the Muslim community for the anti-war movement and they were also joined by secular groups such as the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign (Birt 2005). Shahed and Shahedah were also elected as members of the steering committee of the StWC.

Although set up as a group to encourage Muslim participation in the anti-war movement, its founders were keen for Just Peace to go beyond what they saw as a narrow interpretation of events held by the Muslim mainstream: that this was a war on Islam and that was the only justification for opposing the invasion of Afghanistan. Shahed felt it particularly compelling that there were so many people involved in StWC, not because of any affiliation to cultural or religious concerns, but merely because they thought it was wrong. He thought it would be good for Muslims to 'widen the scope of their campaign as it's not just about being Muslim, it's about principles. Opposition to the war should not be based simply on religion, race or ethnicity.'[6] In fact, Just Peace was a radical departure from traditional Muslim groups and organisations that 'tended to centre on the "Muslim condition" and were overtly, to a greater or lesser degree, religious. Just Peace was different in this regard – although its

members practised their religion, it was not a "religious organisation" as such'.[7] It initially involved both Muslims and non-Muslims and made attempts to be as inclusive as possible. The group also did not label itself as a religious organisation and there was no religious agenda or ideology that underpinned what they were doing. Although they found that religion did need to be invoked when they were trying to persuade people to get active in the anti-war movement. A key theme that they utilised was the idea of justice:

> The announcement we made at the City Circle was from the angle of 'your religion tells you to stand up for justice.' So although we were motivated more from a Human Rights perspective, we knew that the principle of justice was important for believers, as indeed it is for any religion. So we used that to appeal to people and get them active.[8]

They asked religious leaders for help in order to provide some quotes and straplines for their leaflets. Providing religious justification was particularly important in the face of some opposition to their actions by Muslims who thought they should not be associating with non-Muslims. They also encouraged well known personalities from the Muslim community to speak at their events such as Ghayasuddin Siddiqui who by this time was leading the Muslim Parliament and was also involved with the StWC.

Just Peace retained a core group of about 10 people although some of their meetings did attract larger numbers. As the group remained small, they were able to decide on their actions via consensus at their weekly meetings. They organised public events and talks and encouraged Muslims to join the demonstrations that were being organised by the StWC. This would involve handing out leaflets outside mosques and generally putting the word out amongst the Muslim community through email newsletters which were subsequently forwarded on by various individuals. In this way they were able to influence Muslims beyond their own immediate social circle of London. They were, for example, pleasantly surprised to receive questions from Muslim groups in places as far afield as Wales.[9] The first major success of the group was the organisation of a collective breaking of the fast during a

demonstration that took place during Ramadan on 18th November 2001. The protestors who were gathered in London's Trafalgar Square joined in with a collective *iftar* and members of Just Peace had organised the provision of dates and other food for this purpose as well as the call for prayer to be announced via loudspeakers. Muslim activists involved were moved by this gesture. It was seen as symbolising an important sign of unity and tolerance and encouraged others to join the anti-war movement. In fact, it must be pointed out that since the beginnings of the StWC, two keys slogans had been adopted which aimed to show support with the Muslim community – "Defend civil liberties" (against anti-terrorism legislation) and "Resist the racist backlash" (against the targeting of Muslims for reprisals).

As international political events developed, the StWC slowly started to shift its attention from the conflict in Afghanistan to the potential invasion of Iraq. Shahed Saleem recalls attending a meeting of the coalition in 2002 and seeing a banner saying 'Don't attack Iraq.' At the time he thought this 'seemed a bit far fetched' but weeks later it would become apparent that the administration of George W. Bush was seriously contemplating an invasion of Iraq. This factor also helped to mobilise more people to the cause, including many Muslims, who had by now become very visible at various anti-war protests. The members of Just Peace were keen for Muslims to get involved but not to separate themselves from the wider movement. As Shahedah Vawda explains:

> When we were preparing for a demonstration, one guy, who was actually a friend of mine, said 'all the Muslims should march together'. I said to him, 'I'm sorry but that's just defeating the whole purpose! The point is that we stand together in solidarity. It's about human rights and our common values. It's not about Muslims or Muslims in the West. That's what we're trying to move away from'.[10]

She felt that if they had gone out and marched 'as Muslims' this would have reinforced the stereotype of them not being a part of wider society. Through Just Peace they wanted to start a debate within their community about Muslims getting involved in the mainstream, about the problems of remaining insular, and how they could combat ideas of them not being

considered as full citizens. These were debates that were already prevalent, particularly among Muslims who had been raised in Britain, but the issue of the Iraq war really brought them to the fore. However, the idea of Muslims as being 'different' was also promoted by leaders within the StWC. Shahedah felt like she was treated as some kind of celebrity during anti-war demonstrations as an articulate Muslim woman who also wore a headscarf. The middle class white women in the movement were 'quite taken with her' and some even expressed astonishment that she could 'speak English so well.'[11] She was also aware that as a Muslim women who covers her hair she was effectively being used by the coalition to send out a particular message, but she didn't mind. 'They wanted to get Muslim authenticity on board and the easiest way to achieve that was to put a Muslim woman with a headscarf on a stage.'[12]

The involvement of the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB)

For many, the involvement of Muslims in the anti-war movement is synonymous with the participation of the Muslim Association of Britain. This is puzzling when we consider that the organisation at that time was still quite new (founded in 1997) and yet to really establish itself on a national scale with a membership of no more than 400 (Phillips 2008). More importantly, it was highly unrepresentative of the Muslim community in Britain which is largely South Asian in origin. MAB was set up by highly educated Arab individuals, many of whom had come to the UK to study in the 1970s and 1980s and ended up settling. As they felt largely unrepresented by existing Muslim groups, they decided to set up MAB whose ideology is loosely based on the teachings of the Muslim Brotherhood (Bowen 2012). It is an affiliate of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) which would have been the obvious

candidate for rallying Muslims to the anti-war cause as the most visible and representative national umbrella organisation. However, its role as primary interlocutor with the Labour government at the time put it in an awkward situation and immense pressure was applied to make the MCB toe the official line on the bombing of Afghanistan. Despite officially opposing the war, the MCB 'withdrew its support for the first anti-war march to placate the government, even though a number of its affiliates were involved, but, fearful of being outflanked, it publicly endorsed subsequent demonstrations' (Birt 2005: 96). The damage had already been done and organisations such as the MAB were well placed to exploit what was seen as a massive political misjudgement by the MCB by the majority of British Muslims. When the StWC was first formed, the MAB were invited to join as a member of the coalition but they declined. Yet they did take part on an individual basis in their demonstrations including the one mentioned above in November 2001 during Ramadan.

Throughout 2002 the anti-war movement grew as it became increasingly apparent that an invasion of Iraq was likely. The leadership of the StWC began to look for an organisation that could mobilise even larger numbers of Muslims on a nationwide scale for their protest marches. The MAB had organised a successful demonstration in April 2002 against the Israeli military operation in the Jenin refugee camp. Anas al-Tikriti, who was at the time their director of media and public relations, admits that the response to their call for a demonstration was overwhelming. When asked by the Metropolitan Police how many people they expected, he said 5000. The actual number turned out to be more than 20 times that amount.[13] The event attracted media interest and also that of the steering committee of the StWC who asked the MAB if they would become a partner and help to organise subsequent anti-war marches. Before responding to this invitation, the leaders of the MAB organised a meeting with those of Just Peace to ask for their opinion and information on those involved with the coalition. The response was positive and the MAB's young leadership was

convinced that it was the right thing to do. This moment represented a passing of the baton as the MAB became the main organisation charged with mobilising Muslims. Just Peace activists were more than happy to allow this to happen as they had limited resources and felt that they had done as much as they could.[14] They considered that their initial objective to get Muslims to join the movement had been achieved and they continued to work with the StWC until the invasion of Iraq took place in March 2003.

The first joint demonstration organised by the StWC and the MAB took place on 28th September 2002 just before the start of the Labour Party Conference. There was some conflict around the framing of this action with the MAB insisting that Palestine needed to be the focus while the StWC preferred slogans to be solely against an attack on Iraq:

> The demonstration's slogan conveyed this pragmatic compromise, 'No war in Iraq, justice for Palestine.' Unable to agree completely on priorities, MAB decided that its leaflets would have 'Freedome for Palestine' above 'Stop the war in Iraq', while StWC's leaflets put the slogans in the opposite order. MAB had also wanted to call the joint demonstration the 'One million march' but accepted the StWC's objection to this, that a turnout of less than a million would have been humiliating (Phillips 2008: 104).

In the end, the estimated turn out was half a million people making it by far the largest demonstration to date. It ended with a rally in London's Hyde Park with speeches from leading figures in the movement including the late Tony Benn. The scale of this protest gave the StWC huge momentum and encouraged other organisations to get involved such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). Just over one month later, the European Social Forum (ESF) was held in Florence and a call was made to the citizens of Europe to 'start organising enormous anti-war demonstrations in every capital on February 15th' followed by a large protest held in the Tuscan city on 9th November 2002 (Verhulst 2010). Preparations were then started for the worldwide demonstration of 15th February 2003, of which the StWC in the UK played a leading role. The demonstration that took place in London was officially co-organised by the StWC, the CND and the MAB which now had a platform that was

beyond its leaders wildest dreams. The fact that MAB spokesmen like Anas al-Tikriti and Azzam Tamimi were invited to address the sea of people in Hyde Park that day demonstrates the important role that they played in the organisation of this record breaking demonstration. The initial role of Just Peace was not forgotten as Shahedah Vawda was also given an opportunity to stand 'on the windswept stage to address a crowd so large she could not even see where it ended' (Brown 2003). She also took part in a televised debate with Tony Blair on 10th March along with other women who were opposed to the war.[15]

The difficulties of collective action

In the 'official' accounts of the anti-war movement produced by its leaders (Murray and German 2005, Nineham 2013), the participation of Muslims is recounted as unproblematic and almost natural. However, this glosses over a certain reticence that was apparent both within certain sections of the anti-war movement and internally amongst British Muslims themselves. When Just Peace began their efforts to bring Muslims into the anti-war movement they faced some resistance. Some felt it was wrong to be associating too closely with non-Muslims and by doing so 'you were taking up *their* cause rather than *ours*, which some saw as *haram*.'[16] This was a line that was being propagated by activists involved with groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir but there was also suspicion among those with less radical sympathies. For example, the MAB leadership had to work hard to persuade its members that 'collaboration with non-Muslim anti-war activists was halal (religiously permissible)' (Phillips 2008: 103). Part of the problem was that the StWC was known to be led by personalities associated with the radical left, in particular the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). This was part of the reason that the MAB refused to join the actual coalition, as it was known

to be 'led by the Left' (Phillips 2008: 104) which was problematic for some. According to those in MAB, the Muslim community needed to identify with something that it could trust: 'I couldn't bring out 200,000 Muslims to rally under the banner of trade unions, leftist, socialist or communist organisations.'[17]

This kind of mistrust was also present within some of the leftist groups that were part of StWC. There were anti-clerical factions which see religious organisations, particularly those with a more conservative bent such as the MAB, as reactionary and contrary to the aspirations of the working class. An example of such a group is the Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL) which openly opposed the alliance with the MAB given that it was 'a right-wing organisation.'[18] Such opposition was quickly silenced by the leadership of the StWC, and its press officer Mike Marqusee claimed that 'those people who questioned the link with MAB were castigated as Islamophobes' (Gillan et al 2008: 75). Such tactics are hardly surprising when we consider that some of the key figures in the StWC were also on the SWP's Central Committee, including the likes of Lindsey German, Chris Nineham and John Rees.[19] As a group that practices 'democratic centralism', a system of decision making in the revolutionary Marxist tradition, they were often criticised for promoting a veneer of equal participation, whilst effectively taking many key decisions behind closed doors. Shahed Saleem recounts that as an officer of the StWC he would attend their meetings where 'it seemed like the conversations that took place were a continuation of previous discussions they [SWP members] had been having. By having me there they could claim that they were being democratic but I didn't have that much input.'[20]

The involvement of MAB was initially opposed by some members of the CND and they were also 'seen as too conservative by other Muslim groups' (Gillan *et al* 2008: 67). Some regretted the fact that in order to work with the Muslim community, the StWC had 'decided to work with Islamists' and that they did not make any efforts to 'engage with the

many secular groups that exist within the Muslim community' (Phillips 2008: 107). Similarly, journalistic accounts of the inherent ideological contradictions within the anti-war movement focus on the role of MAB and its links to the Muslim Brotherhood (Cohen 2007). These critiques do however overlook the fact that the coalition's main goal was to rally as many as people as possible to its demonstrations rather than construct a coherent political project. They also conflate the participation of thousands of British Muslims in the demonstrations, most of whom would have no particular organisational affiliation, and the organisation which was tasked with mobilising them. The MAB leadership noted that most of those who volunteered to help them to organise the protests were not members of their organisation.[21] Its membership doubled as a result of its involvement in the anti-war movement but by the end of 2005 those who led this initiative lost control of the organisation and were later forced to set up a new group called the British Muslim Initiative (Phillips 2008).

Conclusion

The activists who were interviewed for this research were unanimous that participation in the anti-war movement led to a new found confidence within the Muslim community, particularly amongst those who were born and raised in Britain. 'What is noticeable about the post-September 11 response was the willingness of younger Muslims to form expedient alliances of dissent outside of their community, which was certainly not true of the Rushdie affair in 1989 or the Gulf War of 1991' (Birt 2005: 102). The idea of working and campaigning alongside people from other walks of life is no longer alien and Shahed Saleem was proud to play a part in 'leading Muslims out of the cold and away from blinkered

thinking.'[22] The mistakes of the Rushdie affair were avoided as the second generation 'learned modes of protest' (Heath *et al* 2013: 191) and adapted their methods of dissent to be more in tune with British political culture. It has been remarked that 'a new generation of skilled and media-savvy Muslims activists has emerged who regularly engage with journalists, policy makers, academics and activists from other faiths, in a self-conscious attempt to redress perceived biases in media coverage' (Bolognani and Statham 2013: 246). The generational shift that the anti-war movement promoted could only have positive effects for the perception of Muslims by the wider British public. Indeed, the overwhelmingly calm and sensible reaction to the London bombings of 2005, just two years after the huge anti-war march, impressed many and seemed to demonstrate the tolerance of wider society. This was also interpreted as a result of Muslims becoming more visible in the public sphere and increased interaction between them and other citizens. Shahedah Vawda thought that it was 'amazing how ordinary British people have tried to learn more about Islam and make an effort to show that they are not against all Muslims.'[23]

Despite the efforts to halt the war eventually being in vain, this mobilisation did propel a number of individuals to the forefront of what one might now term 'Muslim civil society'. A prominent example is Salma Yaqoob who founded 'Respect: The Unity Coalition' in early 2004. This political party would go on to play a leading role in getting Muslims involved in electoral politics and achieved some notable election victories (Peace 2013). Yaqoob served as a Respect local councillor in Birmingham from 2006-2011 and narrowly missed out on becoming a Westminster MP in 2005 and 2010. Although she has now left the party, she is still a prominent figure in British public debates. Anas Al-tikriti, the driving force behind the involvement of the MAB in the StWC, was also briefly involved in Respect. He stood as one of their candidates in the 2004 European elections but then left to found the British Muslim Initiative and then the Cordoba Foundation. The path of Dr

Ghayasuddin Siddiqui is symbolic of the changes in Muslim Civil Society since the Rushdie affair. In 1989 he was part of the British Muslim delegation in Iran that had asked Mohammad Khatami to act on Rushdie, which led to the notorious fatwa pronounced by Ayatollah Khomeini. He is now a trustee of British Muslims for Secular Democracy (BMSD) and campaigns against forced marriage, domestic violence and murder in the name of honour. The Muslim Institute, which he helped to form back in 1973, and at one time acted as a front for the Iranian Embassy in London, was re-founded in 2010 and now has a more progressive outlook publishing the quarterly magazine *Critical Muslim*. His son Asim Siddiqui was one of the founders of the City Circle which continues to provide Muslim professionals with 'a safe space for communities to self-critically discuss and debate issues that have concerned them.'[24] Just as the Rushdie affair led to the creation of a series of new Muslim organisations, the anti-war movement has provided the basis for the development of groups with more of a focus on wider society. For example, ENGAGE works towards enhancing the active engagement of British Muslim communities in national life, particularly in the fields of politics and the media and MADE in Europe is a movement of young people who want to see the Muslim community lead the fight against global poverty and injustice.[25] This trend of new Muslim Civil Society groups is likely to continue and they owe a debt of gratitude to those activists who became involved in the anti-war movement who demonstrated that Muslim activism could be about more than strictly religious issues.

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[1] Interview with Anas al-Tikriti

[2] Interview with Asad Rehman.

[3] Interview with Anas al-Tikriti

[4] For information on the founding of the StWC see Murray and German (2005) and Gillan *et al* (2008).

[5] 'We love each other: Shahed Saleem & Shahedah Vawda', *The Guardian*, 15 March 2003. http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2003/mar/15/weekend.craigtaylor

[6] Interview with Shahed Saleem.

[7] Shahed Saleem quoted in Murray and German (2005: 59).

[8] Interview with Shahedah Vawda

[9] Interview with Shahed Saleem.

[10] Interview with Shahedah Vawda

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Interview with Anas al-Tikriti

[14] Interview with Shahed Saleem.

[15] 'Prime Minister - the final countdown' was a studio debate chaired by the newsreader Sir Trevor McDonald, part of which can be viewed here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MUW5OOQvv-U

[16] Interview with Shahed Saleem.

[17] Interview with Anas al-Tikriti

[18] Interview with Sacha Ismail

[19] It should be noted that all these activists have since left the SWP.

[20] Interview with Shahed Saleem.

[21] Interview with Anas al-Tikriti

[22] Interview with Shahed Saleem.

[23] Interview with Shahedah Vawda

[24] 'About us' http://www.thecitycircle.com/about-us

[25] See their respective websites http://iengage.uk.net/about-us/ and https://www.madeineurope.org.uk/about