



Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate Crime:  
a London Case Study

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**EUROPEAN MUSLIM RESEARCH CENTRE**

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## About the Authors

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Jonathan Githens-Mazer and Robert Lambert became research partners in October 2007. Since then and prior to this current project they have conducted numerous interviews with Muslim Londoners, especially those with family backgrounds in North Africa. This earlier research project sought to understand how myths, memories and symbols of the past affected contemporary forms of political activism – literally how stories that grandparents tell grandchildren about the colonial past make a difference to worldviews and the politics of the ‘street’. What began as a project to chart how these stories created a basis for violence, through radicalisation, rapidly became a study that examined how colonial and contemporary political repression reverberated through European North African communities today. It became apparent that these communities chafed at the popular use of terms such as ‘radicalisation’, believing that they unfairly stigmatised Muslims who feel an obligation to become politically active in the present to prevent what they perceive as the horrors of the past recurring today.

These research observations suggested that the popular and pejorative notions of politically active Muslim Londoners as subversive and sectarian threats did not match the reality on the ground. Instead, according to our research, the small number of Muslim Londoners who in the last decade could be accurately described as threats to the well being of the city – perhaps Abu Hamza a former Khatib at the North London Central Mosque is the most well known figure in this category – had been effectively challenged by the very same Muslim Londoners who

had most often been wrongly conflated with them. The authors rapidly concluded that this was not only grossly unfair, but also liable to be tangibly counter-productive in terms of London’s security and the enhancement of community cohesion. For this reason they have argued that the UK government’s strategy to prevent violent extremism has at times been undermined by advisors, most notably the Quilliam Foundation, who target mainstream London-based Muslim organisations as subversive threats when the evidence suggests they are often credible and effective opponents of violent extremism (Githens-Mazer and Lambert, 2009a,b,c and d).

Both authors have personal experience of the power and effectiveness of cross-cultural alliances against bigotry, in one case in support of disadvantaged and alienated black citizens in Baltimore and the other in support of disadvantaged and alienated Muslim citizens in London. It is not surprising therefore that their partnership should be characterised by a notion of empowering marginalised and disadvantaged communities. This report represents the beginning of a research project that is planned to investigate the adverse community impact of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crime across Europe over a ten year period. The authors are determined to influence government, media, police, public servants and public attitudes and thereby contribute to solutions to the problem before it escalates further. In doing so they will maintain a daily presence in London, their research hub, in support of which the University of Exeter Streatham campus provides an ideal location for supportive reflection and analysis.

# About the European Muslim Research Centre (EMRC)

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**Our core value is that a growing European Muslim population makes significant and valuable contributions to the safety, prosperity and cohesion of European communities and countries and to the well being of Europe as a whole.**

We reject, as fundamentally flawed, the position currently held by too many commentators: that European Muslims, Islam and strict adherence to Islam poses a threat to the safety, cohesion and well being of communities and countries in Europe. The research undertaken and sponsored by the EMRC builds upon this value – seeking to highlight and constructively engage with communities, practitioners and policy makers where these contributions seem especially relevant and valuable to the development of 21st century Europe. This means that research conducted by the EMRC is ‘action’ oriented – seeking not only to make methodologically rigorous academic contributions to understandings of the roles that Muslim communities play in European society, but also engaging with practitioners, policy makers and the public to translate this work into practice. The EMRC research agenda is posited on the belief that overly negative or non-constructive analyses of the contribution of Muslim communities to European society, if left unchallenged, may create the conditions necessary by which these pernicious ideas become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

We therefore aim to share with European citizens a far more optimistic, and we would argue, far better informed analysis of the roles played by their Muslim neighbours. We will do so by contributing research findings that are based on in-depth engagement with Muslims themselves, so that Muslim voices can be heard on their own terms, not relegated or obscured by outside and top-down commentators. We will therefore be joining a small but important body of academics who have been working tirelessly to the same end for a number of years. We acknowledge their influence and have every intention of building partnerships with them and of highlighting the results of research projects they have undertaken.

However, in addition, we have an original contribution to make. EMRC’s core guiding principles derive from the findings of close engagement with Muslim communities in the UK’s capital city over a long period and to a lesser extent with Muslim communities in other UK and European towns and cities. In contemporary London we assess that the overwhelming majority of Muslims who interpret Islam as directing and informing their public political behaviour as well as their personal

and private behaviour do so to the benefit of the city and their fellow Londoners. These benefits, in our experience, extend across many fields of civic conduct but most especially in regard to security and social cohesion, in London and beyond. We therefore admit to being ‘London-centric’ and although this is a valuable perspective it is one we aim to expand in the future, not least by working with key partners in other UK and European towns and cities.

EMRC shares Muslim communities’ concern with political agendas that view Muslims principally through lenses of ‘security’ or ‘cohesion’ – agendas which, unchecked, can serve to stigmatise, alienate and isolate inhabitants of European countries who happen to be Muslim. EMRC is particularly concerned about the use of the ‘war on terror’ and counter-insurgency paradigms, as well as blasé attitudes towards the use of torture and the infringement of civil liberties which are blunt and counter-productive tools for tackling terrorist threats. Moreover, EMRC does not accept that Islamically inspired political thought or politics pose inherent threats to the West. In our experience radical Muslim leaders have often played valuable and undervalued roles in support of the values shared by fellow citizens of different faiths and no faith. Just as radical Christians interpret the New Testament as providing a positive framework for their public, political activity so too do many contemporary Muslims regard Islam as a basis for positive political engagement with national and local political institutions. Nor do we suggest that all Muslims should feel this way about their religion – merely that there be space for those who do to be politically active.

For these reasons and more, we launch our first research report in January 2010: *Islamophobia and Anti Muslim Hate Crime: a London case study*; an introductory report that highlights the issues we will present and analyse in a ten year research project involving towns and cities across Europe. A more detailed analysis of our London data alongside an analysis of data from other UK towns and cities will be included in our next report *Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate Crime in the UK* which will be published in July 2010. Whereas our first report is concerned with highlighting the problem of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crime, our follow-up report will contain detailed proposals to facilitate long term solutions.

Both in this research project and our other ventures we intend to produce rigorous qualitative research that reflects the realities of day to day life for Muslims in Europe. The overwhelming

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majority of European Muslims live in underprivileged urban areas of towns and cities and that is where our research focus lies. Over the next ten years we aim to illuminate those lives and to address the political issues that surround them. By selecting a case study of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crime in London for our first report we do not suggest that these are the only serious problems facing European Muslims nor that London faces an especially acute problem. Rather we assess that Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crime, like the terrorist threat that often motivates it, has a devastating and disproportionate adverse impact on communities and community cohesion and is often wrongly diagnosed. London, we assess, is an appropriate starting point for our research because Londoners have a long history of experiencing and confronting bigotry and hate crimes and because it has become an important hub of analysis of the problem.

The content and the methodology chosen for the report illustrate our central purpose: to produce high quality, long-term, empirical research on the experience of Muslims in European towns and cities. We have chosen the topic of Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate Crime because it has become a serious problem in many European towns and cities. In our assessment Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crime require the same kind of urgent and thorough attention that policy makers, public servants and researchers have afforded to the problems of racism, anti-Semitism and homophobia in recent years. Our starting point is London but we aim to compare and contrast experience here with experience in key towns and cities across Europe in the months and years ahead.

**Jonathan Githens-Mazer and Robert Lambert**  
**Co-directors, European Muslim Research Centre**

For further details contact the European Muslim Research Centre at: [www.exeter.ac.uk/emrc](http://www.exeter.ac.uk/emrc)

## Dedication

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**This report is dedicated to Yasir Abdelmouttalib, a talented and committed PhD student, whose prospects of an exciting and productive academic career were cut short when he was brutally attacked and seriously injured by a gang of youths while on his way to Friday jumma prayer at the London Central Mosque in June 2004. During the assault he was struck several times on the head with a road sweeper's broom. As a result Yasir was in a coma for three months and his doctors feared he would not recover consciousness. Mercifully, he did but as a result of brain injuries he has remained partially paralysed, partially blind, largely housebound, frequently bed-ridden, and reliant on constant nursing care provided by his family. Nevertheless, the commitment he showed before he was attacked still shines through the disabilities he has been forced to endure and he has made a small but significant recovery.**

We are therefore honoured to be working closely with Yasir and his family to establish ways in which we can help him recommence his academic studies and ensure that his legacy is a positive one, which serves to reduce the risk of other young Londoners becoming victims of anti-Muslim hate crime.

We also dedicate this report to known and unknown Londoners who have been attacked and abused during the last decade because their assailants thought, rightly or wrongly, that they were Muslims. Clearly, most times, the assailants were right. Moreover, if in 2001 anti-Muslim hate crime was sometimes misdirected towards Sikhs and Hindus, by 2009 that kind of error on the part of attackers had generally been remedied by them. Evidence in this report suggests that gangs and individuals had by the end of the decade become reasonably competent in identifying their intended Muslim targets.

Whereas in the past Londoners became accustomed to attacks on vulnerable victims that their assailants described as 'Paki bashing' or 'queer bashing', it is now clear that 'Muslim bashing' has become an anti-social and dangerous London street phenomenon in its own right. Policy makers, police, public servants generally and academics owe it to Muslim victims and their families to analyse and respond to the threat effectively. That would be a task Yasir Abdelmouttalib could help guide and inform.

## Foreword

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**Over the centuries many ethnic and religious groups have become the subject of hatred and vilification because they in some way threatened British identity. At various times Germans, Roman Catholics, Jews and West Indians have all fallen into this category.**

Today this unenviable outcast role is occupied by British Muslims. There are special rules of discourse when it comes to Muslims. It is permissible to fabricate malicious falsehoods and therefore foment hatred against Muslims in a way which would be regarded as immoral and illegal if perpetrated against any other vulnerable section of society.

One of the achievements of Jonathan Githens-Mazer and Robert Lambert's very powerful study is to expose the shocking consequences of this inhumane culture of contempt. One of them is violence. The constant assault on Muslims from certain politicians, and above all in the mainstream media, has created an atmosphere where hate crimes, ranging from casual abuse to arson and even murder, are bound to occur and are even in a sense encouraged by mainstream society.

These ugly rules of public discourse are also a gift to far right political parties and in particular the BNP, which increasingly singles out Britain's Muslim community for special attack.

These violent attacks will only grow worse, and the anti-Islamic rhetoric will intensify, unless wider society takes action – and at present many decent people are not even aware of the problem. So this study, and indeed the creation of the European Muslim Research Centre, answers an urgent need to expose the lies, falsehoods and abuse which has become such a natural part of public discourse.

More than that, the authors have opened up a public debate about the actions that all of us – politicians, police, media and all decent citizens – urgently need to join if we are to halt this inhumane and dangerous contempt for British Muslims.

**Peter Osborne**

*Political Commentator, Co-Author of 'Muslims under Siege: Alienating Vulnerable Communities' and 'It Shouldn't happen to a Muslim', Dispatches, Channel 4*

## Preface

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**Be under no illusion, we are at war. And it is a war we are losing badly...  
I am so sick and tired of hearing nationalists talk of killing Muslims, of  
blowing up mosques, of fighting back... the time has come to stop the  
talk and start to act...**

Martin Gilleard, violent extremist nationalist, convicted of manufacturing nail bombs in 2008  
[Hasan, 2009]

The perils of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crime threaten to undermine basic human rights, fundamental aspects of citizenship and co-existing partnerships for Muslims and non-Muslims alike in contemporary Europe. Routine portrayals of Islam as a religion of hatred, violence and inherent intolerance have become key planks for the emergence of extremist nationalist, anti-immigration politics in Europe – planks which seek to exploit populist fears and which have the potential to lead to Muslim disempowerment in Europe. Sections of the media have created a situation where the one serves to heighten the unfounded claims and anxieties of the other – such that politicians from Austria to Britain, and the Netherlands to Spain, feel comfortable using terms like “Tsunamis of Muslim immigration”, and accuse Islam of being a fundamental threat to a “European way of life”. While in many cases, the traction of this populist approach reflects an ignorance of Islamic faith, practice and belief, there are many think-tanks which are currently engaged in promoting erroneous depictions of Islam and Muslim political beliefs through unsubstantiated and academically baseless studies, and a reliance on techniques such as ‘junk-polling’.

Prior to researching Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crime in London, we worked with Muslim Londoners to research the contested notion that is widely termed by academics and policy makers as “violent radicalisation” (Githens-Mazer, 2010, Lambert 2010). To a large extent it was that prior research experience that persuaded us to embark on this new project. That is to say, we discerned an important link between the two areas of work which we should explain at the outset. Since 9/11 Muslim Londoners, no less than Muslims in towns and cities across Europe, have often been unfairly stigmatised as subversive threats to state security and social cohesion, sometimes characterised as a fifth column (Cox and Marks 2006, Gove 2006, Mayer and Frampton 2009). We do not suggest that this stigmatisation did not exist before 9/11, still less do we argue that it revolves solely around the issues of security and social cohesion, but we do claim that the response to 9/11 – ‘the war on terror’ – and much of the rhetoric that has surrounded it has played a significant part in increasing the public perception of European Muslims as potential enemies rather than potential partners and neighbours.

From our perspectives and experience, both academic and practitioner, the rise of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crime is morally abhorrent and needs to be countered. Muslim communities in the UK and Europe have important contributions to make to the local communities and broader societies in which they live. Yet to date, these communities, and Islam more broadly, are often the subject of misunderstanding and vilification. Whereas Islamic legal and political traditions have, at key points, inspired and informed Western political and intellectual traditions, and Muslims in Europe have historically made, and especially today continue to make, important contributions at every level of British and European society, portrayals of their religion and identity still often seem to focus on terrorism, intolerance, and issues such as the veil. While such portrayals are unjust and empirically untrue, they still appear to academically, politically and popularly inform perceptions of Islam in Britain and Europe. This insidious phenomenon runs the very real risk of driving deep divisions through European societies, and of alienating friends, neighbours and political partners.

*Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate Crime: a London case study* represents an initial and introductory first report for the newly formed European Muslim Research Centre (EMRC). Initial and introductory because this is a long-term ongoing project, and what follows here is only the tip of the iceberg. We are particularly pleased to be presenting the report at the London Muslim Centre (LMC) in Whitechapel on 28 January 2010. In important respects both the venue and location are symbolic. At the end of the nineteenth century and again in the twentieth century Whitechapel has been at the hub of resistance to anti-Semitic and anti-racist violence (Catterall, 1994; Malek 2006). Most famously in the 1930s in opposition to Oswald Mosley’s fascist Blackshirts (Dorril, 2007), and again in the 1970s and 1980s in opposition to the National Front (NF), Londoners united in Whitechapel to defeat the sectarian street violence that invariably accompanies fascist, neo-Nazi politics (Hann and Tilsey 2003). After analysing our research findings we anticipate that Londoners will once again need to unite in Whitechapel against a violent, sectarian threat during the next decade. *Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate Crime: a London case study* is therefore our first contribution to what we anticipate will again be a successful,

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long-term grass roots campaign against the politics of hate. The extremist nationalist politics that once targeted Jews and Asians in East London is now unambiguously aimed at Muslims (BNP 2006, 2009).

Suffice to say Whitechapel is now home to many poor Muslim families in the way that it once was home to poor Jewish families. LMC is at the hub of numerous good citizenship initiatives in Whitechapel and surrounding areas and serves local Muslims and other local citizens well (Jameson 2009, Green and Silver 2009). The LMC itself binds together different sections of London Muslim communities, and stands as a key site of social, cultural and political organisation – an Islamically inspired form of political organisation which is occasionally portrayed as a threat by key commentators and policy makers. Not only does our research challenge this kind of analysis of Islamically inspired political organisation, it suggests that Muslim Londoners and their neighbours and allies will need to overcome mainstream as well as extremist bigotry before they can claim any kind of success. This is why we have set aside the next ten years to monitor and facilitate progress.

For us, the method to counter Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crime is clear: education. By creating an unimpeachable body of academic work, and by creating mechanisms to empower Muslim communities to put forward their positions – now and in the future, we hope to help dispel the ignorance that has thus far fuelled the populist appeal of Islamophobia and the hate crimes it spawns, and challenge those individuals and organisations that seek to pursue agendas that demonise and alienate European Muslims. At its most basic, the European Muslim Research Centre (EMRC) will seek to engage these kinds of falsehoods, and seek to explore, teach and examine the nuances of Muslim contributions in the European context. As an interdisciplinary centre, such a focus will mean contributing to debates about the role of Muslims and Islam from the perspectives of politics, history, law, business studies/economics, sociology, anthropology, literature, English, cultural studies, theology and the sciences. In this way, we hope to take academically sound research and introduce it as a corrective to the current debates over the role of Muslims in contemporary European society.

Finally, we have contributed in recent years to what has become a dense and over-populated field of study: radicalisation, counter-radicalisation and de-radicalisation. Nearly 100% of this cross-disciplinary study is focused on Muslims and it has the tendency, both intentionally and unwittingly, to problematise Muslims and their faith. It is our hope that this report will encourage scholars to return to a wider view of the problem of political violence – one in which the ‘radicalisation’ of convicted members of a violent extremist nationalist milieu such as ex-British soldier Terence Gavan receive as much detailed scholarly attention as convicted British Muslims who lacked Gavan’s sophisticated bomb making skills.

**Jonathan Githens-Mazer and Robert Lambert**  
**European Muslim Research Centre January 2010**



# Acknowledgements

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**This report is the product of a team effort in which Naima Bouteldja, Musa Danquah, Raja Khan and Ruhul Tarafder have been star players. We have also benefitted enormously from guidance from our advisory board: Anas Altikriti, Mohamed Abdul Bari, Rachel Briggs, John Esposito, Andy Hull, Oliver McTernan, Basheer Nafi and Tim Niblock. The team will inevitably grow as we undertake research in other parts of the UK and then in towns and cities across Europe. However, we are confident that we have assembled a core group of expertise that will provide direction, momentum and quality reporting throughout this new decade.**

Several fellow academics have helped and inspired us, none more so than Basia Spalek, Salwa el Awa and Laura McDonald at the University of Birmingham, and we look forward to developing our collaboration with their new Communities, Securities and Justice grouping. We have also benefitted from collaboration with Mary Hickman's Suspect Communities project at London Metropolitan University. Similarly Matthew Goodwin, Stuart Croft, Gwen Griffith-Dickson, Tariq Ramadan, Paddy Hillyard, Marie Breen-Smyth, Richard Jackson and Jeroen Gunning have been inspirational and influential.

Since the Runnymede Trust first published *Islamophobia: A Challenge For Us All* in 1997, a number of academics and activists in the UK have illuminated what has become a complex and contested topic and without their pioneering work we would not have been equipped to undertake this project. In this category we should mention the invaluable contributions made by Tahir Abbas, Chris Allen, Saied Reza Ameli, Humayan Ansari, Mohammed Aziz, Yahya Birt, Tufyul Choudhury, Liz Fekete, Arun Kundnani, Tariq Modood, Nasar Meer, Tehseen Noorani, Elizabeth Poole and Pnina Werbner.

We have also been informed and instructed by the work of numerous London based community projects concerning Islamophobia, including work by the Muslim Safety Forum (MSF), Forum against Islamophobia and Racism (FAIR), Islamophobia Watch, Engage, Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC), Muslim Public Affairs Committee (MPAC) UK, the Federation of Islamic Student Societies (FOSIS), and the Muslim Council of Britain and its many affiliates.

Less well known but equally valuable has been the work of individual police officers in the Metropolitan and City of London Police. Most notably and providing tangible benefits to this project has been the experience and expertise of Chief Inspector Tim Parsons, Head of Diversity Policing in the City of London Police.

Several London journalists have also become valuable sources of information on the topic, most notably Peter Osborne, Vikram Dodd, Seumas Milne and Madelaine Bunting. As always, Carl

Arrindell, Director of Programming at Islam Channel, has been especially helpful.

We also wish to thank the trustees of Islam Expo and the Cordoba Foundation who have provided the funding to launch the European Muslim Research Centre (EMRC) and enabled us to carry out the research for this report. Other groups and individuals have expressed the same interest in funding this research project as it develops throughout the UK and Europe and we welcome their generosity. Not least during an economic recession it behoves academic institutions to look beyond conventional sources of funding to facilitate important and original research. British Muslim businesses are looking to emulate British Jewish businesses that have supported research and monitoring projects concerning anti-Semitic hate crimes. Readers who may also be potential EMRC fundraisers or benefactors or have friends who might be should contact us.

There is a natural tendency when dealing with a corrosive social problem like urban hate crime to overlook the positive impact ordinary decent citizens have when they treat their neighbours with dignity and respect. Therefore, at the outset, we should pay tribute to the overwhelming majority of Londoners who have at important times defended their neighbours from vilification and attack from a minority of Londoners who have been influenced by the politics of hate. Sometimes good citizenship of this kind has involved sacrifice and bravery yet on most occasions it occurs unremarked in daily encounters where common courtesies are extended to members of minority communities who are otherwise subjected to abuse. We include individual Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) officers and staff in this tribute because we have compelling evidence of so much outstanding work they have done to help victims of hate crime achieve justice and recovery. This acknowledgement of outstanding police work is important because it has inevitably often been overshadowed by a small number of notable failings. However, outstanding commitment from individual police officers alone will not remedy a problem that requires the same kind of impetus John Grieve brought to bear on the problem of racist hate crime in London. Brave leadership and partnership of the kind provided and epitomised by Doreen Lawrence and John Grieve will be required during the next decade.

Most importantly we wish to thank the victims of hate-crimes and their friends and associates who have taken part in interviews and discussions for this report. Their experience is what matters and any merit in the report is due to it. Any mistakes in the report are entirely our own and if readers bring them to our attention we will look to remedy them in future reports on the same topic.

**Jonathan Githens-Mazer and Robert Lambert**  
European Muslim Research Centre January 2010

# Abbreviations

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ACPO	Association of Chief Police Officers
ACPO TAM	ACPO Terrorist and Allied Matters Committee
ACSO	Assistant Commissioner Specialist Operations (MPS)
BMI	British Muslim Initiative
BNP	British National Party
CSC	Centre for Social Cohesion
CST	Community Security Trust
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
EDL	English Defence League
ELM	East London Mosque
GLA	Greater London Authority
HT	Hizb ut Tahrir (UK)
HMIC	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies
IAG	Independent Advisory Group (MPS)
ICC	Islamic Cultural Centre (London)
IFE	Islamic Forum Europe
IHRC	Islamic Human Rights Commission
IIPT	Institute of Islamic Political Thought (London)
IPCC	Independent Police Complaints Commission
LMC	London Muslim Centre
MAB	Muslim Association of Britain
MCB	Muslim Council of Britain
MCU	Muslim Contact Unit
MPA	Metropolitan Police Authority
MPAC UK	Muslim Public Affairs Committee UK
MPGB	Muslim Parliament of Great Britain
MI5	Security Service
MI6	Secret Intelligence Service
MPS	Metropolitan Police Service
MPSB	Metropolitan Police Special Branch
MSF	Muslim Safety Forum
MWH	Muslim Welfare House
NAMP	National Association of Muslim Police
NBPA	National Black Police Association
NCTT	National Community Tension Team
NF	National Front
NSY	New Scotland Yard
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
WTC	World Trade Centre
UAF	United Against Facism
UMO	Union of Muslim Organisations

# Executive Summary

In this report we introduce empirical evidence that demonstrates tangible links between Islamophobia or anti-Muslim bigotry in both (i) mainstream political and media discourse and (ii) extremist nationalist discourse and anti-Muslim hate crimes. That is to say the report provides *prima facie* and empirical evidence to demonstrate that assailants of Muslims are invariably motivated by a negative view of Muslims they have acquired from either mainstream or extremist nationalist reports or commentaries in the media. Moreover, the evidence is clear that the major motivating factor for violence against Muslims is a negative and false belief that Muslims pose a security or terrorist threat. The evidence arises from compelling and original primary data: interviews with victims, perpetrators and witnesses of hate crimes in London.

Muslim Londoners face a threat of violence and intimidation from three arenas. Firstly from a small violent extremist nationalist milieu that has broadly the same political analysis as the British National Party (BNP) and the English Defence League (EDL). BNP influence is significant but so is the influence of mainstream political commentators. Moreover, whereas the experienced London based *Searchlight* monitors of this same milieu focus on the BNP and the dirty water it swims in as racist and anti-Semitic, this report highlights new tendencies towards anti-Muslim bigotry that have hitherto been understated. Secondly from London gangs who have no allegiance with or affinity to the BNP or the violent extremist nationalist milieu that surrounds that party. Thirdly from ordinary Londoners and visitors to London who have become convinced and angry by negative portrayals of Muslims as terrorists and security threats.

The purpose of the report is to highlight the nature and extent of the problem to politicians, public servants, police, media and the public. It is an initial attempt at identifying what we feel are key issues for further investigation rather than the definitive work on Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crime in London, the UK or Europe. As such, it is only the first of what we hope will be many steps in ramping up academic capacity to understand European Muslim communities' experiences in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Our next report in July 2010 *Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate Crime in the UK* will continue along this line, presenting more detailed evidence and making detailed recommendations. For now, politicians, public servants and journalists may wish to reflect on the initial evidence from London which points in places to their own witting and unwitting roles in fostering the Islamophobic climate that gangs and individuals use to justify their attacks on Muslim Londoners. Our research findings are presented

thematically for ease of reference. They are also intended to have a cumulative impact and a clear purpose in terms of policy recommendations. In doing so we hope to reverse a trend that gained momentum in the last decade: the stigmatisation of Muslims as a threat to security.

Just as researchers of racist, anti-Semitic or homophobic attacks in London have never sought to rule out the possibility that a black, Asian, Jewish or gay Londoner might conceivably be attacked in the street for reasons wholly unconnected with his or her ethnicity or lifestyle, neither do we seek to argue that every single assault on a Muslim Londoner is motivated by anti-Muslim bigotry. However, our findings do strongly suggest that politicians and public servants, especially police, should begin to develop policies to ensure attacks on Muslim Londoners are treated with exactly the same seriousness and urgency as all other hate crimes in the capital. To achieve that goal it will be necessary to create a clear category of hate crime: anti-Muslim hate crime (which we think is more accurate) or Islamophobic hate crime.

The following is a summary of the report's main findings:

## ***Nature and scale of anti-Muslim hate crimes in London***

- In the last year alone Muslim Londoners have suffered serious anti-Muslim attacks which include murder, serious assaults and arson.
- Less serious assaults, abuse and intimidation of Muslims, occur on a regular basis in the capital.
- The overwhelming majority of anti-Muslim hate crimes consist of spitting and threatening or abusive words and behaviour.
- The majority of anti-Muslim hate crimes are not reported to police either because of a lack of confidence in the police or because victims are unaware of a police interest.
- Significant non-reporting of anti-Muslim hate crimes by victims makes it difficult to assess or quantify the scale of the problem.
- Despite the severity of the problem the overwhelming majority of Londoners display courtesy and respect to their neighbours irrespective of religion or race.
- Anti-Muslim hate crimes are confined to the margins but have increased dramatically during the last decade and have a debilitating impact on victims, families, friends and neighbours.
- Since 9/11 Anti-Muslim hate crimes appear to have become more prevalent than racist hate crimes where black and Asian Londoners are the victims.
- Anti-Muslim hate crimes have not been afforded the same priority attention government and police have invested in racist hate crimes.

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### *Motivation of anti-Muslim hate crimes*

- Islamophobic, negative and unwarranted portrayals of Muslim London as *Londonistan* and Muslim Londoners as terrorists, terrorist sympathisers and subversives in sections of the media appear to provide the motivation for a significant number of anti-Muslim hate crimes.
- In a number of cases perpetrators of anti-Muslim hate crimes appear to be motivated to attack their Muslim victims because they associate their victim with Osama bin Laden.
- Members of a violent extremist nationalist milieu are additionally motivated by the politics of the BNP, EDL and other groups in their arena.
- Members of London street gangs are additionally motivated by local animosities with 'Muslim' gangs and a perceived threat to their lifestyle from local convert Muslims.

### *Location and timing of anti-Muslim hate crimes*

- One manifestation of a pejorative and ill-founded association of Muslims with terrorism is the increased prevalence of anti-Muslim hate crimes in the immediate aftermath of terrorist incidents.
- Muslims are generally at less risk of attack when they are in areas of high Muslim population and close to their homes.
- Many anti-Muslim hate crimes occur late in the evening when assailants have been drinking or are drunk.

### *Identity, description and behaviour of anti-Muslim assailants*

- Some gangs and individuals in London who previously engaged in racist hate crimes have now re-focused their criminal attention on Muslim targets.
- Some gangs and individuals in London who have not previously engaged in attacks on racial or other minority communities are now targeting Muslim victims.
- There are two main kinds of attack: either by a gang or by an individual.
- Gangs may sometimes restrict their behaviour to threatening words and behaviour and this can often be extremely intimidating when, typically, a solitary Muslim passenger is being vilified as a terrorist by a gang in an underground train carriage.
- Assailants, whether gangs or individuals, invariably indicate their sentiments and motivation by an explanatory insult linking the victim to terrorism.

### *Identity and descriptions of Muslim victims*

- Anti-Muslim hate crimes are invariably random in nature and so individual victims are not targeted except to the extent that a victim may be briefly targeted when he or she is spotted in a public place.
- Muslim Londoners have family connections in all parts of the world and so victims can have varied and diverse ethnic appearances, just the same as their attackers.
- When a Muslim woman wearing a nicab or burka is attacked the assailant will not always be aware of the ethnic identity of his victim.
- High profile Muslim figures and Muslim organisations are regularly targeted with threatening and abusive hate mail and hate emails.
- Many Muslim Londoners with a distinctive Muslim appearance have been threatened or abused on numerous occasions.

### *Relationship between racist hate crimes and anti-Muslim hate crimes*

- Several perpetrators of anti-Muslim hate crimes have no association with racism and are solely focused on Muslims as targets for violence.
- Motivations for "Paki bashing" and other racist attacks have given way to motivations for attacks on Muslims.
- Whereas victims of racist attacks were invariably men, victims of anti Muslim attacks are often women.

### *Relationship between British National Party and anti-Muslim hate crimes*

- Perpetrators of anti-Muslim hate crimes often share the same political analysis as the British National Party (BNP).
- Although BNP hostility is directed against refugees and Muslims it is Muslims rather than refugees generally who are more often victims of hate crimes.
- A small number of BNP supporters have committed anti-Muslim hate crimes.
- BNP leadership legitimates anti-Muslim hate crimes in eyes of perpetrators.

### *Preliminary recommendations: police*

- Outstanding conduct of majority of Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) officers are undermined by poor behaviour of a small minority.

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- John Grieve's police leadership post Stephen Lawrence Inquiry needed to enhance Muslim community confidence in MPS.
  - MPS should engage with critics in Muslim community in same positive way it has done with minority ethnic communities post Stephen Lawrence Inquiry.
  - MPS should develop urgent anti-Muslim hate crime strategy with the Muslim Safety Forum (MSF).

***Preliminary recommendations: politicians***

- Bush and Blair legacy of 'with us or against us' war on terror still has adverse impact in terms of unwittingly promoting and licensing anti-Muslim hate crimes.
- Counter-terrorism strategy still wrongly conflates al-Qaida threat with other Islamist groups which in turn licences anti-Muslim hate crimes.
- Minority of mainstream politicians display Islamophobic attitudes that unwittingly license anti-Muslim hate crimes.
- Government should afford same recognition and status to anti-Muslim hate crimes as all other hate crimes.

***Preliminary recommendations: media***

- Sections of media unwittingly provide Islamophobic motivation for anti-Muslim hate crimes.
- Media should embrace and promote victims of anti-Muslim hate crimes in the same way as victims of other hate crimes.

## Research Methodology

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The purpose of this report is to introduce some key issues that will be addressed over a ten year period through an initial and preliminary analysis of data gathered in London. Research participants and interviewees have been chosen because of their expertise. For example, one of our interview team has been active in the anti-racist movement in London for two decades and is able to draw on that experience to approach and interview individuals known to have relevant experience. Similarly we have interviewed former members of London's violent extremist nationalist milieu – a milieu which encourages violent and aggressive behaviour by a small but diverse range of London citizens towards another small but diverse range of London citizens who are Muslims in the name of a narrow form of ultra-ethnic nationalism, defined by race, religion, language and ethnicity. These 'activists' have a long track record of experiences on the opposite side of the police cordon - so to speak - who can also shed original and important light on the topic. The most important interviews conducted for this report, however, have been interviews with victims of hate crimes and we have been indebted to Muslim organisations in London who have helped facilitate them.

Subsequent reports will deal with the same experiences and perspectives in other UK and European towns and cities as well, so as to be able to make comparisons in experiences and responses across Europe. In this introductory report we seek to identify and highlight the key issues emerging from the initial research interviews, meetings and discussions conducted in London between September 2009 and January 2010. To date we have collected data that amounts to over 150 hours of recorded or summarised interviews and discussions. That figure will increase in the months ahead and we will provide a more detailed analysis of the data in our next report (EMRC July 2010).

To introduce key elements of policing as part of our research in this arena Tim Parsons has kindly produced an informed and articulate overview and we have included it in this report as an appendix. In fact *Islamophobia: Islamophobic Hate Crime and the Challenge that Western Societies must rise to* extends well beyond a purely policing role and provides valuable insights for politicians, media and public throughout Europe. Parsons' use of the more familiar term 'Islamophobic hate crime' also serves to remind readers that our 'anti-Muslim hate crime' is merely a suggested alternative.

Parsons is a highly experienced and respected police officer who has served in recent years as Head of Diversity Policing in the City of London Police Service. While the report he has prepared for us is very much his personal view it is nevertheless imbued with the unrivalled experience he has of the topic. Parsons' report will also be especially helpful when we extend our research interest across Europe because he is one of the few practitioners to have compared issues between towns and cities in different parts of Europe. Last but not least Parsons' report benefits from the academic study he has undertaken in this field at Kings College. Due to retire from the police in 2010 and to commence an academic career we sincerely hope Parsons will have time to contribute to this research project as it develops throughout the decade.

Based on bottom-up, ethnographic, qualitative research our project is supported and to a large extent triangulated by reference to other research that is more survey oriented such as the Open Society Institute report *Muslims in Europe* (Open Society Institute, 2009), Gallup Coexist Index *A Global Study of Interfaith Relations* (Gallup Coexist, 2009), Gallup's *Who Speaks for Islam?: What a Billion Muslims Really Think* (Esposito and Mogahed, eds., 2008), the 1990 Trust's *Survey, Muslim Views: Foreign Policy and its Effects* (1990 Trust, 2006) and the Mayor of London's *Muslims in London* (Mayor of London, 2006). In addition we recommend readers assess our project in the light of recent rigorous qualitative research that focuses on discrimination in Europe from an ethnic rather than Muslim perspective namely *Ethnic Profiling in the European Union: Pervasive, Ineffective and Discriminatory* (Open Society Justice Initiative, 2009).

To gain the fullest possible understanding of the community impact of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crime we have asked those Muslim Londoners who have agreed to share their experiences and analyses with us to be long-term participants in the research project. This means that instead of merely providing an interview, our participants will utilise a range of research methods: interviews, audio diaries, focus groups and discussion forums.

Most crucially they have been encouraged to reflect at length on the significance of their experiences over a long period. Not only are we keen to gain a better understanding of the topic over the last two decades and throughout this new decade we are also



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excited by the prospect of enabling London Muslim voices to speak for themselves on the subject and thereby help their London neighbours to better understand the problems they face. In keeping with the overwhelming majority of Muslim Londoners most of the participants in our research project have ethnic origins that made them vulnerable to racist bigotry in the past. Consequently, some of them are able to compare the impact of being physically attacked or verbally abused as a 'paki' or a 'nigger' in the past with the impact of being physically attacked or verbally abused as a 'Muslim terrorist' in the present.

We are especially interested to probe the impact of the British National Party (BNP), the English Defence League (EDL) and a fringe violent extremist nationalist milieu on Muslim Londoners. For at least ten years the BNP has campaigned as an anti-Islam, anti-Muslim party. More recently the EDL has launched a single issue street protest against what it calls 'radical Islam'. Where do these ideas come from? How has the focus shifted from attacks on ethnic minorities to attacks on one single faith community? To help us unpack these questions we have asked former members of the BNP and other extremist nationalist groups like the National Front (NF) and Combat 18 to contribute their experience of London street politics to the study. Serving and retired Metropolitan Police and City of London Police officers have also provided practitioner insights to ensure that the study benefits from a wide range of street experience in the capital. This aspect of the research assumes particular significance with Nick Griffin, leader of the BNP, standing to become the BNP's first MP at the next general election in the London Borough of Barking – nine stops from Whitechapel on the District Line and an East London neighbour of Newham, Waltham Forest, Redbridge, Hackney and Tower Hamlets where most Muslim Londoners live (Mayor of London, 2006).

Gillespie highlights relevant dilemmas with participant research concerning judgments about the validity, veracity and status of research data (Gillespie, 2006). In particular Gillespie focuses on tensions between the subjectivity and objectivity of the researcher; intimacy and distance, i.e. 'how researchers handle the intimacy required to understand social lives and the distance required to stand back and analyse them'; 'relations of power between researchers and researched'; and 'wider questions about the politics and ethics of doing fieldwork and writing ethnography' (Gillespie, 2006: 913).

We are therefore involved in reflexivity and reflection, a research approach that has two basic characteristics: 'careful interpretation' where all 'references to empirical data are the results of interpretation' and 'reflection' which focuses attention

'inwards' towards 'the person of the researcher and 'the relevant research community' (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000). Central to a reflective approach, is a concern to explore and document Muslim Londoners' own experiences and perceptions thereby giving access to voices that have largely been overlooked by the welter of policy-driven terrorist and counter-terrorist discourse post 9/11 (Spalek and Lambert, 2008). In a post 9/11 world, Muslims are often viewed with suspicion by the media, politicians, security services and by agencies of the criminal justice system (Poyting and Mason, 2006). Moreover, particular minorities within the Muslim population, notably Salafis and Islamists, are often viewed as problem groups (Spalek and Lambert, 2008). By highlighting neglected and marginalised Muslim voices this project may help to forge new approaches within social science research, in the same way that a focus upon 'race', ethnicity, and indeed gender, previously carved out new pathways within research.

Wherever possible the researchers recorded interviews and/or made contemporaneous notes during interviews and participant observation but on many occasions this was not possible owing to the prevailing environment. As a rule in these circumstances, notes were written up within twenty-four hours and regularly checked and discussed with participants. Recorded interviews were transcribed by a Muslim Londoner with extensive knowledge of the development of local Muslim communities in the capital. Her knowledge of context and idiom enhanced the quality of the transcriptions. Following Kenney's method, the researchers double-checked the accuracy of transcripts by listening to the audio-tapes while reading the transcripts, stopping to ponder inaudible comments before sometimes discussing them with the transcriber or participants (Kenney, 2008: 143). As Kenney suggests this two-staged transcription work is time-consuming but 'essential to ensure the reliability and integrity of critical primary source data' (Kenney, 2008: 143). Again following Kenney in interview transcriptions respondents' 'false starts, filler syllables, pauses, run-ons, and verbal fragments' ('er', 'um', etc) are removed so as to make them easier to read, 'without changing the content of what was said during interviews' (Kenney, 2008: 144).

At particular points in certain interviews documents and videos are discussed. In these cases documentary analysis follows the same criteria applied to an analysis of participant observation and interviews – that is to say, the texts 'do not speak for themselves' but acquire significant meaning when situated within a context set by vigorous analytical and methodological assumptions' (Burnham *et al*, 2004: 188). Texts, like interviewee's recollections of events, are therefore located in a political,

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community, and chronological context in an effort to authenticate them. However, as Peter Burnham and his co-authors caution, 'the most serious challenge facing users of documentary sources concerns their response to questions of representativeness and meaning' (Burnham *et al.*, 2004: 187). Every effort has therefore been made to ensure that the documents and tapes consulted are 'representative of the totality of relevant documents' (Scott, 1990). As recommended by Scott, we sought to establish 'as much as possible about the conditions under which the text was produced and, on that basis, make sense of the author's situation and intentions' (Scott, 1990).

The researchers also follow Kenney's method by coding primary data after carefully re-reading transcripts and notes line-by-line, 'inductively coding the documents according to themes and concepts', both those they had already identified and those that emerged from the data (Scott, 1990). Although still at an early stage in the process by January 2010 the researchers had assembled an index containing twenty five categories and fifty

sub-categories arising from 'pre-established and newly emergent themes' in the primary data (Kenney, 2008). By July 2010 when we intend to publish our next report, the index will have expanded further and will enable us to publish a detailed analysis of the data. During this process the researchers listen repeatedly to audio recordings of Nick Griffin and other key figures alongside primary data so as to better comprehend similarities and differences. This helps the researchers to expand their written notes documenting reflections on the research themes and methodological issues, a process Kenney and other qualitative researchers refer to as 'memoing' (Kenney, 2008: 145). In consequence further amendments, improvements and connections between different themes gradually emerge so as to begin to convert them into what Kenney calls a 'coherent theoretical narrative' (Kenney, 145). That narrative extends from the specific themes that emerge in each interview through to a cumulative analysis. We aim to introduce that cumulative analysis in this report but to provide a fuller account of it in our next report in July 2010.



# Terminology

There are four terms we use consistently in the report that require a brief comment: Islamophobia; hate crime; anti-Muslim hate crime; and violent extremist nationalist milieu.

## Islamophobia

We fully appreciate the significance of both nuanced and reductive academic, policy, media and public debates about the meaning, application and deficiencies of the term 'Islamophobia'. Yahya Birt offers a particularly insightful overview of current academic perspectives concerning the term which we found extremely helpful (Birt, 2009). Birt is surely right when he anticipates the potential value of three new books due to be published on the topic later in 2010. There is every reason to expect that Chris Allen's *Islamophobia* to be published by Ashgate will prove to be a seminal text and confirm his position as one of the most experienced and respected scholars in the field. Like Birt we have been immensely impressed with Maleiha Malek's 2009 collection 'Anti-Muslim Prejudice in the West: Past and Present', published as a special issue of the academic journal *Patterns of Prejudice*. Non-academic readers will be pleased to learn that this outstanding collection will be published by Routledge this year as *Anti-Muslim Prejudice: Past and Present*. Birt himself is one of several important contributors to *Thinking Through Islamophobia* edited by S. Sayyid and Abdoolkarim Vakil, to be published this year (2010) by Hurst.

We will make our own contribution to this valuable discussion in our next research report in July 2010: *Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate Crime in the UK*. For now and for the purposes of this introductory report we would remind readers that the term Islamophobia was originally defined rather broadly and loosely in the Runnymede Trust's 1997 report *Islamophobia: A Challenge For Us All* as having eight components:

- 1) Islam is seen as a monolithic bloc, static and unresponsive to change;
- 2) Islam is seen as separate and 'other'. It does not have values in common with other cultures, is not affected by them and does not influence them;
- 3) Islam is seen as inferior to the West. It is seen as barbaric, irrational, primitive and sexist; 4) Islam is seen as violent, aggressive, threatening, supportive of terrorism and engaged in a 'clash of civilisations';
- 5) Islam is seen as a political ideology and is used for political or military advantage;
- 6) Criticisms made of the West by Islam are rejected out of hand;
- 7) Hostility towards Islam is used to justify discriminatory practices towards Muslims and exclusion of Muslims from mainstream society; and
- 8) Anti-Muslim hostility is seen as natural or normal.

We agree with 'al-Maktabi', quoted on the *Islamophobia Watch* website homepage, that 'the term Islamophobia does not adequately express the full range and depth of antipathy towards Islam and Muslims in the West today' (Islamophobia Watch, 2010). Al-Maktabi suggests that 'a more accurate expression would be 'anti-Islamic racism' [because] it combines the elements of dislike of a religion and active discrimination against the people belonging to that religion.' We have reservations about the term 'anti-Islamic racism' not least because it fails to acknowledge the prevalence of 'anti-Muslim prejudice' – Maleiha Malek's better term – where racism is sometimes absent. However, despite its shortcomings, Islamophobia is such a well known term that we have decided to use it.

## Hate crime

The term 'hate crime' has been embraced by police, policy makers and academics to describe violent crimes that are deemed to be aggravated when the victim has been targeted because of his or her ethnicity, race, lifestyle or religion. The term has gained wide usage in the UK since the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry and has become synonymous with this landmark case. Although we have adopted the term because it is so widely known, we are conscious that it often fails to adequately describe attacks by violent extremist nationalists on their victims. In many cases of this kind London policing has over a century of experience of monitoring and investigating extremist political street violence, often a more telling description that has fallen from wide usage.

Like Islamophobia, hate crime is a relatively new concept for academics, policy makers and practitioners to unpack and interpret. Here we are indebted to the clarity of conceptual thought brought to bear on the topic by Paul Iganski, Neil Chakraborti, Jon Garland and Nathan Hall. Not least because of its focus on hate crime in London Iganski's *Hate Crime in the City* (2008) has been especially instructive.

## Anti-Muslim hate crime

We use 'anti-Muslim hate crime' in preference to the more familiar term 'Islamophobic hate crime' simply because many attacks on Muslims appear to be motivated by a crude political belief that Muslims are a security threat rather than any fear or hatred of Islam *per se*. However, we accept that 'Islamophobic hate crime' is more widely used and generally adequate for its purpose.

## Violent extremist nationalist milieu

We think 'violent extremist nationalist milieu' properly describes a fringe political scene in London. However crude and violent it is important to note that it has long political antecedents in the capital. 'Far right extremism' is generally less accurate when describing the street politics involved.

# Research Findings

## I. Introduction

At the beginning of the new millennium John Grieve, an inspirational London police officer, signalled a new approach to tackling racist hate crime:

In Britain after Stephen Lawrence, every individual and institution has a responsibility to examine their behaviour, perception and prejudices. The defence of unwitting racism is closed. As a member of my Independent Advisory Group explained: 'Passive non-racism is no longer acceptable'. For the Met this is a time of profound change. We have made terrible mistakes and my determination is that, in working more closely than ever before with the communities we serve, we seek to build a police service ready to face the challenges of the new millennium – a millennium that is hostile to racists (Grieve and French, 2000).

Notwithstanding some notable and praiseworthy exceptions, post 9/11 politicians, public servants, police, think-tanks and journalists generally failed to recognise the extent to which unfair and unrepresentative portrayals of Muslims as terrorist and security threats fuelled Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crimes. As a result Grieve's new policing model was not so easily applied to Muslim Londoners as it was to minority ethnic Londoners generally during the same period (Lambert 2010). Londoners therefore owe it to the victims of anti-Muslim hate crimes to extend Grieve's pledge to them so that the new decade becomes hostile to anti-Muslim bigots.

Interviewees with long experience of extremist nationalist street violence in London are unequivocal in their assessment that Muslim Londoners are now a prime target for serious violence and intimidation in the way that Londoners from minority ethnic communities once were.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, interviewees with experience of London street gangs that have no connection or affinity with extremist nationalist politics are adamant that Muslims have become prime targets for serious attacks.<sup>2</sup> In addition well informed interviewees are clear that the main perpetrators of low level anti-Muslim hate crimes are not gangs but rather simply individuals from a wide range of backgrounds who feel licensed

to abuse, assault and intimidate Muslims in terms that mirror elements of mainstream media and political comment that became commonplace during the last decade.

Since the Runnymede Trust's seminal report *Islamophobia: A Challenge For Us All* was published in 1997, many small scale community initiatives have tried unsuccessfully to bring government, police, media and public awareness of hate crimes against Muslims to a tipping point that would result in the kind of pro-activity that followed the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry in respect of racist hate crimes and institutional racism in 1999 (Macpherson, 1999; see also Sharp, 2002 and Souhami, 2007). Both conceptually and practically, Islamophobia is a diverse and complex phenomena that will continue to benefit from the penetrating insights key scholars bring to it (see for example Allen 2010; Birt 2010; Malek 2010). However, to do justice to the victims of the City University attacks (see 2.4) we believe it is vital to introduce a clear conceptual sub-field to the study of Islamophobia that is understood on the same terms that assailants and their Muslim victims understand it. On London streets during the last decade the football derived chants "we hate Muslims, and we hate Muslims" and "Muslim terrorists off our streets" became familiar accompaniments to anti-Muslim hate crimes that were solely focused on Muslims. The attackers targeted Muslim victims because of a wrongly perceived link between being Muslim and being a terrorist. In this new decade, that phenomenon deserves to be identified, presented, investigated and prosecuted as anti-Muslim hate crime that is motivated by a popular Islamophobic account of Muslims as terrorists. That at least is our assessment of the evidence presented in this report.

During the course of our prior research into 'violent radicalisation' it became clear to us that some of the most effective Muslim Londoners in countering al-Qaida propaganda were also at greatest risk of being stigmatised as subversive threats (Lambert 2008a and 2008b). We heard countless stories of unheralded individuals who, though profoundly 'orthodox' in their religious orientation, or highly 'politicised' because of their Islamic faith, bravely stood up to individuals who were recruiting to, and engaging in terrorist activities despite threats to their personal safety. That these individuals, because of their politics or

<sup>1</sup> Interview references AMHC 30-33; 40-43.

<sup>2</sup> Interview references AMHC 25 – 27.

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religious practice were coming under scrutiny from those that disputed their commitment to integration or allegiance to the state seemed profoundly unfair, as well as being inherently counter-productive. In our experience terrorists who conspire to bomb Londoners are best defeated if Londoners with the ability to reduce their effectiveness are embraced as partners not alienated and excluded. There is of course an important caveat to this rule: if any Londoner – Muslim, Christian, Atheist, Jew, Buddhist, whoever – displays hatred towards other Londoners then partnership with public servants for a security or any other civic purpose should be withheld. That is a test usefully suggested by Dean Godson of Policy Exchange (Godson 2007a) but one we assess he has applied wrongly to several London based Muslim organisations. Co-incidentally, some of the same Muslim organisations Godson compares to the BNP have impressive track records of tackling Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crime.

Regrettably, our evidence suggests, again with laudable exceptions, that politicians, public servants, think-tanks and journalists who led an effective campaign throughout the last decade to rid London of the scourge of racist violence in the wake of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, have failed to extend that campaign to the benefit of Muslim Londoners. On the contrary, in some instances, committed anti-racist campaigners have refused to acknowledge that Muslims faced a distinguishable threat or a significant threat at all. This blind spot was most evident to our interviewees when they watched a television panel of Westminster's elite enthusiastically confront Nick Griffin, leader of the BNP, for being a racist and then hesitate when Griffin demonstrated instead his hatred for Muslims (BBC, 2009c).<sup>3</sup>

Whereas Jack Straw as Home Secretary sent the strongest possible signal to police to give urgent attention to racist hate crimes in the wake of Lord Macpherson's report in 1999, there was no suggestion in his televised panel debate with Nick Griffin in 2009 that he recognised, as Justice Secretary, the need to galvanise the same police support for victims of anti-Muslim hate crimes (BBC, 2009c). Instead, perversely, Straw's insistence on focusing on the BNP's racist credentials provides licence to a growing number of extremist nationalists who are only too

willing to prove their anti-racist credentials by targeting Muslims instead. Indeed, when groups like the English Defence League (EDL) are reliably informed that politically active Muslims are the same kind of fascist threat as the BNP then they have a licence for anti-fascist street violence.<sup>4</sup> As an interviewee with twenty years anti-fascist street activity in London explained:

We stood shoulder to shoulder against the Nazi scum in Welling [reference to a major anti-fascist demonstration intended to close the BNP bookshop in Welling on 16 October 1993]. 50,000 minimum. More like 100,000. Got violent, very violent! But it was solid. United. And every night action against the BNP. Try and get those numbers now, won't happen. Not if you say BNP is anti Muslim. Defend the Muslims. Won't work. ... Its been poisoned by a few Islamophobic voices in the movement. That's why what you hear from UAF [United Against Facism] is more anti-racist than anti-Islamophobic ...its why the BNP is more popular... they [BNP] get away with what they say about Muslims because it's what you can read in the papers.<sup>5</sup>

There are no quick fixes here. The negative impact of a decade of pejorative Islamophobic discourse in mainstream politics and the mainstream media will not be rolled back without a massive collective public effort in the new decade. We hope to make a significant academic contribution to empower and facilitate it.

<sup>3</sup> Interview references AMHC 01-09.

<sup>4</sup> Interview references AMHC 30, 40, 41.

<sup>5</sup> Interview reference AMHC 11.

# Research Findings

## 2. Serious anti-Muslim hate crimes

We have decided to deal with the issue of serious anti-Muslim hate crimes first not – mercifully – because they are more prevalent than less serious incidents but because they cause death and serious, permanent injuries to victims, major suffering to their families and fear and tensions in communities. To this extent, serious anti-Muslim hate crimes are no different to other serious hate crimes committed in the capital. However, whereas a huge investment has been made to support and reassure victims of serious racist hate crimes in the wake of Lord Macpherson’s finding of institutional racism against the MPS in 1999 nothing similar has been undertaken to support Muslim victims. On the contrary, interviews with past and present members of the MSF suggest that it has been extremely difficult to persuade police that Islamophobic or anti-Muslim hate crimes should be treated as a significant phenomenon in their own right and not merely as an adjunct to racist or religiously motivated hate crime.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Muslim youth workers we have interviewed are concerned that the support offered to other victims of serious hate crime is not always readily available to Muslim victims.<sup>7</sup> The main reason for this failure appears to be a refusal to accept that Muslims have become the prime target for serious hate crimes in the capital.<sup>8</sup>

It will therefore be helpful to illustrate key issues with reference to seven cases: Neil Lewington, a violent extremist nationalist convicted in July 2009 of a bomb plot (2.2); Terence Gavan, a violent extremist nationalist convicted in January 2010 of manufacturing nail bombs and other explosives, firearms and weapons (2.3); a gang attack in November 2009 on Muslim students at City University (2.4); a gang assault in June 2004 on PhD student Yasir Abdelmouttalib to whom this report is dedicated (2.5); the murder in September 2009 of Muslim pensioner, Ikram Syed ul-Haq (2.6); a serious assault in August 2007 on the Imam at London Central Mosque (2.7); and an arson attack in June 2009 on Greenwich Islamic Centre (2.8). For the purposes of this introductory report we will focus mainly on the City University attack but before examining these illustrative cases it will be helpful to recall lessons learned in the David Copeland case and the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, both in 1999, so as to begin to trace a shift in focus in the last decade from serious racist street violence to serious anti-Muslim street

violence (2.1). In this way we hope to make recommendations for urgent action by politicians, policy-makers, police and media. To set the scene we will quote a former member of the violent extremist nationalist milieu in London:

Well there you have it! [brandishing copy of *Daily Mail* 11 January 2010 report: Islam divides us say the majority of Britons (Doughty 2010)]. We don’t like Muslims its official! Hooray. Another fistful of money to researchers to tell us what we already knew. Islam not nice. Muslims pain in the arse. But the down side to it is the way A\*\*\*\*\* and company [violent extremist nationalists] will use it to justify hitting them or burning down their mosques. Or on the way to football [Chelsea] two women with all the clobber on [burkas] and up goes the chant! ‘We hate Muslims, and we Muslims, we are the Muslim haters!’ That’s not too bad. But one of them said something and then it got silly. Old Bill [police] stepped in. Its getting nastier too. Some of those EDL – every bit as evil as B\*\*\*\*\* and C\*\*\*\*\* [Combat 18 veterans].<sup>9</sup>

### 2.1. Significance of David Copeland case and Stephen Lawrence Inquiry

Londoners know from recent experience that one individual acting entirely on his own can cause significant harm and suffering to minority communities. In 1999 David Copeland, ‘the nail bomber’, single-handedly launched an effective terrorist campaign against black, Asian and gay Londoners. Copeland was inspired to carry out bomb attacks in Brixton, Whitechapel and Soho by fringe, extremist nationalist politics in London (Hopkins and Hall 2000). Immediately prior to his arrest MPS resources were stretched to the limit in an effort to detect him and to protect and reassure minority communities in London (BBC, 2000). According to MPSB detectives who monitored the violent nationalist milieu that spawned Copeland he was entirely typical in the way he personalised the propaganda of extremist nationalist politics.<sup>10</sup> In the words of one former detective:

[Copeland’s] reasons for carrying out the attacks were exactly what he read and heard from that [extremist nationalist] scene. You know, whites were under threat from blacks, Asians, gays. Threats to their way of life,

<sup>6</sup> Interview references AMHC 01-09.

<sup>7</sup> Interview references AMHC 11-13.

<sup>8</sup> Interview references AMHC 07, 08, 12.

<sup>9</sup> Interview reference AMHC 31.

<sup>10</sup> Interview reference AMHC 40.

their culture, livelihoods..... I saw many cases where the same reasons or motives were given for assaults in the street. Copeland went further but it was the same justification.<sup>11</sup>

A former member of the violent, extremist nationalist scene adds insight and context:

Copeland did what most of them [violent extremist nationalists] wanted to do. He was right to act on his own so he didn't have to worry about being grassed.... and he had the f\*\*\*\*\* skill to make bombs that went off. That was something different.... Lots of them [violent extremist nationalists] talked about doing the same but mainly all they did was talk and hit people in the street. When he [Copeland] started in Brixton [first bomb attack] and Brick Lane [second bomb attack failed] they were convinced they would know who was doing it but really he [Copeland] was hardly known [in violent extremist nationalist circles].<sup>12</sup>

At the conclusion of an accurate, in-depth television documentary *The Nailbomber*, the final word is given to Gerry Gable, editor of *Searchlight*, an established, investigative anti-fascist journal:

I think you have to look at a young man like Copeland and think here's a young guy who's done terrible damage to our society. He's killed. He's done terrible damage to himself and his family as well. Who at what point is responsible for all of this? Who wrote those terrible ideas up in that boy's mind? And I think you just go and see who produces this hate material and you know (BBC 2000).

In our interviews both police and activist interviewees noted that the same violent extremist nationalist milieu that spawned Copeland was now – ten years later – almost exclusively fixated with Muslims as targets for attack. Similarly, they suggested, a series of cases in 2009 where violent extremist nationalists were suspected of planning bomb attacks (Dodd, 2009; Leppard 2009) were now likely to be aimed exclusively at Muslim targets.<sup>13</sup> Other interviewees with the same expert experience

concurred that any future bombing campaigns of the kind adopted by Copeland were likely now to be aimed at Muslim targets and not at black, Asian or gay targets as in the Copeland case.<sup>14</sup> Asked to explain why the target had changed respondents were unanimous: Copeland was motivated by the extremist nationalist propaganda of his day when blacks, Asians and gays were singled out for vilification whereas throughout the last decade those minorities were replaced as targets for vilification by Muslims.<sup>15</sup> The switch from demonising and attacking ethnic groups to one particular religious group – Muslims – follows the lead set by the BNP after the Bradford riots in July 2001. What is worse now, according to a former activist who shared Copeland's political views in the 1990s, is the fact that 'the thugs in EDL think they can kick shit out of Muslims and the whole f\*\*\*\*\* public will be cheering them on.' 'Look at them on the f\*\*\*\*\* rampage in Luton<sup>16</sup> [reference to an EDL video showing their search for Muslim targets in Luton after a demonstration in Summer 2009], they look like Millwall let loose in the Shed [reference to extreme violence in London football hooliganism scene].'<sup>17</sup>

Practitioner interviewees are acutely aware that the small number of individuals involved in the violent extremist nationalist milieu in and around London, is no bigger today than in Copeland's day.<sup>18</sup> It is precisely for that reason that the real risk of another attack in the style of Copeland should not be overstated but equally cannot be discounted – especially because Copeland is understood to have been hugely successful in that milieu.<sup>19</sup> However, as we will see demonstrated, the threat of serious violence to Muslim Londoners does not just come from the milieu that spawned Copeland. Significantly, serious violence against Muslim Londoners is now being inflicted by gangs and individuals who do not have even the remotest connection to extremist nationalist politics.

As well as the Nailbomber attacks many Londoners also remember 1999 as the year that a police investigation of a fatal random racist attack on Stephen Lawrence was subject to authoritative disapprobation for being institutionally racist itself (Macpherson 1999). The extent to which mainstream politicians and media have supported the victim's parents' quest for retrospective justice is highlighted by an ongoing campaign by the *Daily Mail* (Pendlebury and Wright 2010). This level of support

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Interview reference AMHC 30.

<sup>13</sup> Interview references AMRC 31-33, 40-44.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Luton is thirty miles outside our purview in this report. That said, a significant number of Luton residents commute to London every day and so like several towns in Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Essex, Kent, Surrey and Berkshire with fast train links to London it is effectively a London suburb. In any event, we will be focusing on significant events in Luton and other UK towns and cities in our next report in July 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Interview reference AMHC 41.

<sup>18</sup> Interview references AMHC 30-33.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

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has been reflected in unprecedented resources being made available to the police to help ensure no minority ethnic London parents ever endure the same fate as Doreen and Neville Lawrence (Sharp 2002; Souhami 2006). Financial resources have been matched by outstanding organisational leadership, initially from a highly respected detective, John Grieve (Lambert 2010).

Interviewees are concerned that the remedies that have been made in policing as a result of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry in respect of investigations of racist hate crimes are not yet sufficiently embedded in police culture and procedures so as to benefit victims of anti-Muslim hate crimes in the same way.<sup>20</sup> Given that Muslim Londoners are now at greater risk of serious or fatal injuries from extremist nationalist violence than black, Asian, Jewish or gay Londoners, interviewees express concern that political constraints appear to inhibit police from reassuring Muslim Londoners as effectively as they have other minority communities since Lord Macpherson's report in 1999.<sup>21</sup> The nature of these political constraints is explored more fully later in the chapter but for now it suffices to note that Muslim Londoners have reason to be concerned about the risk of serious attacks and the efforts that are being made to reduce it.

Available evidence from cases reported in 2009 suggests that attempts to carry out bomb attacks of the kind made infamous by Copeland, are more likely to be carried out by groups and individuals inspired, as Copeland was, by violent, extremist nationalist politics (Dodd, 2009; Leppard 2009). MSF interviewees confirm Dodd's report in the Guardian:

Scotland Yard's counter-terrorism command fears that right-wing extremists will stage a deadly terrorist attack in Britain to try to stoke racial tensions, the Guardian has learned. Senior officers say it will be a 'spectacular' that is designed to kill. The counter-terrorism unit has redeployed officers to increase its monitoring of the extreme right's potential to stage attacks. Commander Shaun Sawyer told a meeting of British Muslims concerned about the danger to their communities that police were responding to the growing threat. Sawyer

said of the far right: 'I fear that they will have a spectacular... they will carry out an attack that will lead to a loss of life or injury to a community somewhere. They're not choosy about which community.' He said the aim would be to cause a 'breakdown in community cohesion' (Dodd, 2009).<sup>22</sup>

According to a former MSF member this analysis by police is still wrongly focused on 'racial tensions' rather than Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crime.<sup>23</sup> 'To say they [right wing extremists] are not choosy about which community they attack', he argued, 'flies in the face of ten years BNP and far right campaigning against Islam and Muslims... to say nothing of media pundits like Richard Littlejohn.'<sup>24</sup> Dodd's report also captures MSF concerns about the influence of the BNP:

The meeting at which Sawyer spoke was staged by the Muslim Safety Forum, whose chair, Abdurahman Jafar, said: "Muslims are the first line of victims in the extreme right's campaign of hate and division and they make no secret about that. Statistics show a strong correlation between the rise of racist and Islamophobic hate crime and the ascendancy of the BNP (Dodd, 2009).

Expert interviewees caution that there is an important difference between 1999 and 2009: mainstream political and media coverage. Copeland, they suggest, knew that he was motivated by a political vision that was increasingly unfashionable and that both his views and actions would be universally condemned by mainstream politicians and the media in the way that they were.<sup>25</sup> That is to say, not just condemnation for his actions but also for the political analysis that inspired them.<sup>26</sup> In contrast, they suggest, there is a climate of hostility to Muslims in sections of mainstream politics and the media in 2009 that would allow an attacker in Copeland's mould to believe that although his methods might be condemned his motivation would strike a popular chord.<sup>27</sup> 'This is a vital difference', an experienced analyst of extremist nationalist politics in London suggests, 'the strategists who write the propaganda for these groups realise that they are merely echoing and sometimes amplifying a political analysis that can be read every day in the *Express* and *The Sun*'.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Interview references AMRC 01 – 03, 41, 42.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Interview references AMRC 01 – 04.

<sup>23</sup> Interview reference AMHC 10.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Interview references AMRC 30-32, 41-43.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Interview reference AMRC 31.



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Members of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry who watched the covert video recordings of racist thugs suspected of killing Stephen Lawrence will recall the extent to which the suspects felt they were licensed to attack black and Asian Londoners for unsophisticated political reasons that were strongly linked to the nationalist politics of the NF and the BNP (Macpherson, 1999): Neil Acourt, now 34, was understood to be the gang's leader and in the video he talks about 'chopping up' black Londoners or 'niggers' (Macpherson, 1999). After Lawrence's murder Acourt was convicted of a racist attack on a black policeman and, separately, of possessing an offensive weapon. To a large extent Acourt was the product of the world he grew up in and explains why the BNP opened their bookshop in nearby Welling. It was also the world former NF and BNP activist Matthew Collins knew well:

The [BNP] shop had a big effect on Bexleyheath and the surrounding areas. That area of south London was known as the Deep South and the atmosphere contributed to the Stephen Lawrence murder (Taylor, 2008).

There is a quantum leap from the BNP bookshop to Lawrence's murder but it is one that many academics and commentators have endorsed in the last decade. Our interviewees agree that Collins' published recollections appear to be authentic for the main part<sup>29</sup> and germane to this report. Interviewees also accept that the threat of serious racist violence to minority ethnic Londoners has not disappeared but they do insist that there has been a real shift in focus to target Muslims instead. However, that shift in focus by violent and non-violent extremist nationalists does not appear to account for the motivation in each of the serious cases we will discuss next.

Whereas Acourt and his accomplices personify the popular image of 'casual' white racist South Londoners the assailants of London Muslim victims in five of our case studies are substantially different. Indeed, it is not fanciful to suggest that some of the assailants of London Muslims in these and other current cases would have been minority ethnic targets for Acourt and his associates in an earlier but still recent era of London street violence. As such these same cases enable us to examine links between serious racist violence and serious anti-Muslim

violence. Overall we have chosen cases that highlight the diverse range of groups, gangs and individuals that currently pose threats of death or serious harm to Muslim targets. The individuals in the first two cases might reasonably be described as direct descendents of David Copeland.

## **2.2. Neil Lewington: extremist nationalist convicted of a bomb plot**

In July 2009 Neil Lewington was convicted of terrorism and explosives offences:

Neil Lewington, 44, an unemployed electrician whose heroes were the nail bomber David Copeland and the Oklahoma bomber Timothy McVeigh, was told by a judge that he faced a long prison sentence (O'Neil, 2009).

Lewington had not been on any terrorist intelligence radar but instead was arrested by chance:

Lewington, from Tilehurst, Berkshire, was arrested in October after causing a disturbance on a train travelling to Lowestoft, Suffolk. His holdall was found to contain components for two incendiary devices, including digital clocks, batteries, wiring, firelighters and ignition mechanisms. There were also tools to complete assembly of the firebombs. In his wallet were notes headed "device 1" and "device 2" with lists marked: "date", "place", "target", "weather", "device used: solid fuel incendiary", "delay" and "detonated?" (O'Neil, 2009).

A police search of Lewington's bedroom revealed the following items:

Chemical mixtures labelled "igniter", weed killer, firelighters, fuses, pyrotechnic boosters and books entitled *Homemade Ammo: How to Make It*, *How to Reload It*, *How to Cache It* and *The Do-It-Yourself Gunpowder Cookbook*. There were tennis balls with diagrams of how they might be turned into shrapnel bombs. Police also found a notebook labelled "Waffen SS UK Members' Handbook" in which were writings and

<sup>29</sup> Interviewees do suggest that Collins' account of BNP supporters attacking elderly Asian women in 1989 is untypical; fights with anti fascist activists and attacks on Asian youths were far more commonplace; AMRC 41.

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diagrams under the headings “picking target areas”, “transporting devices”, “targeting/attacking parts” and “counter-surveillance” (O’Neil, 2009).

Neil Lewington drew inspiration from David Copeland’s successful bombing campaign in London (O’Neil, 2009). Like Copeland he lived a short distance from London and like his hero he is included in this report because there is a real possibility that if he had not been arrested he would have carried out bomb attacks in the capital. We do not seek to link him evidentially to an attack on London merely to highlight the fact that London is generally a prime target for violent extremist nationalists and other terrorist bombers as it was for Copeland. However, we accept that he posed a wider threat to community safety throughout the UK, as Deputy Assistant Commissioner John McDowall, head of the Met’s Counter-Terrorism Command, made clear:

While our inquiries did not uncover any details about intended targets, we do not underestimate the impact that Lewington’s actions and extremist beliefs may have had on communities nationwide (O’Neil, 2009).

We found it instructive to discuss Lewington’s case with interviewees with both first-hand experience of the violent extremist nationalist milieu in and around London and with former police officers who have monitored the threat throughout their careers. In both cases they recognised important similarities between Lewington and Copeland. As one former police officer explains:<sup>30</sup>

Both capable of working on their own, both heavily into the business of making devices, you know, the skill involved, hours of patient work, not something most people have got patience for... Both seriously ill adjusted socially but find the extremist politics makes them more important. Walking round with their secret.<sup>31</sup>

Clearly, like Copeland, Lewington posed a threat to more than one minority ethnic community, and we do not seek to suggest that Muslim targets would have featured more prominently on

his target list than others. However, our expert interviewees do suggest that in 2009 he would have been far more likely to specifically target Muslims than Copeland was ten years earlier.<sup>32</sup> In this sense Muslim Londoners may be said to face a double risk: a threat of attack from apolitical street gangs and individuals unconnected to violent extremist nationalist politics (see examples below) and an entirely separate threat from individuals like Lewington with a racist pedigree who would include Muslims as part of their target group or who might prioritise Muslim targets in the same way that non-violent extremist politicians like Nick Griffin do.<sup>33</sup>

Current and former MSF members we interviewed reported widespread frustration amongst Muslims that Lewington’s case received precious little media attention – especially when compared with Muslims suspected or convicted of terrorism offences.<sup>34</sup> They acknowledged that the problem was highlighted extremely well in a *New Statesman* article written by Muslim journalist Mehdi Hasan. ‘Imagine, for a moment,’ Hasan begins, ‘that Neil Lewington, who is on trial at the Old Bailey for preparing for a “campaign of terrorism” ...was a British Muslim’ (Hasan, 2009). ‘The story’ he suggests, ‘would be splashed across the front page of every newspaper in Britain, and Sky News would be rolling a loop of images of his scowling, bearded, dark face’:

The reality, however, is that you’ve probably never heard of Lewington (who denies all eight charges of terrorism) because he is not Muslim, or black, or of Asian origin. He is white. And our gloriously impartial, truth-seeking, “colour-blind” media don’t seem to care. The coverage of the Lewington trial has been negligible – a few short stories buried deep inside a handful of newspapers, but, as I write, no rolling coverage on Sky News, and not a peep on the main BBC news bulletins or on *Newsnight*. (Hasan, 2009)

Hasan quoted a ‘veteran home affairs correspondent’ who had asked his editors why the Lewington trial wasn’t being covered. “They didn’t want to hear about it,” he said. “They just weren’t interested. It’s outrageous.” Hasan’s article goes on to draw

<sup>30</sup> Interview references AMHC 30-34, 40-43.

<sup>31</sup> Interview reference AMHC 43.

<sup>32</sup> Interview references AMHC 30-34, 40-43.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Interview references AMHC 1 - 9.



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attention to a series of similar convictions that attracted minimal media interest: Robert Cottage, a former BNP candidate jailed in July 2007 for possessing explosive chemicals in his home – ‘described by police at the time of his arrest as the largest amount of chemical explosive of its type ever found in this country’; Martyn Gilleard, a Nazi sympathiser ‘jailed in June 2008 after police found nail bombs, bullets, swords, axes and knives in his flat, as well as a note in which he had written, “I am so sick and tired of hearing nationalists talk of killing Muslims, of blowing up mosques, of fighting back... the time has come to stop the talk and start to act;” Nathan Worrell, a ‘neo-Nazi, described by police as a “dangerous individual”, who hoarded bomb-making materials in his home, and was found guilty in December 2008 of possessing material for terrorist purposes and for racially aggravated harassment’; Neil MacGregor, who pleaded guilty to ‘threatening to blow up Glasgow Central Mosque and behead a Muslim every week until every mosque in Scotland was closed’ (Hasan, 2009).

Current and former MSF members we interviewed also drew attention to this final point from Hasan’s important article, ‘Robert Cottage was charged under the Explosive Substances Act 1883, not the panoply of modern anti-terror laws now at the disposal of the police and the Crown Prosecution Service’ (Hasan, 2009). ‘We want to see the police take terrorism against Muslims as seriously as terrorism by Muslims’ one said.<sup>35</sup> After Lewington’s conviction the MSF explained to police that there were widespread Muslim community concerns that the threat of terrorism specifically aimed at Muslim or minority ethnic communities may have been neglected and under-resourced.<sup>36</sup>

Hasan also makes an important point about the European context which we will develop when we begin our studies across European towns and cities later in the year:

Figures compiled by Europol, the European police agency, suggest that the threat of Islamist terrorism is minimal compared with “ethno-nationalist” and “separatist” terrorism – terrorism committed by white people, in other words. According to Europol, in 2006, one out of 498 documented terrorist attacks across Europe could be classed as “Islamist”; in 2007, the figure rose to just four out of 583 – that’s less than 1 per cent of the total. By contrast, 517 attacks across the continent

were claimed by or attributed to nationalist or separatist terrorist groups, such as ETA in Spain (Hasan, 2009).

Finally, we should draw particular attention to a response from a veteran of the violent extremist nationalist milieu when we showed him Hasan’s article.<sup>37</sup> He was struck by Martyn Gilleard’s reported comment “I am so sick and tired of hearing nationalists talk of killing Muslims, of blowing up mosques, of fighting back... the time has come to stop the talk and start to act”.<sup>38</sup> ‘How many times have we heard that?’ he asked rhetorically. ‘F\*\*\*\*\* always the same. Bollocks to the meetings. Lets f\*\*\*\*\* do something, egh?’<sup>39</sup> Equally experienced police officers concurred that frustration with extremist nationalist political meetings – ‘especially with the BNP wanting to be so legit’ [legitimate]’ was often a precursor to street or terrorist violence (as it often was in other arenas of political violence).<sup>40</sup> It would appear that Simon Darby, a BNP spokesman is making the same calculation if not the same point when commenting on the conviction of former BNP member Terence Gavin, the case we will examine next:

If people are going to build up large arsenals then they will get stiff sentences. It’s the inevitable consequence of enforced multiculturalism. You are going to get more and more incidents like this. It sounds like this was a lucky escape (Roberts, 2010).

Interestingly, Darby can be construed as making exactly the same kind of veiled threat that Omar Bakri Mohammed and Anjem Choudary, apologists for an al-Qaida terrorist threat to London, have made several times during the last decade (Lambert 2010).

### **2.3. Terence Gavan: extremist nationalist convicted of manufacturing nail bombs**

On 15 January 2010 Terence Gavan, a former BNP member and soldier, was convicted of manufacturing nail bombs and a staggering array of explosives, firearms and weapons. It was, Mr Justice Calvert-Smith said, the largest find of its kind in the UK in modern history (BBC 2010). The fact that Copeland used nail bombs to deadly effect (see 2.1. above) makes this an especially disturbing case. Gavan had previously pleaded guilty to 22 charges at Woolwich Crown Court:

<sup>35</sup> Interview reference AMHC 4.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Interview reference AMHC 32.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Interview references AMHC 40-43.

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Police discovered 12 firearms and 54 improvised explosive devices, which included nail bombs and a booby-trapped cigarette packet, at the home Gavan shared with his mother. He told detectives he had “a fascination with things that go bang”, the Old Bailey heard. After the case, head of the North East Counter Terrorism Unit Det Ch Supt David Buxton said Gavan posed a significant risk to public safety. “Gavan was an extremely dangerous and unpredictable individual,” he said. “The sheer volume of home-made firearms and grenades found in his bedroom exposed his obsession with weapons and explosives....“Gavan used his extensive knowledge to manufacture and accumulate devices capable of causing significant injury or harm” (BBC, 2010).

Unlike Lewington, Gavan is reported as having specifically Muslim targets in mind, in particular he is reported to have planned to ‘target an address he had seen on a television programme that he believed was linked to the 7 July bomb attacks in London’ (Guardian, 2010). In one hand written note he explained, ‘the patriot must always be ready to defend his country against enemies and their governments’ (Guardian, 2010). Again, like Lewington, he would have posed a threat to Muslim communities throughout the UK, especially those areas like Bradford and East London most popularly associated with large Muslim populations. However, for one of our interviewees with experience of this violent extremist nationalist milieu Gavan’s view of himself as a ‘patriot’ ready to ‘defend his country’ against its ‘enemies’ is familiar.<sup>41</sup> ‘He’s an ex-squadie, of course he wants to defend his country, especially when his mates are fighting Muslims all the time,’ he said speculatively yet based on experience.<sup>42</sup>

Given the proximity of Gavan’s conviction to the publication of this report we will defer making further observations on the case until we report on the same topic nationally in July 2010. Suffice to note at the time of writing that Gavan was receiving far less media attention as a threat to UK social cohesion and security than Anjem Choudary: a fringe, extremist publicity seeker Gavan would surely have regarded as a prime target to attack in defence of ‘his country’ had he still been at liberty to use his carefully crafted bombs.

<sup>41</sup> Interview reference AMHC 33.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Interview references AMHC 30-34, 40-43.

Our expert interviewees are convinced that Gavan, Lewington, Cottage, Gilleard, Worrall and MacGregor will be joined by many more colleagues from the violent extremist nationalist milieu as convicted bombers and bomb makers during the course of the new decade.<sup>43</sup> To date good fortune and good police work has prevented that threat resulting in death, injury, and intimidation in the way David Copeland demonstrated was possible. Those planning future attacks will therefore take heart from Copeland’s example and the fact that they share a negative view of Muslims, their prime targets, with many in the mainstream.

The same interviewees are also convinced that this new decade will see individuals from the violent extremist nationalist milieu carrying out serious assaults on Muslim Londoners (both targeted and random), without recourse to bombs.<sup>44</sup> Thus just as Stephen Lawrence was stabbed to death at a London bus stop in 1993 because he was black, so now in 2010 Muslim Londoners face an increased risk of the same kind of attack by the same kind of attackers.

We turn next to gangs who have no connection to or affinity with the violent extremist nationalist milieu yet have one thing in common – they carry out serious assaults on Muslims.

### 2.4. Gang attack on Muslim students at City University

We have decided to give this case extended attention in this report so as to highlight key concerns that have emerged throughout our research in the capital to date. Our decision is also based on the quality and clarity of a compelling account provided to us by a leading member of the Muslim student community at City University. In our next report in July 2010 we will update our report on this case and also extend our coverage of other serious anti-Muslim hate crimes in London and elsewhere in the UK.

On Thursday, 5 November 2009, three Muslim students were stabbed in an attack by a multi ethnic gang in a street near City University in the London Borough of Islington.<sup>45</sup> These serious assaults were the culmination of a sustained campaign of violent intimidation by the same gang against Muslim students at City University that started on Monday, 2 November.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Interview reference AMHC 16.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

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The focus of this campaign of violent intimidation were two Muslim prayer rooms (male and female) which are situated in the basement of City University's Gloucester Building in Whiskin Street, a short walk from the main campus building in Northampton Square. The gang appeared to be aware of the regular presence of Muslim students at this venue and laid siege to it. On Monday 2 November the gang attacked Muslim students as they left the Gloucester Building after prayers shouting "get those Muslims". Three students required hospital treatment for facial and head injuries after the gang attacked them with bricks and other projectiles. Although representatives of the City University Islamic Society reported the incident to the University and police immediately they did not receive pro-active support until after the second attacks on Thursday 5 November.

Between 2 and 5 November the Muslim prayer rooms at City University became the focus of attack for a local gang.<sup>47</sup> All the available evidence clearly indicates that the motivation for the gang's violent actions was hatred towards Muslims in general, who they regarded as terrorists or supporters of terrorism; not towards any individual Muslim students who they did not know.<sup>48</sup> Clearly, according to English criminal law, even if their victims had been convicted or suspected of terrorism, such facts would not have afforded the gang any basis for defence. Instead, their victims' sustained injuries and hurt that was inflicted on a totally false premise. Thus, one of the key features of this kind of attack is that victims are wrongly targeted as having some specific or general association with terrorists such as the London tube bombers.

Although especially serious in its outcome, this attack is typical of many that are now taking place in the capital. For that reason it will be helpful to recount the events in some detail. Our interviewee is a Muslim student at City University who was closely involved in organising a defence to the violent gang threat during the period 2 to 5 November and beyond.

First we asked him to describe the events on Monday 2 November. Here he describes how a local gang first attacked a Muslim student in the street outside the Gloucester Building:

They came from different council estates, but there was maybe a group of ten of them? Fifteen of them? ...they were on their bikes, there was a mixture of black and white youths, with the majority being black. X\*\*\*\*\*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

[Muslim student] was on his way to the building, got attacked; punched repeatedly in the face, his nose was bleeding. And he came into the...[building] because you have to swipe your card to get into the building...he managed to get away from them and swipe his card. Got in, and they couldn't follow him. And they started shouting things: 'We'll get you when you come out'. Things like that. 'You terrorist...paki...' All this stuff. And once he was in the building, he was kind of subdued. He was very nervous, scared to leave. ....There's a little corridor in the prayer room, and he was just sat there with his head bowed, nose was still bleeding. He hadn't cleaned himself up. And after all the prayers and everything, everyone was about...well, everyone was still in the building, and then a couple of the other students saw him, and just said to him: 'What's wrong?' And he wouldn't say anything. Eventually he told them, and he was like: 'Can we leave as a group, together? Will you guys walk me to Angel?' he said. Angel tube station, which is not too far; it's just a five minute walk up north, St John Street.<sup>49</sup>

Clearly the students were exercised by the problem of how to safely escort their injured colleague away from the building. Our student interviewee resumes his account by describing how the students attempted to do that:

So, as a group of about five or six of the Muslim students are leaving the prayer room...there's only one entrance and exit...and as soon as you come out, you have the council estates right next to you [where the gang members were understood to live]. And you turn left and you come towards the main university building.<sup>50</sup>

However, instead of successfully leaving the building the students were immediately confronted by the gang:

As they [the students] came out, the president of the Islamic Society was there; he saw the group [the gang] and he wanted to go and just ask them what happened, why they attacked them. And there was no malice in his intent, nothing. ....he's not someone who's going to walk up and...he's not an intimidating guy [the president]. If I was walking towards someone, maybe. But not him. And he walked towards with his hands up,

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

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saying: 'we don't want a fight, we just want to talk.' But as soon as they saw him approaching them, they... there's a lot of building work in the area. There was bricks and stuff. So they picked up a lot of the bricks and threw them at the Muslim students. They were on their bikes, like I said. And a lot of them took the seats off their bikes and used them as weapons. One of them had a police baton, similar to a police baton...<sup>51</sup>

It is worth noting that the gang was made up of members from different majority and minority ethnic backgrounds who expressed their antipathy towards Muslims in the clearest possible terms. The Muslim students were themselves equally diverse in their ethnic origins and appearance. Anyone witnessing the attack would have observed only one visible difference between the assailants and their victims: both male and female victims were dressed in a way that signified they were Muslims. Observers would also have noted that the attackers had targeted the Gloucester Building because it housed the Muslim student prayer room. Our interviewee continues to describe the attack outside the Gloucester Building:

A lot of the students, the Muslim students... because these people who attacked them weren't students from the university. So a lot of the students kind of ran and a few of them were attacked... quite severely injured. One of them... they all pretty much had bricks across their faces and things like that. One of the students had severe swelling to his knee... was hit on the knee with a baton. He was walking with a limp for several weeks. Another student received quite a lot of head injuries, to the extent that when he went to the hospital for a check-up, they told him: 'had you received another head blow, it could have caused paralysis.' All of them went to the hospital after the attack; one of them was OK pretty much, just a lot of cuts and bruises. The other two... like I said, one of them with the knee, the other one with the bruising to the head. And then they were released the same evening, the same night.<sup>52</sup>

Not surprisingly our interviewee was upset when recounting this episode. He said he is British through and through, has many non-Muslim friends and he loves studying in London. To be

confronted, he explained, by a gang that hates you and wants to harm you because you are a Muslim is extremely troubling. Like many other young Muslims this kind of incident makes him question whether the country and the city he loves is any longer a place he can call home. Fortunately, he recounts, a neighbour came to their aid:

The fight only stopped when a local man... maybe he was Irish... he shouted: 'I've called the police, the police are coming.' And then the youths just ran. They live local, because we see them around; we've seen them around quite a lot. So, obviously, they'll know how to get away from the scene and stuff like that. So they ran and they shouted things: 'Oh, the terrorists are going to get it; you're going to get it, this isn't over.' And things like that. So we told the police everything that happened, and they said they'd increase the patrols in the area. We told the university; they said as well that they'd increase security in the area.<sup>53</sup>

As student representative our interviewee saw some of the victims afterwards in the accident and emergency department at University College Hospital:

I saw them in the aftermath; a lot of them had cuts. One of them, he – from a brick that was thrown – had a huge cut here that was kind of glued together. And on his head, as well, he had quite a deep cut that was glued up as well. The others, just bruises and a bit of blood on their clothes. And rips in their clothes.<sup>54</sup>

Unfortunately neither police nor the university provided proactive support at this stage, as our interviewee makes clear:

The Tuesday, the following day, nothing really happened. We didn't even see them [the gang]. There was very little actual evidence police or security increased patrols that they said. I mean, two police officers on bikes, motorbikes, came down the road where the prayer room is, went around... because the road kind of curls round, and then... in a cul-de-sac... and then goes off again. So they went around it, and then drove off, and we saw them maybe once, in an hour and a half/two

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

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hour period. And we were outside... a lot of the male students; basically we stood outside while the female students were leaving. Because obviously they're an easy target, if you like. We were worried for their safety, so we stood outside and kind of along the route as they headed towards Angel. Most of them were going towards Angel. So nothing happened on Tuesday.<sup>55</sup>

It is noteworthy that the serious incident on Monday may well have gone largely unremarked by the police and university had not the situation deteriorated further. Most disturbingly, for the Muslim students, they were now under siege and insufficiently supported. Albeit Wednesday provided some breathing space:

Wednesday most students aren't in university; Wednesday finishes... all classes finish at one. Most people don't even have classes, I don't have classes on a Wednesday, so I didn't come in.<sup>56</sup>

Unfortunately when the students returned on Thursday so did their attackers:

The Thursday is when the second attack happened. Basically, around four o'clock, some of the students, again, stood outside to let the female students go. And then after they'd gone and the male students were coming back into the building, the gang of youths came again, and the Muslims went inside the building and called security... of the university. I went in a different direction... we'll come to that. So we went inside the building again, on Thursday. They were throwing rocks and things like that at the entrance to the building. There was quite a bit of damage to the exterior. And, you know, they were just outside; there was about fifteen of them again, maybe even more. Maybe even a bit more.<sup>57</sup>

This is when the sense of being under siege became palpable. Students were understandably fearful:

We went inside the building, down to the prayer room, called the security, the university security. And they said, OK, they'd call the police. A couple of hours later... maybe an hour and a half later, we tried leaving again, and there's only one exit... one entrance and exit... so we're kind of bottle-necked, if you like. So we tried leaving again, and they were there, once more [the gang]. We came outside this time, and then we saw

them, after we'd all come out. We saw them; they were just around the corner. And there was less of them this time, maybe five of them, six of them. And they threw fireworks towards us. And, you know, early November, fireworks are all being sold. So they threw fireworks at us... more bricks, more stones and such. To the extent that a couple of the Muslim students kind of lost it a little bit and ran after them. Just to kind of scare them away. They got to a certain... they got round... it's difficult to describe, but there's a park towards Exmouth Market. There's a park around there, and as they were chasing the group towards this park, the police came.<sup>58</sup>

Clearly the belated arrival of police helped frighten off the gang. However, it was now a very dangerous situation with individual students at risk of encountering individual gang members in the surrounding area. Our interviewee continues:

The rest of their group was all there [the gang], so it could have been really dangerous for them [the students]; the two or three students who ran after them. There was probably between twenty and twenty-five of them [the gang], just around the corner, waiting almost for the other five [gang members]. So the police came, told the students to go back. So basically, the students with the police went back to where the rest of the students were, outside of the building.<sup>59</sup>

The fact that police did not appear to have an awareness of the recent background and the extent to which Muslim students were under siege, was disappointing for the students. Nevertheless, they co-operated fully with the police:

We went back into the building, to get our bags and everything like that, that some people had dropped. And the police said: 'Look: everyone just split up, and go home.' They said as a large group, we could be inciting the problems. Or intimidating them, or scaring some of the locals or something like that. They told us to split up and they'll take care of it, and then everyone go home. So a group of us went towards Angel, a group went towards Barbican, a group went towards Farringdon. I was going towards Barbican; so at the same time that I was going, the group who were headed towards Angel... maybe only six or seven/eight of them... half way along the route, down St John's Street; on the route to St John's Street, there's a couple of roads and alleyways and I don't know if you know the Sadler's

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

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Wells Theatre? It's quite famous, along there as well. As they were walking along, they saw a couple of the youths [the gang], and the youths told them: 'Come here.' And the Muslim students, they didn't want any trouble, so they said 'no' and they carried on walking. And then, eventually, they walked on a little bit further, and there's another alleyway, just ahead. And they'd got people coming from in front [gang], and some came from behind [gang], and they were actually attacked there, by about fifteen of the group [gang]. And that's where three of the students were stabbed; a couple of them on the back, one of them on his side.<sup>60</sup>

In the event separating the students in the way police suggested proved costly. At least mobile phone contact enabled the students to provide mutual support as they struggled to get their wounded colleagues to hospital:

One of them wasn't too severely stabbed [student], but the other two [had] quite deep wounds. And the group...one of the group [student] from Angel or going towards Angel called one of the group that were heading towards Farringdon [by mobile phone]. Now, Farringdon is also on St John's Street, but going in the opposite direction. Now this [student] group turned around, because they heard about the attack...this was after the attack had happened. And they said: 'Look, come, three of us have been stabbed.' So they went up towards Angel, to see how everyone was...you know, obviously they were concerned. As they were walking up St John's Street, they were actually ambushed outside one of the university buildings, the Social Science building. Several of them, they were repeatedly kicked and punched. And there was maybe twenty of the gang and only five or six of the students. And they were quite badly injured. One of them had memory loss and was struggling to speak. It was pretty bad, severe. Quite severe injuries. And only when the police sirens came did the group flee.<sup>61</sup>

Needless to say, the fact that this second attack occurred at least in part because the Muslim students were following police advice did not go unremarked:

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

So a lot of the disappointment was down to the fact that police told us to split up, and that's pretty much when we were attacked...when we left the safety of numbers. And they told us that they'd take care of it, and we were attacked. And speaking to a lot of the police afterwards, they know who these kids are, especially the community support officers. They work in the area; they know who these kids are. And still, even after telling us they'd take care of it, the attacks happened. After that, obviously there was a huge increase in police presence. It was almost as if they didn't take Monday serious...like, after we told them what had happened, and that they'd threatened to come back, it was almost like they didn't...they were like: 'OK...yeah, alright.' They didn't really...obviously, they can't put all of their energy into it. But it was almost like it was a back issue to them. And then, after three students get stabbed, obviously it gets highlighted.<sup>62</sup>

The serious nature of the injuries sustained by the students caused shock amongst the Muslim students:

....after Thursday, I was in the group that was heading towards Barbican. When we heard, the guys that were injured had already gone to hospital. So I went straight to the hospital. Again, it was University College Hospital. After an hour or so, or maybe a bit more, we saw them...because we couldn't go in to where they were. A couple of them were on crutches, walking on crutches, because of stabbing in the back. I didn't ask them to show me their injuries, but it was quite clear that they...and the guy who had the memory loss and was mumbling. He had recovered a little bit by then; he wasn't mumbling but he was still dazed and confused. His eyes were just kind of like wobbling and it wasn't good. It wasn't good.<sup>63</sup>

It was at this point that the plight of the Muslim students at City University became more widely known:

word...news of the attack spread amongst the Muslim students in particular, like on forums and things like this. Local newspapers got in touch with us; I was actually

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*



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appointed as the official spokesman, if you like, for the incident. Maybe because I'm a bit older than everyone, a little bit wiser perhaps. And also I'm on the committee of the Islamic society. And all the students who were attacked are Muslims. The majority of them have a beard and wear the thobe and things like that... are easily identifiable as Muslims.<sup>64</sup>

It was also at this point that the university had their first in-depth discussions with the students:

Then the university held meetings with us, after it had kind of escalated and said: 'Oh, we're going to do this, we're doing this.' It was a bit like: 'We told you on Monday, then this happened. We told you on Thursday that they were outside; you said you'd increase security. We didn't see a single security member. They said that they would increase patrols; we didn't see anyone. After that Thursday incident, the following Friday...like I said, we held meetings with the local police and the university...the police were actually very good at that meeting. They accepted and appreciated our disappointment that despite us telling them and the university what had happened on Monday: the threats that it wasn't over, as they said. We told them on Thursday, we called them on Thursday; we were only attacked after following the police instructions. We told them that we weren't happy that even after all that, we were still attacked.'<sup>65</sup>

In-depth discussions also took place now with police for the first time:

The police were...there was one head of the local team. Sergeant F\*\*\*\*\*, I think. She's very, very good; very supportive. Very, very helpful and understanding. She gave us numbers for her team, phone numbers, so that if anything else happened, we're in the area; we know about it now. The Friday, we saw loads of police. The police actually agreed to place a couple of officers outside the doors in the evening. And we saw that for that Friday and for the following week as well. There were always one or two community support officers outside the building as we were leaving. There were regular vans, police vans, around the area. And over the week or so after...like ten days after the Thursday attack, by then nothing really had happened. We'd seen them still, riding around on their bikes, in full view of the

police, and the police said they knew who these kids were and things like that. But obviously you can't arrest someone for riding around on a bike. The police said they knew that these kids in the area...a lot of their crime is bike theft. Push bike theft. They said they were aware of who they were, their names and everything, ...where they lived.<sup>66</sup>

Police kept the students up to date with developments:

They told us that after Thursday's attack, three of them were arrested, released on bail with conditions that they couldn't come...they couldn't approach the university or any of the students. There was a restriction of like a hundred metres, I'm not certain exactly. I'm not too sure what has happened to those three who were arrested.<sup>67</sup>

Not untypically some students were wary about making police statements and attending an identity parade:

A lot of the Muslim students who were attacked were asked to give statements and a couple of them were asked to go to ID parades. Some of them did those things; a lot of them just didn't want to, like we mentioned before. A lack of feeling that anything would happen or just that they didn't really want to go to the station and things like that. Some of them were asked to give DNA...they were a bit concerned about that. Which...we sort of understand that they want to try and match the DNA but there's another...for other reasons, they were a bit concerned about doing that, so once they were asked to give DNA, they kind of like, in their minds, kind of shut off all cooperation with the investigation. So I'm not sure what has happened to those three that were arrested, but this was over a month ago now, since the Thursday attack...Thursday the fifth actually. And since then, we haven't really had any problems, which is good.<sup>68</sup>

As a student representative our interviewee was closely involved with the media:

We got a lot of requests from Islington newspapers... Islington Tribune, Islington Gazette, Eastern Eye.... I think BBC Radio Asia were in touch. Some media outlets from overseas, from the Middle East, from India. Just quite a lot of media attention.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

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However, despite his clarity and the clarity of the students' own accounts the media reports described the stabbings as racially motivated, not once as anti-Muslim hate crime. In fact media reports followed the lead taken by police and university press statements. Our interviewee explains the student's confusion:

In my five years at this university, we've not had any trouble with any locals. The students at the university were made aware of the problems, but a lot of the media outlets who reported on it, and university statement... they were keen too... well, not keen, but they focused on the fact that it was a racial attack. And they said 'Asian students.' As opposed to the fact that it was clearly Muslim students! OK, most of the Muslim students are Asians, but the basis of the attack wasn't that they were Asian. We mentioned that we were called 'terrorists' 'suicide bombers' and 'pakis' and things like that. Just all kinds of vile language. But almost all the initial outlets that were reporting on it... I think the BBC had an article on their website: 'Asian students were attacked'. The university statement, even after we'd spoken with them: 'Asian students were attacked.' And it was a bit...: 'Asian students?!!' And then once we'd seen all this, we were a bit like: 'Come on! Let's tell it how it is!'<sup>70</sup>

To conclude this account we illustrate our interviewee's points by reproducing headlines from relevant press releases and reports:

*City University press release, 9 November, 2009*  
*A message from Acting Vice-Chancellor Professor Julius Weinberg in response to student attacks*

University students were victims of assault near the University in St John Street

On Thursday 5 November at approximately 7.45pm, some University students were victims of "racially aggravated assault" near the University in St John Street, two sustained stab wounds described as "non-life threatening" (City University 2009).

*Press report: London Evening Standard. Asian students attacked by gangs. 9 November, 2009.*

Police were today investigating at least two racist attacks

on Asian students outside a London university (Davenport, 2009).

*BBC News report: Attacks on Asian students probed. 9 November.*

Four people were stabbed when a group of up to 30 armed with metal poles and bricks targeted Asian students in a suspected race attack in north London. Two others were badly beaten in St John Street, close to City University in Islington, on Thursday evening. Three teenagers – aged 17, 18 and 19 – have been arrested over the attack.

Officers are checking if this is linked to an incident the previous Monday when several black men shouted racist abuse and threw bricks at Asian students (BBC, 2009).

### 2.5. Gang attack on Muslim student Yasir Abdelmouttalib

Yasir Abdelmouttalib was a remarkably gifted and dedicated student who had just begun his PhD research when his future plans were cut short. Distinctively dressed as a Muslim he was on his way to Friday jumma prayer at the London Central mosque in Regents Park when he was seriously injured during an unprovoked gang attack in June 2004. He was waiting at a bus stop in Willesden when his young assailants set upon him. During the course of the attack he was struck repeatedly on the head with a road sweeper's broom (Muir, 2004). After the attack it was feared that he would not recover consciousness from the severe head injuries he sustained and he remained in a coma for three months. In the event, he regained consciousness and the extent of his recovery has surprised the doctors who treated him. Nevertheless, he has been left severely disabled and he and his family have endured extreme difficulties during the last six years.

Before moving to London to look after her injured son, Malika, Yasir's mother lived in Morocco. She was so impressed with the reputation of the UK for fair treatment that she chose to pay for her children to receive higher education here: Yasir at Edinburgh and his two younger brothers at Oxford.<sup>71</sup> Edinburgh and Oxford have proved to be safe and welcoming, 'I chose the UK ahead of France' she said, 'because in France there is a bad attitude towards Muslims.'<sup>72</sup> 'The UK is good for Muslims...' she

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Interview reference AMHC 22.



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paused, realising as she spoke that the actions of a teenage London gang had shattered that positive image.<sup>73</sup>

Yasir was therefore a guest of the UK when he was attacked; a fee paying student contributing to society intellectually and economically. The bus journey he chose to undertake – from Wembley to Regents Park, via Harlesden and changing buses at Willesden – took him through an area of London noted for violent street crime:

It did not occur to Yasir Abdelmouttalib to be afraid. And he paid little heed to friends warning him against wearing Islamic white robes to prayers. That decision seems to have cost him his health and his future. It almost cost him his life... He believes his tunic and beard may have singled him out. "All the time television talks about Osama bin Laden and I think they thought, 'Let's take revenge.' (Muir, 2004).

Yasir was waiting at a bus stop in Willesden for a bus to take him to jumma prayers at the London Central Mosque near Regents Park when the attack took place. He had already travelled on one bus from his friend's house in Wembley and needed to wait for a second bus to complete his journey. The youths upstairs on the bus caught his attention as the bus stopped at the bus stop. They were shouting abuse towards him and next proceeded to disembark from the bus and attack him. Yasir's own recollections of the attack are blurred but he remembers being punched and kicked to the ground, one assailant in front of him and two behind.<sup>74</sup> Witnesses at a subsequent court case were clear that the motive for the attack was Yasir's distinctive Muslim appearance.

Looking back on that dreadful day Yasir concedes that he may have been naive. It had not occurred to him that he would be viciously attacked simply because he was a Muslim:

It was claimed that trouble flared after the three 14-year-olds spotted [Yasir] wearing traditional Muslim clothes at a bus stop. Steven Perian, prosecuting, said that following a "barrage of spitting", they threw a street bin at him and then snatched a broom from a nearby road sweeper's dustcart. "It was used by at least one person ... to hit him on the head a number of times, with one witness describing it as if it was a croquet mallet hitting a ball." The barrister claimed that even when the victim slumped helplessly to the ground, that was "not good enough" for the teenage defendants. "More hits with the

broomstick followed until finally a person stepped in." ..... [Yasir] had not only suffered a number of skull fractures but had been struck so hard his brain had moved inside his skull (London Evening Standard, 2004).

Malika and Sara, his mother and sister, bravely endured the ordeal of a subsequent court case:

Yesterday the trial ended of three 14-year-old boys accused of a vicious attack on the 22-year-old university graduate as he waited for a bus in Willesden, north-west London, one Friday afternoon in June. Mr Abdelmouttalib, a tall, slight figure, was repeatedly punched and kicked and struck in the head with a heavy roadsweepers' broom. One teenager was convicted at Harrow crown court of causing grievous bodily harm with intent and will be sentenced on December 20. Two others, who denied taking part in the attack, were acquitted. Mr Abdelmouttalib was unable to give evidence (Muir, 2004).

Remarkably transcending her own personal grief Maleka memorably expressed pity for her son's attacker:

Malika, sat in the court's public gallery. Afterwards she said of her son's attacker: "I am sad for him because I just don't think he knows any better." She added: "I am sad for this society, too" (Muir 2004).

When we interviewed Malika in December 2009 she endorsed that compassionate sentiment. 'He was just a boy [Yasir's convicted assailant]' she said, 'he could have been my son'.<sup>75</sup> Malika and Yasir are now channeling that same compassion by promoting efforts to reduce the risk of such incidents happening in the future. That is a project we are honoured to assist.

Although Yasir Abdelmouttalib was attacked in 2004 his case highlights issues that still need to be addressed in the new decade. A gang of three or four youths first saw Yasir as their bus pulled up at a bus stop in Willesden Green on a Friday morning. They were upstairs on the bus and saw Yasir waiting at the bus stop.<sup>76</sup> It has not yet been possible to interview the assailants but from what we have gleaned of their backgrounds so far, it appears absolutely certain that they had no connection to or affinity with nationalist politics of any kind. Instead they appeared to be a typical local street gang that pose threats to local residents in terms of robberies and related street crime.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Interview reference AMHC 21.

<sup>75</sup> Interview reference AMHC 22.

<sup>76</sup> Interview references AMHC 21-22.

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According to our interviewees who are London youth workers with experience of dealing with gang street crime over the last two decades, the gang that attacked Yasir probably saw him as an enemy because over the last ten years Muslims have assumed that position in local gang culture, largely for three reasons.<sup>77</sup> One reason is the generally negative portrayal of Muslims that has arisen post 9/11:

Muslims are now understood to oppose everything these kids aspire to. Flash cars, nightclubs, expensive clothes, jewellery, drugs, alcohol, casual sex, glamour, dancing, music, you name it! One kid [member of London street gang] said after the ...those attacks on the nightclubs [reference to failed terrorist attack on London nightclubs in June 2007] ... that he hated Muslims because they wanted to take all the fun out of life. I said this was not a Muslim attack and he said it doesn't matter they either bomb the nightclubs or they tell you not to go there.<sup>78</sup>

The second reason arises from the role of convert Muslims with their own backgrounds who condemn their anti-social gang behaviour and drug oriented lifestyles:

Often they know someone who has left their scene and become a devout Muslim. That is like a defection. And whether they do or don't they say they know this or that terrorist who used to be a great person till he joined the Muslims.<sup>79</sup>

Most importantly, thirdly, street gangs like the ones that attacked Yasir and the City University students are increasingly coming into violent conflict with rival gangs who purport to be Muslim or who adopt aspects of Muslim dress for the sake of a new 'street' image.<sup>80</sup>

Big issue. Just like a handful of terrorists give Muslims a bad name, now these new so called Muslim gangs are causing the same problem, well, on the streets they are, in the gang scene they are. Big fights. Stabbings, guns...<sup>81</sup>

The issue of motivation for the gang that attacked Yasir and for

other London street gang attacks on Muslims is one that we will develop in our next report (EMRC July 2010). For now by highlighting some of the context it is sufficiently clear to see that descriptions of this and other gang attacks as racist are almost certainly inadequate.

Notwithstanding some evidence about the motivation for the attack being anti-Muslim, police did not describe it as an anti-Muslim or Islamophobic hate crime. Like many other cases of this kind it appeared that police did not have a policy that allowed them to deal with an attack on a Muslim with the same legal and procedural clarity and priority as in racially motivated attacks.

Even though disappointed that two gang members were acquitted and that CCTV cameras at the crime scene were not working, Yasir's mother was reasonably satisfied with the police investigation that led to the conviction of one of the gang members.<sup>82</sup> However, she was frustrated and angry when it became apparent that the police appeared to be treating Yasir as a terrorist suspect. 'He was lying in a coma in hospital and we thought he might not live and the police were asking questions about which mosque did he go to'.<sup>83</sup> 'Fortunately', she said, 'I got support from Massoud [chairman of the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC), the only community group in London with case workers to help Muslim victims of hate crimes like Yasir] and that helped us to pull through'.<sup>84</sup> This aspect of the case raises issues concerning the extent to which post 9/11 policing has on occasions unnecessarily alienated Muslim families and their friends and is one we will explore nationally and report on fully in our next report (EMRC July 2010).

### 2.6. Murder of Ikram Syed ul-Haq

It is with deep regret that we record the fact that in September 2009, Ikram Syed ul-Haq, a retired care worker, became a murder victim when he died from brain injuries he sustained in an anti-Muslim gang attack outside his local mosque in Tooting. On the evening of 31 August Ikram, described by his friends as a quiet, kind and compassionate man, was with his three-year-old granddaughter Marian ul-Haq when a gang savagely beat him to the ground. 'Witnesses said the hysterical toddler [his granddaughter] ran screaming into the *Idara-e-Jaafariya* Islamic

<sup>77</sup> Interview references AMHC 25-29.

<sup>78</sup> Interview references AMHC 25.

<sup>79</sup> Interview references AMHC 25.

<sup>80</sup> Interview references AMHC 25.

<sup>81</sup> Interview references AMHC 26.

<sup>82</sup> Interview reference AMHC 22.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

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centre in Church Lane, Tooting, south London, at around 9pm' when 'most of the congregation were still inside as they shared a meal to break their Ramadan fast' (Buaras, 2009). The gang assaulted other victims outside the mosque. According to a newspaper report 'one of the other victims described how a gang of 20 teenagers in hoodies ambushed them outside the mosque, on Church Lane, as they emerged from a prayer session' (Allen 2009). 'Minicab driver Imdad Buhkari, 39, who was standing with another victim, who is in his 70s, said:

They came down the road and about six of them broke off from the rest and surrounded the two of us. They asked me for the time. I said I don't wear a watch and suddenly someone from behind punched me hard on the jaw. I was attacked from behind with no warning. Then they hit the old man, whose name is Atameer, and ran off.... I went round the corner and I was shocked when I saw Ikram lying unconscious on the ground. He was bleeding from his mouth and ear. Now he is in a coma. The doctors want to turn off his life support machine but his family say no. It is terrible. Who would do such a thing? (Buaras, 2009).

The attacks were captured on CCTV and arrests quickly followed - four boys - one aged 12, two of 14 and one of 15. Clearly we have no wish to interfere with the course of justice but we can usefully highlight an important feature of this case and what has become a recurring feature in cases of this kind. Just as politicians prefer to call Nick Griffin's anti-Muslim rhetoric 'anti-racist' so too do police chiefs regularly choose to interpret anti-Muslim hate crimes as anti-racist. Both are potentially misleading and counter-productive. Thus, police have described the murder of Ikram Syed ul-Haq as possibly 'racist' or possibly 'casual violence' but not once as 'anti-Muslim' or 'Islamophobic' (Davenport, 2009a; Buaras, 2009). This is problematic given that members of the same gang attacked other Muslims at the same mosque at the same time and also given that a Muslim was subsequently attacked by a gang at the nearby Gatton Road Mosque (also known as the Al-Muzzammil Mosque) a week later. In this subsequent attack the victim was attacked with a weapon and required hospital treatment for head injuries (Buaras, 2009). Moreover, given the prevalence of routine, low level anti-Muslim hate crime in the neighbourhood it would normally be the case that local community policing would be aware of the problem, even when victims were not formally reporting the incidents as crimes.

According to an interviewee who knows the local gang scene well, Muslims are despised by certain gangs and often targeted for attack, albeit not usually with such deadly force.<sup>85</sup> This is not to say that local gangs are purely focused on Muslim targets nor that they are not capable of casual violence as well. On the contrary one of the features of gang violence in this and surrounding parts of South London is that rivalry has developed in recent years between gangs that are involved in street crime and gangs that have adopted some superficial appearance of Muslim adherence. As an interviewee, a local youth worker explains:

On the one hand you have gangs like the Muslim Boys who have become attracted to what they like about being or rather looking Muslim. Looking like a terrorist you might say. That's how they see it. They like to rob the kind of gangs they used to belong to. Take their drugs. Take their guns. Say look we used to deal drugs now we confiscate them. Money goes to a new cause. Then you get a response from the gangs they are attacking. They hate Muslims even more and maybe are afraid to attack the Muslim gangs directly so they attack soft Muslims, real Muslims, elderly Muslims instead.<sup>86</sup>

We will return to the question of motive in this and other cases in our next report (EMRC July 2010). For now, we wish to draw attention to a local phenomenon that suggests that anti-Muslim sentiment is very likely to play a part when local gangs are picking targets to attack. According to the same interviewee, the typical make up of local gangs that regard themselves as being strongly anti-Muslim in terms of their image and street reputation includes male and female youths aged between 10 and 20 from a wide variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds.<sup>87</sup> It is therefore inaccurate to describe their attacks on Muslims as racist, both because they are principally anti-Muslim and also because they are themselves multi-cultural or multi-ethnic in their make-up.

In addition to serious attacks by gangs several local Muslim interviewees described being subjected to anti-Muslim abuse, assault and harassment by individuals. That topic is discussed below (2.2).

We have not sought to interview Ikram Syed ul-Haq's family while they are coming to terms with his brutal murder and while his young assailants are being brought to justice. We have however approached a trusted family friend and with his guidance will seek to interview family members at a later date for inclusion in our next report (EMRC July 2010).

<sup>85</sup> Interview reference AMHC 26.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*

# Research Findings

## 2.7. Serious assault on Imam at London Central Mosque

In August 2007 an imam at the London Central Mosque (LMC) in Regent's Park was brutally assaulted by Brian Donegan, a forty year old Londoner from Hammersmith, who gained entry to the mosque in the early hours of the morning to carry out his attack. The imam was subjected to a frightening ordeal and required emergency optical treatment after his assailant repeatedly gouged his eyes. The imam underwent emergency surgery after suffering injuries to both eyes. Donegan was charged with grievous bodily harm and assault and was detained at a mental health facility.

In this interview with Muslim News, Dr Ahmad Al-Dubayan, director of the London Central Mosque and Islamic Cultural Centre (ICC), explains how the attack took place:

Dr Al-Dubayan said that the 58-year old imam, who did not want to be named, was attacked on Friday morning after the man, who was wearing a cross, entered the mosque claiming that he wanted to be converted to Islam. The imam offered him dates and explained to him about Islam and suddenly the man threw himself on the ground and began saying something the imam did not understand. Then he suddenly got up and began punching the imam on his forehead until the imam fell on the floor. The man then stood on top of the imam and began poking into the eyes of the imam with his fingers, damaging them badly. The imam tried to defend himself but could not free himself. The imam began shouting and the security came and called the police. The man was apprehended after much difficulty as he resisted the arrest (Muslim News, 2007).

For over two decades LMC cultivated a close working relationship with the MPS so when the attack happened there was effective support:

[MPS] Chief Superintendent David Morgan said: 'We have a close working relationship with worshippers and staff at the mosque and will continue to work together to offer reassurance to the community with extra patrols in and around the area' (Muslim News, 2007)

When asked about the background to the attack, Dr Al-Dubayan offered the following comment:

[He] said that he suspected the assault was religiously motivated. He added: 'We are worried about Islamophobic feelings and racial attacks. I believe there has been an increase in Islamophobia. We have received threatening and insulting letters and emails.' Mr Dubayan said the mosque was reviewing its security following the attack. It was considering hiring extra security staff and restricting its opening hours to boost the protection for its team of imams. He also blamed some of the media, with their repeated use of such phrases as 'Islamic terrorist' or 'Muslim terrorist', for creating 'an atmosphere of Islamophobia' in the past year [Muslim News, 2007].

Donegan was subsequently declared 'insane' at Southwark Crown Court (BBC, 2008). However, there is nothing in the insanity verdict or the circumstances of the attack that detract from the fact that the assailant was motivated to enter London's premier mosque and attack the imam. We see no reason to suppose that an insane man is any less capable of anti-Muslim hatred than any one sane. Indeed, Donegan was sufficiently coherent to make his hatred strikingly clear to his victim.<sup>88</sup> We make this observation because there is a natural and erroneous tendency to conclude that mentally unsound assailants are incapable of forming coherent motivations. That may be true in terms of forming *mens rea* the necessary criminal intent, but we are merely seeking to establish the fact that anti-Muslim sentiment is so pervasive in London that a man such as Donegan is as likely as his sane neighbours to have formed a highly pejorative view of Muslims.

London Central Mosque probably has the best security of any mosque in London and therefore the attack sent shockwaves around London's other mosques, Islamic centres and prayer rooms that number over 200, where in most cases precious little exists in terms of robust security to prevent attacks.

The attack also sent shock waves around Muslim London because it coincided with a spate of attacks around the UK. There is a recognised phenomenon of 'spikes' or sudden

<sup>88</sup> Interview reference AMRC 27.

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increases in anti-Muslim attacks in the immediate aftermath of terrorist incidents, and in this case they were connected to attempted terrorist attacks in London and Glasgow on 29 and 30 June:

Attacks on Muslims and mosques in Glasgow, Manchester and Bradford have been blamed on heightened community tensions since the bungled terror attacks in London's West End on 29 June and at Glasgow airport the next day. Strathclyde Police said the number of racially motivated attacks it dealt with rose from 201 in June to 258 in July. It said 31 of those were definitely connected to the airport incident. Among the attacks they are investigating is a Glasgow newsagent's being gutted after a car crashed into it in an apparent imitation of the airport attack in the city. A fire that severely damaged a mosque in Lidget Green, Bradford, is also being treated as suspicious (Muslim News, 2007).

Inayat Bunglawala, spokesman for the MCB, summed up the mood:

There has definitely been an upsurge in prejudice against Muslims. It appears people are taking out their frustrations about the failed attacks on Muslims. Some sections of the media have been very active in fomenting that prejudice (Muslim News, 2007).

Muslim News editor Ahmed Versi 'called on the Government and the police to ensure that Muslims and their places of worship are protected in the current hostile climate'. 'Such Islamophobic attacks should not be tolerated' he said. 'They are causing further alienation in the community and add to the dangers of radicalising young people' (Muslim News, 2007).

## **2.8. Arson attack on Greenwich Islamic Centre**

To underline the point Bunglawala and Versi were making, there have been a significant number of arson and criminal damage attacks against Mosques and Islamic centres in the UK since they made their warnings in 2007. The majority have not taken place in London and we will be reporting on them in our next report (EMRC July 2010). However, the risk of further attacks against mosques will be significant throughout the new decade in London as elsewhere in the UK and so we have chosen to illustrate the dreadful impact such attacks have by reference to an arson attack on the Greenwich Islamic Centre in June 2009. In fact the centre was petrol bombed twice in one week as the following press report makes clear:

A brave caretaker was hurt as he risked his life to save a mosque torched by arsonists in the second petrol bomb attack in a week. Mohamed Koheeeallee, 62, raced to tackle 7ft flames at the Greenwich Islamic Centre in Plumstead Road at 12.15am on Tuesday. Grabbing a bucket of water, he extinguished the fire as it spread inside but when he opened a fire exit, he was engulfed by flames burning his arm and his face. Choking with smoke inhalation and despite his injuries, he carried on dousing the fire until the mosque was safe but when he tried to tackle the source of the blaze he was pushed back by its intensity. Holy texts, including the most sacred in Islam – the Koran – were burned (Bexley Times, 2009).

It is disappointing but hardly surprising to note that the outstanding bravery of the caretaker Mr. Koheeeallee was not taken up by the mainstream, national media. Nevertheless, the report in the local paper properly captures the importance of his role and the negative community impact that is sustained when a Mosque and its precious contents are damaged or destroyed:

Mr Koheeeallee, who believes the attack was racially motivated, was taken to Queen Elizabeth Hospital by ambulance to be treated for smoke inhalation and burns and was later discharged. He said: 'It makes me feel really bad to see the burnt holy scriptures. If these people have a problem they should be brave enough to say it to my face, but not like this' The caretaker had also dealt with another arson attack at the mosque which had been less serious but had taken place a week before at approximately the same time of night (Bexley Times, 2009).

Calls for enhanced local police support, as reported here, will clearly be strengthened if the issue is addressed and co-ordinated nationally:

The centre's director, Dr Tariq Abbasi, said 'enough is enough,' and has called on the new Greenwich borough commander Richard Wood to take action. Dr Abbasi said: 'This is as bad as it can get. Nobody deserves this. Seeing burnt copies of the Koran, the emotional impact has been devastating. Monetary loss is one thing, the building can be re-built, but the emotional scars can last for years. The Muslim community see this as a racist attack on a place of worship.' He said a racist minority may have been encouraged after BNP members won seats in the European elections (Bexley Times, 2009).

## Research Findings

We note the reference to the incident as a 'racist attack' and that remains a common and reasonable perception in Muslim communities, especially those with family backgrounds in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh who often have extended first-hand experience of racism in London. Our research project therefore has an additional purpose of educating communities as well as politicians, policy makers, police, media and academics about the changing nature of anti-Muslim hate crimes. It is also worth noting that there is a vast range of experience in Muslim London with the most telling experience generally found amongst those who are in touch with the street (or grass roots).

Hate crimes involving arson and criminal damage are substantively different from the kind of violent gang attacks we have described previously. While the general motivation may be the same an arson attack often involves a degree of research, planning and preparation that is absent in most street attacks on Muslims. Our interviewees with experience of London's violent extremist nationalist milieu express concern that arson attacks against mosques have become more prevalent because of increased anti-Muslim sentiment generally and adverse publicity surrounding the building of new mosques in London in particular.<sup>89</sup> The same interviewees confirm that violent extremist nationalists (including those convicted for manufacturing or possessing bombs such as Lewington (see 2.2) and Gavan (see 2.3) above) regard attacks on mosques as another tactical option alongside others like vandalizing Muslim graves in cemeteries.<sup>90</sup>

### 3. Low level street assaults, abuse and intimidation of Muslims

As we noted in the introduction, evidence presented in this report suggests that a significant number of Muslim Londoners have been the victims of hate crimes during the last decade and especially since 9/11. While some of the more serious attacks of the kind we have illustrated have been reported to police, the overwhelming majority of Muslim victims of hate crimes appear not to have reported the incidents to police. Sometimes, interviewees suggest, that failure to report a crime to police is because of a lack of confidence in the police and other times because of a failure to appreciate that an incident merits police attention. Typical incidents that have not been reported to police include men spitting at Muslim women wearing burkas<sup>91</sup> or hijabs<sup>92</sup> in the street. Invariably in incidents of this kind the male attacker does not know his female victim and makes an abusive comment to indicate to the victim, and sometimes to bystanders, why he is committing the crime. To illustrate the point in one such incident in August 2008, a male passenger leaning out of the front seat window of a white Renault van shouted "f\*\*\*\*\* terrorist c\*\*\*\*" at a Muslim woman who was waiting at a bus stop in Tooting High Street.<sup>93</sup> Immediately prior to hearing this abuse the victim had been struck on the chin by phlegm that her unknown assailant spat at her.<sup>94</sup>

On this occasion the victim described her assailant as a white male with a London accent, someone she said who looked 'a bit like the footballer Paul Gascoigne'.<sup>95</sup> In many other unreported incidents of this kind, however, assailants have often been described by their victims as sharing the same or a similar ethnic background as their own. Thus, for example, in another unreported hate crime involving spitting and threatening abuse the female Muslim victim described her assailant as a "Jamaican" and a "Yardie".<sup>96</sup> When talking to other black Londoners who had converted to Islam, friends she called her "Salafi sisters"<sup>97</sup> the victim in this incident discovered that what had happened to her had become commonplace.<sup>98</sup> Indeed, in one of the most serious unreported incidents disclosed during our research we

<sup>89</sup> Interview references AMHC 30-33.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Burka or chador - a full length garment covering a woman from head to foot, generally black.

<sup>92</sup> Hijab or veil - a headscarf.

<sup>93</sup> Interview reference AMHC 27.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Interview reference AMHC 28.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* See Robert, 2005 for London Salafi women's perspective.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*



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discovered that a female black Londoner was punched and abused by an unknown male black Londoner in front of her infant daughter because she was a “f\*\*\*\*\* Muslim slave”.<sup>99</sup>

Other victims of unreported hate crimes attest to the same largely unacknowledged fact: Muslim Londoners have been attacked by fellow Londoners who sometimes share the same ethnic backgrounds as their victims. Incidents disclosed to our research team reveal victims and assailants sometimes sharing broad South Asian, Near East, North African, Sub-Saharan African, Afro-Caribbean as well as English and European ethnic backgrounds. In addition, in some instances, victims have identified their assailants as sharing the same ethnic or family connections to specific countries, such as France, Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia, India, Bosnia, Iran and Pakistan. In addition, in other cases, Muslim Londoners who have been the victims of hate crimes have described their assailants as being immigrants from Poland and other European countries.

None of which is intended to divert attention from the fact that the majority of assailants appear to be local Londoners who are described by their victims as being white and English. Rather, our purpose is to highlight the fact that a significant minority of unreported anti-Muslim hate crimes do not sit easily within pre-existing notions of racist hate crimes and more especially suggests that the familiar use of the term ‘anti Muslim racism’ may need to be re-assessed. More importantly, our research highlights what victims know only too well - they have been attacked because they are Muslims, not because they are Asian, Afro-Caribbean, African, or immigrants. It therefore follows, we conclude, that if assailants and victims are clear that the victims’ Muslim identity is a motivation for hate crime, it behoves policy makers, public servants (especially police), political commentators, think-tanks and academics to formulate responses that take that fact into account.

To help that process we have asked former members and associates of the British National Party (BNP), English Defence League (EDL), National Front (NF), Combat 18 and other extremist nationalist groups to explain how they have come to target Muslims for vilification and physical attacks. Their answers

are unambiguous and coherent as in this example: “Muslims either want to blow us up or piss on our way of life”.<sup>100</sup> Certainly Nick Griffin, leader of the BNP, has been absolutely clear throughout the last decade that Muslims pose a serious threat to social cohesion in parts of London and those other poor urban areas where they are concentrated in large numbers (Allen, 2009; Griffin 2007, 2008). According to an experienced NF and Combat 18 street activist in London, Muslims began to replace Asians, Afro-Caribbeans, Jews and gays as targets for vilification and attack after the riots in Burnley, Oldham and Bradford in June and July 2001.<sup>101</sup> “We still hated ZOG<sup>102</sup> but Muslims with their bombs and breeding like rabbits were totally unacceptable.”<sup>103</sup>

Similarly, an experienced BNP activist in London, explains that he believes that most BNP supporters simply followed the lead set by their favourite tabloid commentators that they read every day.<sup>104</sup> When these commentators singled out Muslims as threats to security and social cohesion, he says that it was perfectly natural for BNP supporters to adopt the same thinking.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, BNP supporters would learn from newspaper commentators who sought to disprove the charge that they were racists by demonstrating their friendships with Asians and Afro-Caribbeans.<sup>106</sup> Thus it became commonplace for many former racists to accept that their former targets had become less problematic, even sometimes potential allies in the far more important task of tackling the Muslim threat.<sup>107</sup>

Similarly, a former extremist nationalist activist in London explains that most BNP supporters simply followed the lead set by the tabloid journalists and radio phone-in hosts they read and heard every day.<sup>108</sup> So that when they constantly read and heard that Muslims were threats to security and social cohesion it was perfectly natural for BNP supporters to adopt the same thinking.<sup>109</sup> Similarly, BNP supporters would learn a useful tactic from the same commentators who often sought to disprove the charge that they were racists by demonstrating their friendships with Asians and Afro-Caribbeans.<sup>110</sup> Thus it became commonplace for many former racists to argue and demonstrate that their former targets had become less problematic, even sometimes potential allies in the far more important task of tackling the Muslim threat.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Interview reference AMRC 29.

<sup>100</sup> Interview reference AMRC 30.

<sup>101</sup> Interview reference AMRC 31.

<sup>102</sup> ZOG – a term of abuse for Jews based on the notion of a Zionist Occupation [or Occupied] Government, an anti-Semitic conspiracy theory.

<sup>103</sup> Interview reference AMRC 31.

<sup>104</sup> Interview reference AMRC 33.

<sup>105</sup> Interview reference AMRC 33.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Interview reference AMRC 33.

<sup>109</sup> Interview reference AMRC 33.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

# Research Findings

## 3.1. Death threats and threats of harm

Another important aspect of routine, everyday anti-Muslim hate crime is anonymous telephone, email and postal death threats and threats of harm. Indeed on occasion they require to be classified as serious hate crimes. Since 9/11 hundreds of death threats, threats of serious physical harm, along with more general violent threats and abuse have been received by national Muslim organisations, most of whom have their headquarters in London. While it is impossible to quantify, it is absolutely clear that many of the more serious ones have come from members, supporters or sympathisers of the violent extremist nationalist milieu in the UK.<sup>112</sup> Naturally the threats spread the full gamut from extremely serious to the very minor. Nevertheless, even the most minor contribute to a sense of siege especially in the immediate aftermath of terrorist incidents in the UK, attributed to al-Qaida when the volume of such threats often increase alarmingly. According to one interviewee who has had responsibility for incoming post, emails and telephone calls at a prominent national Muslim organisation, there is a danger that staff can get so used to these kind of threats that they may overlook ones that are serious.<sup>113</sup>

We should explain the context and background for these kinds of death threats. As our experienced police interviewees have emphasised a death threat may be serious or it may be little more than a throw away remark. Broadly speaking, seriousness will depend on the perpetrator's intention and ability to affect his or her purpose. Death threats may be serious when they are hoaxes provided the perpetrator of the hoax has the actual capability to make the threat credible and compelling. Death threats may be closely related to threats of serious harm made by the same individual or on behalf of the same group or organization. Finally death threats may be made by an individual or group known to the victim or they may be made anonymously, by a variety of means, by an unknown individual sometimes on behalf of a group or organisation that may also be known or unknown.

In addition two of our interviewees from the violent extremist nationalist milieu recall that death threats have always been a staple in that arena. 'Bomb threats, death threats, yeh, mobile phone from the pub after a few drinks! But it can get very nasty.

Let's be honest. Ten years if you get caught.<sup>114</sup> Rather like delivering leaflets is a bread and butter activity for non violent extremists such as local BNP activists, so too do those that graduate to street violence often become used to the routine business of intimidating enemies in a number of ways, one of which involves the communication of death threats, bomb threats and the like:

Its both ways. The BNP probably get more death threats and bomb threats than anyone! Who would ever have wanted to spend the night in the bookshop! [reference to the BNP bookshop in Welling that was in a constant state of siege from violent anti-fascist activists in the 1990s]<sup>115</sup>

In 2008 a leading member of a London based national Muslim organisation was subjected to serious death threats that required police attention. For personal security reasons we do not wish to provide details of this case or many other cases brought to our attention where prominent, respectable members of mainstream Muslim organisations have been subject of death threats and threats of violence. Rather simply by recording a representative case we intend to highlight a significant and widespread occurrence worthy of attention.

The 2008 death threat case is typical of the overwhelming number of death threats and threats of serious physical harm that have been made to Muslim individuals and organisations in London since 9/11 – they are made on a false premise. To explain: from the perspective of most activists in the violent extremist nationalist milieu Muslim organisations that are linked directly or indirectly to the al-Qaida terrorist threat to the UK are considered worthy targets for attack and intimidation, and death threats are part of their panoply of tactical options. Like their counterparts in non violent extremist nationalist politics (most notably the BNP) these street activists have spent the last decade getting their instruction on who al-Qaida's active and tacit supporters are in London from highly visible, obvious yet problematic sources.<sup>116</sup> Thus violent extremist nationalist tabloid readers have become convinced that *Londonistan* is home to several national Muslim organisations that purport to condemn al-Qaida but are in fact part and parcel of the same threat.

<sup>112</sup> Interview references AMHC 5, 30-33, 42.

<sup>113</sup> Interview reference AMHC 6.

<sup>114</sup> Interview reference AMHC 30.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> Interview references AMHC 30-31, 40-42.



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In consequence, for activists in groups like the English Defence League (EDL), a leading member of a mainstream national Muslim organisation will be understood to be a wolf in sheep's clothing, every bit as much as an enemy target Anjem Choudary, a well known London based extremist al-Qaida apologist. This conflation of mainstream Muslim figures with extremists like Choudary is problematic for many reasons but in this current context it results in death threats being made to responsible London citizens because of false and often malicious assertions that they pose a security threat to the UK.

At the time of writing, in January 2010, Anjem Choudary is also receiving police support because of a death threat (Daily Mail, 2010):

Metropolitan police officers have been told to give his protection priority above other local policing jobs such as muggings, theft and foot patrols. Officers tasked with carrying out these patrols have privately expressed their fury at being diverted away from what they regard as 'proper policing'. Their concerns intensified after a Facebook campaign against the march attracted the support of more than 250,000 Britons and led to threats against Choudary's life. A police source said that since the checks began last week, they had already taken up around £2,500 of police time, often occupying beat officers for entire shifts if counter-terror detectives are not available.

Daily Mail readers have been left in no doubt that police resources might be better deployed:

'We [the police] are being diverted away from other jobs to carry out these checks and they are given priority over other things, such as house break-ins,' the source said. 'Choudary has deliberately made himself a target among far-Right groups and his recent plans to protest at Wootton Bassett have stirred up even more anger. 'His address is widely known and police fear it's a powder-keg atmosphere. Senior officers are frightened of having a race war on their hands. 'If something were to happen to him, we would be blamed.' (Daily Mail, 2010).

In fact, the Mail's police source is describing one of policing's most critical roles: defending the universally despised from the lynch mob (Kleinig, 1996; Alderson, 1998). Protecting Anjem Choudary and protecting Nick Griffin is therefore as important for the police as protecting paedophiles. Similarly, many

Londoners will recall that the Metropolitan Police protected the Islamophobic author Salman Rushdie when he faced a death threat emanating from Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran. This is all part of an MPS tradition of protecting free speech in London.

'They [referring to London's violent extremist nationalist milieu] would love to get him [Choudary]' our interviewee suggested, 'he's the number one enemy in every pub in England'.<sup>117</sup> 'If someone like Gavan who knows what he's doing [reference to his military skill] gets half a chance, bosh, he's dead, goodbye.'<sup>118</sup> Our point is that Choudary deserves public disapprobation and police protection from violent extremists.

### 3.2. Unreported anti-Muslim hate crimes

As our research clearly indicates that Muslims are specifically targeted by assailants in unreported hate crimes it is not surprising that the same should be true in respect of hate crimes that are reported to police. However, whereas since the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (Macpherson, 2006), MPS officers have been under a strict duty to take the victims perspective into account when reporting a race hate crime (Sharp, 2002; Souhami, 2007) this imperative has sometimes proved problematic in respect of attacks on Muslims.<sup>119</sup> On this key issue the report presents compelling accounts from members of the MSF and case workers for the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) who have been at the forefront of efforts to enhance police support for Muslim victims of hate crimes during the last decade.

The problem of unreported hate crime is one that policy makers and police have tackled with some success in partnerships with representatives of other minority communities during the same decade. However, our research suggests that pro-active responses to hate crimes against ethnic and lifestyle minorities in London have not been extended to Muslim Londoners with the same success. Black and Asian Londoners who also happen to be Muslims provide compelling evidence on this point. For example, two experienced representatives for South Asian and Afro-Caribbean origin Muslim Londoners have witnessed a sharp contrast between the two approaches.<sup>120</sup> On the one hand both recall attending productive and pro-active anti-racist meetings with members of the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) Racial and Violent Crime Task Force (subsequently re-named the Diversity Directorate) before 9/11 when their Muslim identity was not an issue and they were treated instead as Black or Asian Londoners. Subsequently, after 9/11, their Muslim identity became an issue, often a problem, and inhibited the kind of support they had previously received from police.

<sup>117</sup> Interview reference AMRC 31.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> Interview reference AMRC 05.

<sup>120</sup> Interview references AMRC 01 and 10.

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We will develop strategies for tackling under-reporting in our next report but for now it will be helpful to note Tim Parson's observations (see appendix). Here is an important extract:

Identifying underlying reasons for the under-reporting of hate crime and Islamophobic hate crime in particular, is far harder to achieve. We might speculate that many in the Muslim community or communities are either distrustful of the police, distrustful of democratic institutions generally or perceive that their complaints won't be taken seriously. There may be additional reasons for under-reporting or not reporting hate crime and further contributing factors that might exert a negative influence. These might include language barriers, with victims having insufficient grasp of English to make them confident enough to explain their situation to a public official; cultural influences, whereby there is pressure from within the community not to involve outside agencies such as the police, may also have an influence (Parsons, 2010).

Ahmed,<sup>121</sup> recalls how after 9/11 he found himself at odds with MPS police officers for the first time when complaining that many young Muslims were facing the double jeopardy of hate crime attacks – as part of a backlash to 9/11 – and an increased risk of being subjected to widespread 'stop and search' counter-terrorism policing tactics and approaches by counter-terrorism police and security service officers to become informants.<sup>122</sup> Abdullah, for his part, recalls how quickly he was re-cast by police as a member of a suspect community simply because terrorist suspects had used the same Mosque as law abiding Muslims.<sup>123</sup> Typically, both Ahmed and Abdullah concede that the post 9/11 terrorist threat to London placed a responsibility on Muslim communities to support reasonable and effective counter-terrorism measures. From their perspective, however, much that was done domestically and internationally in the name of the 'war on terror' was counter-productive, alienating and contributed to the popular, negative image of Muslims that fuelled anti-Muslim hate crimes.<sup>124</sup>

Of particular significance to the next phase of our research, Parsons' contribution highlights good MPS practice:

The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) does have a crime recording system sufficiently sophisticated to breakdown religiously motivated hate crimes by the specific religion subject to such hostile action. Current data shows that the vast majority of religiously motivated hate crimes reported in London are either anti-Semitic, (in this context meaning targeted at Jewish individuals, Jewish premises or communities) or Islamophobic hate crime. The most recent dataset, (the precise figures I am not authorised to publish here) show a close similarity of numbers between the two types of religiously motivated offence – i.e. either anti-Semitic or Islamophobic. This near parity in numbers of crimes reported/recorded needs to be considered against the background of two very different population groups (Parsons, 2010, see appendix).

A comparison of statistics here between Islamophobic (or anti-Muslim) hate crimes and anti-Semitic hate crimes in London is relevant to our future research. One of our interviewees has urged us to recommend that Muslim businesses should be encouraged to fund the MSF substantially so that it can be as effective as the Community Security Trust (CST) has been during the last two decades in encouraging, facilitating and monitoring the recording and dissemination of anti-Semitic hate crimes. 'If we could be half as effective as the CST we would begin to see the real scale of the problem, at the moment it's just the tip of an iceberg'.<sup>125</sup> We accept that the CST has an outstanding record of service to Jewish Londoners in this field but we will complete the next phase of our research before making detailed recommendations.

### 3.3. Impact of British National Party

We have already dealt with the influence of BNP politics in respect of serious anti-Muslim hate crime and it necessarily follows that the same malign influence is at play in respect to low level anti-Muslim hate crimes. In support of this last point we refer to recent research that demonstrates links between local BNP activity and a rise in hate crime:

One of the biggest increases in hate crime came in Barking's Eastbury ward, where racially motivated

<sup>121</sup> Ahmed – assumed name for research purposes, interview reference AMRC 02.

<sup>122</sup> Interview reference AMRC 01.

<sup>123</sup> Abdullah – assumed name for research purposes, Interview reference AMRC 10.

<sup>124</sup> Interview references AMRC 01 and 10.

<sup>125</sup> Interview reference AMHC 7.

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violence, theft and criminal damage more than doubled in the year after Jeffrey Steed won a council seat for the BNP in May 2006. A year later, hate crime rose again and 45 racial incidents were reported in 12 months (Booth, 2010).

The fact that this increase is referred to in terms of racial incidents is one we have already addressed in this report: we have numerous examples of anti-Muslim hate crimes that have been recorded as race hate crimes. However, given that the BNP has started campaigning in Barking ahead of the 2010 general election and in support of the BNP leader Nick Griffin it will be useful for the MPS to consider just how much BNP vitriol is reserved in this campaign exclusively for Muslims. 'Griffin would not want to see Hindus being attacked but he won't lose any sleep if the local Mosque gets torched' is how a former member of the violent extremist nationalist milieu expressed the implications of BNP campaign policy in Barking.<sup>126</sup>

We mention this because our emphasis on Muslims as prime targets for attack from violent extremist nationalists appears to run counter to *Searchlight's* threat assessment in Barking. This is worth noting because *Searchlight* has an outstanding record of assessing this kind of threat in London and we do not demur from their findings lightly.

As part of its support for anti-BNP campaigners in Barking and across the UK in the run up to the general election *Searchlight* has prepared an informative website *Hope not Hate* (Searchlight, 2010). We make our point about our competing analyses by highlighting the fact that *Hope not Hate* is overwhelmingly dedicated to describing the BNP as racist, anti-Semitic, homophobic and anti-immigrant and not as anti-Muslim or Islamophobic:

The British National Party is becoming a household name. In the process it is trying to appear more moderate and respectable. But it is not. Scratch the surface and you find the same old racist organisation it always was. It is run by hardline nazis who believe that the Holocaust did not happen. Its rule book remains firmly entrenched in the principles of racial superiority and the banning of racial integration (Searchlight, 2010).

We have no interest in defending the BNP from these charges. Indeed we do not doubt they are accurate. Our concern is that police in Barking should have a clearer understanding of how the violent extremist nationalist milieu that gravitates around BNP campaigning is more likely to be focused on Muslims and Muslim buildings as prime targets.

#### 4. Conclusion: Londoners' resilience and good citizenship

We will conclude by putting our research topic into context. The overwhelming majority of Londoners display courtesy and respect to their neighbours irrespective of religion or race. It is often forgotten that it was only a minority of Londoners who were openly hostile to Commonwealth immigrants in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Racist violence was always a fringe minority activity just as anti-Muslim violence has become. However, it only needs a small number of individuals and gangs to make life a misery for minority communities.

Although resilience has become a popular term with academics and policy makers, it is a notion like radicalisation that is hard to pin down and describe conceptually. Nevertheless, for us, resilience properly describes the capacity of Londoners to respond positively and phlegmatically to the challenges of living and working in one of the world's most populous and diverse cities. At key moments in London's history this innate quality in its citizens has become heroic when defeating attempts by political extremists to stigmatise members of London's minority communities. Ultimately the divisive anti-Semitic rhetoric of Mosley's Blackshirts in the 1930s, and the divisive racist rhetoric of the National Front in the 1970s, were defeated by ordinary Londoners who rejected messages of hate towards their neighbours and instead respected and embraced the differences they were encouraged to despise.

Even though the challenge is far greater, we are equally confident that Londoners will defeat the divisive anti-Muslim rhetoric of the British National Party (BNP) in the same way in the next decade. Many visible displays of Londoners' resilience have occurred so far during our research study to help illustrate the solid basis for this optimistic assessment. One example will suffice. On a warm Bank Holiday afternoon in Regents Park orthodox Muslim families, the BNP's target community for vilification, and orthodox Jewish families, no longer a target community for vilification by the BNP, stood out from the majority of secular Londoners. While all London families – and visitors to the capital – were enjoying the delights of the day both orthodox Muslim and Jewish Londoners were immediately identifiable because they were wearing formal and traditional clothes dictated by religious and cultural imperatives derived from their respective renditions of Abrahamic faith. Whereas the majority of secular Londoners were celebrating the good weather by wearing as little as possible, their Muslim and Jewish neighbours were equally comfortable in clothes that concealed most of their flesh from the Sun's rays and public view. Casual observation suggested no discernable friction arising from such opposite

<sup>126</sup> Interview reference AMHC 33.

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approaches to enjoying the Bank Holiday. On the contrary, secular, Muslim and Jewish parents shared the same emotional enjoyment while their children excitedly paddled small boats and relaxed with ice creams.

But the BNP, like their predecessors in the Blackshirts and the NF, do not seek to recruit in Regents Park on a sunny Bank Holiday. Such scenes of multi-cultural harmony and resilience depress and frustrate them. Instead the BNP spreads its message of anti-Muslim bigotry to London audiences when their real Muslims neighbours are absent and are misrepresented instead as extremist, dangerous, subversive and uncongenial.

Both John Denham (UK Secretary for Communities and Local Government) and Sir Paul Stevenson (Metropolitan Police Commissioner) express satisfaction that the last decade witnessed significant improvements in tackling racism and achieving equality and justice for minority ethnic communities. Denham therefore anticipates this new decade's challenge having more to do with achieving equality and justice for citizens disadvantaged through class, thus shifting away from notions of race and ethnicity (Sparrow and Owen, 2010). Stevenson anticipates a decade of policing without institutional racism (Dodd, 2009). We would urge both of them when reading this report to take seriously the suggestion that the new decade should also be marked by a commitment to achieve equality and justice for the capital's poorest and most unfairly stigmatised citizens – Muslim Londoners.

Equality and social justice are certainly the political imperatives that will guide the recommendations we will make when we report on the national situation in *Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate Crime in the UK* in six months time and then across Europe throughout the new decade. Moreover, equality and social justice are clearly the qualities that will be needed to underpin efforts to tackle the problem over the next ten years. We will aim to provide examples of what this might look like in practical terms based on successful grass roots initiatives we encounter in our research. We conclude by giving one illustration from our preliminary research in London.

London Citizens is an established grass roots initiative that

empowers poor and marginalised Londoners to campaign effectively in their local communities to reduce the hardships of urban poverty. For example in Whitechapel Muslims from the East London Mosque have joined campaigns to persuade companies in nearby Docklands to pay a minimum wage to cleaners and more recently to persuade nearby City bankers to restrict excessive interest rates on loans. London Citizens campaigns of this kind are bottom up and have the intrinsic benefit of bringing disadvantaged London citizens from all faiths and none together for a common purpose.

We believe the London Citizens model can be employed to reduce the ignorance and hatred that breeds Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crime. Yasir Abdelmouttalib and his family certainly agree with this assessment. Through their local mosque and community centre they have been introduced to the work of London Citizens and found it enormously empowering. In addition meeting the organisers of London Citizens has reassured them that Londoners are compassionate and that the Londoners who attacked Yasir might become so too if they were educated about good citizenship.

# Appendix

## Islamophobia: Islamophobic Hate Crime and the Challenge that Western Societies must rise to

Tim Parsons

### Introduction

The potential threat posed by Islamophobia to community cohesion in Europe's increasingly multicultural and multi-faith societies, is steadily becoming the focus for increasing attention and scrutiny by governments, inter-governmental organisations, (IGO) such as the European Union and the United Nations, as well as numerous research institutes, community-based non-governmental organisations, (NGO) journalists and faith leaders.

In May 2009 the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, (OIC) presented their second Observatory Report on Islamophobia to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights.

In the foreword to the report, Professor Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, Secretary General of the OIC comments that:

*"Islamophobia signifies the contemporary proliferation of discrimination against Muslims and distortion of Islam and is partly due to the ignorance and lack of understanding of Islam in the West. It would be an unfortunate error in judgement in believing that Islam is linked to terror; that it is intolerant of other religious beliefs, that its values and practices are not democratic; that it favours repression of freedom of expression and undermining human rights.*

Religion being an integral component of every civilization and culture, the misperception and lack of understanding of Islam in the West poses a potent threat to the peace and security of the present and the future generations. Islamophobia is a manifestation of racial discrimination. It constitutes a two stranded form of racism anchored in both the different physical appearance of Muslims as well as the intolerance of their religion and cultural beliefs. It has now spread to the level of mainstream political activity and needs to be considered and addressed as one of the most serious threats to the world's stability."<sup>1</sup>

Institutionalised Islamophobia, often operating beneath the surface on a subliminal level, can manifest itself in anti-Muslim

policy decisions, (the proposed vote on banning the wearing of the burqa in France<sup>2,3</sup> and the existing ban on wearing the hijab in public buildings) or in populist but discriminatory political agendas such as the recent referendum decision in Switzerland to ban the building of minarets<sup>4,5</sup> by mosques.

At a local level, on the street and within communities Islamophobia may manifest itself as religiously motivated hate crime. These crimes, often consisting of incidents of verbal abuse, minor assault or low-level criminal damage can sometimes move into the category of very serious offences; arson, serious assault or murder. Perhaps surprisingly the use of precise legal definitions for such offences whereby the element of religious hatred is clearly articulated is not widespread in Europe and the reporting and recording of such offences is often either inconsistent or non-existent.

### Western Responses

The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)<sup>6</sup> is the largest security organisation in the world with 56 member states including the U.S.A and Russia. The OSCE publishes an Annual Report of Hate Crimes, Incidents and Responses.<sup>7</sup> Their 2008 report in the chapter titled *Crimes Against Muslims*; states: "Although 15 participating States informed the OSCE that they collect data on anti-Muslim hate crimes, only Austria and Sweden submitted figures on such crimes in 2008. Statistical data from Canada and the United States was not available in time for this report and will be published at a later date."

The report further states that: "France did not submit any data on anti-Muslim hate crimes. *Collectif Contre l' Islamophobie en France*<sup>8</sup> reported eight cases of arson or vandalism of mosques, the desecration of three cemeteries and that 59 individuals had been the victims of hate-motivated incidents. The NGO Cojep International reported three cases of the destruction of property; there were two incidents of the use of insulting graffiti reported."<sup>9</sup>

The absence of any official submission of data from the French state on Islamophobic hate crime should be seen within the context of France's very significant Muslim population, estimated to number over 5 million.

<sup>1</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> OIC Observatory Report on Islamophobia, June 2008 to April 2009, p 1

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.csmonitor.com>;

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/mehdi-hasan/2010/01/burka-niqab-bat-french-france>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.archives.chicagotribute.com>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/nov/29/Switzerland-bans-mosque-minarets>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.osce.org>

<sup>7</sup> The OSCE/ODIHR, *Hate Crimes in the OSCE Region – Incidents and Responses, Annual Report for 2008* p. 47

<sup>8</sup> Collective Action against Islamophobia, an NGO.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 47

## Appendix

In the United Kingdom the Criminal Justice Act 2003<sup>10</sup> introduced the offence categories of *incitement to religious hatred* and *religiously motivated offences*. Such offences are now recorded and statistics on such offences can be found on the Ministry of Justice website. Latest figures show a total of 46,000 hate crimes or incidents recorded in the UK (2008-09) of which 1700 were religiously motivated.<sup>11</sup> However, across the 43 Home Office police forces in England and Wales the recording and monitoring of religiously motivated offences is not sufficiently detailed to identify crimes motivated specifically by Islamophobia, or hostility to Muslims.

The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) does have a crime recording system sufficiently sophisticated to breakdown religiously motivated hate crimes by the specific religion subject to such hostile action. Current data shows that the vast majority of religiously motivated hate crimes reported in London are either anti-Semitic, (in this context meaning targeted at Jewish individuals, Jewish premises or communities) or Islamophobic hate crime. The most recent dataset, (the precise figures I am not authorised to publish here) show a close similarity of numbers between the two types of religiously motivated offence – i.e. either anti-Semitic or Islamophobic. This near parity in numbers of crimes reported/recorded needs to be considered against the background of two very different population groups. The Jewish community in Britain is estimated to number around 320,000 (there is in fact no reliable data, the 2001 Census data<sup>12</sup> is now long out of date although some reasonably reliable projections can be made from that dataset).

The UK Jewish population is reasonably static, with an ageing profile, the consequence of a falling birth rate. This population does not benefit from any replenishment through immigration.

The Muslim population in the UK (now estimated at around 2 million)<sup>13</sup> is extremely diverse in terms of nationality, ethnicity and culture. Around half of the UK's Muslim population is estimated to be below the age of 25.<sup>14</sup> This population, which continues to experience some increase through migration to the UK is clearly set to grow. Within this context it might be assumed

that the numbers of reported Islamophobic hate crimes/incidents would be significantly higher from the Muslim communities.

### Reasons for under-reporting

The persistent phenomena of under-reporting of hate motivated crime is well established and in the Government's Cross-Government Action Plan, clearly reiterated: "Large numbers of people who experience hate crime do not report these crimes to the police."<sup>15</sup>

Identifying underlying reasons for the under-reporting of hate crime and Islamophobic hate crime in particular, is far harder to achieve. We might speculate that many in the Muslim community or communities are either distrustful of the police, distrustful of democratic institutions generally or perceive that their complaints won't be taken seriously. There may be additional reasons for under-reporting or not reporting hate crime and further contributing factors that might exert a negative influence. These might include language barriers, with victims having insufficient grasp of English to make them confident enough to explain their situation to a public official; cultural influences, whereby there is pressure from within the community not to involve outside agencies such as the police, may also have an influence.

The age and gender of the victim or victims, may also have a bearing on their ability to come forward and report such incidents to the police or; there may be a sense of weariness and resignation to the perceived inevitability of religious persecution from a hostile and largely agnostic ethnic majority.

In fact the evidence to support any of these assertions is not at all clear-cut. For instance a study conducted by Gallup for the Coexist Foundation (2009) found that "British Muslims (76%) are more likely than the British public (67%) as a whole to say they trust their police force."<sup>16</sup> This would seem to imply that British Muslims would not be reticent about coming forward and reporting matters to the police if they became the victims of crime – including hate crime.

<sup>10</sup> *The Criminal Justice Act 2003*, Sub Sections 145 & 146

<sup>11</sup> Source: Race Confidence and Justice Unit – OJCR.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.boardofdeputies.org.uk>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk>, Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.opendemocracy.net>

<sup>15</sup> Hate Crime – The Cross-Government Action Plan, p. 9

<sup>16</sup> *The Gallup Coexist Index 2009: A global Study of Interfaith Relations*, The Coexist Foundation, 2009 p.24



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However a different piece of research conducted by the European Union<sup>17</sup> across the 27 states within the EU found that “Overall 51% of Muslims compared to 20% of non-Muslim ethnic minorities surveyed believe discrimination on grounds of religion or belief to be “very” or “fairly” widespread.”<sup>18</sup> It also found that “11% of all Muslim respondents considered that they were a victim of a racially motivated assault, threat or serious harassment in the last 12 months.” The report goes on to say that: “Although in percentage terms the number may not appear to be so high, in real terms, if we translate this to the entire Muslim population in the member states where Muslim respondents were surveyed, the level of victimisation would extend into thousands of cases every year that are not recorded by the police as racist incidents in the majority of member states.”<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps the most significant finding in the report and the one that might give an indication towards some of the fundamental reasons for the under-reporting of hate crime is the observation that: “The majority of Muslim respondents are largely unaware that discrimination against them might be illegal. Furthermore, even more respondents are unaware of any organisation in their country that might be able to assist them if they are discriminated against.”<sup>20</sup>

Of course these findings must be handled with care and their wider context fully considered; for instance the survey was conducted across the whole of the European Union and not concentrated around the situation in the UK, and it must be remembered that in many EU states the entire national attitude towards immigration, ethnic and religious diversity, and pluralism in society is far less positive than it is in Britain.

## Conclusions

The picture for policymakers attempting to reduce the incidence of Islamophobic hate crime and increase the levels of reporting of such crimes, is clearly incomplete. At the very least, one could assert from the evidence available that a problem exists, that perceptions are as important in shaping a community's attitude towards the police and officialdom generally, as well as feelings about how safe people might feel in their homes and in public spaces.

More research needs to be conducted into the underlying issues; the fundamentals of hate crime offending, the propensity or otherwise of individuals to report incidents of discrimination, harassment or assault and what Muslim communities themselves would like to see changed or improved in regard to an appropriate police response.

Attempting to change or influence the overlaying social and political background, against which Islamophobic hate crimes might proliferate, is a far more challenging issue to address. It should be a matter of concern to the majority, not just those within Muslim communities themselves that mainstream political parties in countries such as France and Switzerland should be seen to pursue blatantly Islamophobic domestic policies, or propagate a strongly Islamophobic national political discourse.

Too often in Western countries popular discourse on the importance of “valuing” equality, diversity and human rights does not feed through into the actions of governments; either towards their own Muslim citizens or towards the majority Muslim countries that they seek relations with. Such an inconsistency in approach I would argue, serves only to undermine all efforts to combat Islamophobia within a domestic context, and to build a sustainable and enduring sense of belonging and equal status among the diverse Muslim communities we seek to engage with.

It must surely be even more damaging to the promotion of equality and human rights to be glib and insincere in our commitment to diversity; to write and publish policies, strategies, action plans and organisational goals that in reality only a small minority have any interest in pursuing, developing or delivering. If that is the level of our commitment then we are surely condemned to fail and worse to further alienate the very people we claim to want to help.

<sup>17</sup> EU-MIDIS *European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey, 2009*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11



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