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British Muslim Identities

'My parents came from Pakistan in the 60s. My dad first worked in a mill and then as a postal worker until he retired. I consider myself to be a British Muslim but I don't like to be pushed into defining myself, it has a dislocating effect. To some, as a Muslim I am either a fanatical terrorist or a victim of Islam, and I am neither of those: we are just people...' This extract from a contribution by **Salma Yaqoob** was published in The Guardian on 30 November 2004, along with a wide range of similarly personal statements from others.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/islam/voices/0,15592,1360343,00.html>

'No one chooses to be born into a Muslim family,' wrote **Tariq Modood** in January 2005. 'Similarly, no one chooses to be born into a society where to be a Muslim creates suspicion, hostility, or failure to get the job you applied for. How Muslims respond to these circumstances will vary. Some will organise resistance; others will try to stop looking like Muslims (the equivalent of "passing"); some will build an ideology out of their subordination, others will not, just as some women will embrace feminism and some will not...'

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/islam/story/0,15568,1394784,00.html>

In an interview for the BBC, reported on 25 July 2005, Professor **Tariq Ramadan** talked about British and European forms of Islam. "My work is about what it is to be truly Muslim and truly European at the same time...Let's say you are vegetarian and a poet, and you are at a dinner. You are going to say you are vegetarian. But at a party, you will say you are a poet. We all have multiple identities which are also moving identities - and this is what European Muslims must solve. How can they remain true to their ethics and values? I think they need to start by getting rid of some of the confusion over what are Muslim values.'

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/4714101.stm>

Earlier (summer 2004), a substantial account of **Tariq Ramadan's** ideas was presented through an interview conducted by Rosemary Bechler on behalf of Open Democracy. 'For over fifteen years,' he said, 'I have tried to assess what room is available within the Islamic legacy to extract new thoughts and interpretations without sacrificing respect for our Qu'ran and the prophetic tradition. Not everything has yet been revealed. I believe that this silence, which encourages us to be creative, is coming from God. I am not alone here; a whole religious and prophetic tradition tells us that it is from mercy that God remains silent on some subjects.'

http://www.opendemocracy.net/faith-europe_islam/article_2006.jsp

'We can choose our identity, but sometimes it also chooses us,' wrote **Gary Younge** in *The Guardian* in January 2005. 'A Muslim reader, with a wife and three daughters, wrote to me to say that two of his girls voluntarily wear the hijab whereas his wife and one other do not. 'This is imposed from outside as much as inside,' he wrote. 'The girls used to consider themselves Pakistani, until they visited Pakistan. They could not consider themselves British because the external world told them they weren't. So their identity became "British Muslim". Not a religious revival, but an establishment of identity. Since 9/11 however, they will not relinquish the "headgear". It would be a sign of defeat. Whilst worn, it symbolises resistance.'

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/islam/story/0,15568,1395081,00.html>

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Debates and discussions amongst Muslims

'Since well before the atrocities of 9/11,' wrote Faisal Bodi in *The Guardian* in summer 2004, 'the trajectory of government legislation and policy has been to demonise and criminalise the Muslim community, a fact that the much-quoted discrepancy between arrest and conviction figures starkly illustrates. The focus of British Muslim organisations' work should be directed at undermining this cynical government agenda, not supporting it.' This was followed by an exchange of letters with Inayat Bunglawala about how and to what extent British Muslim communities should engage with the government.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,,1287655,00.html>

In an article entitled 'The struggle for Islam's soul' in the *New Statesman* on 18 July, **Ziauddin Sardar** wrote about internal divisions within Islam. 'Most Muslims abhor violence yet the terrorists are a product of a specific mindset that has deep roots in Islamic history. If Muslims refuse to confront this, we will all be prey to more terror. Most Muslims abhor violence, yet the terrorists are a product of a specific mindset that has deep roots in Islamic history. If Muslims refuse to confront this, we will all be prey to more terror.'

<http://www.newstatesman.com/200507180004>

Earlier in the year (*The Guardian*, 21 January 2005) **Zia Sardar** published an article entitled 'Asking the wrong questions can be fatal'. The key questions to be addressed, he said, were: 'Is secular Britain ... generous and capable enough to provide adequate space for Muslims to live as Muslims? Will the secularists allow us the full expression of our religious identity, including a political dimension, in the public sphere?' And Muslims must ask themselves: 'How can we use our own internal resources to empower ourselves and become active citizens of a secular Britain?' He added: 'Muslims can be loyal to Britain only by being loyal to their own worldview. And Britain can only become a genuinely pluralistic and multicultural society by providing the Muslim community with enough space to express itself the way it chooses. Neither Britain nor the Muslim community can assume they know the answers. Instead, we need new questions.'

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/islam/story/0,15568,1395457,00.html>

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Inter-faith dialogue and action

The July issue of the newsletter of the **Inter Faith Network** was devoted almost entirely to quoting statements about the London bombs from leaders of faith communities at both national and local levels, and gave information about a wide range of vigils, meetings and events.

<http://www.interfaith.org.uk/ifu28.pdf>

On 11 July the **Network** issued a short but clear and helpful statement entitled *Looking after each other*, outlining practical and symbolic ways in which faith communities should work together.

<http://www.interfaith.org.uk/lookingafter.pdf>

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