Beyond "Angry Muslims"? Reporting Muslim Voices in the British Press

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In this article we discuss the significance of how a variety of self-consciously Muslim actors have become increasingly discernable in public and media discourses in Britain. We show how within news reporting itself there is an observable variety of Muslim perspectives and that this marks a positive contrast with the more limited range of argumentation (publicly reported at least) at an earlier period in the emergence of British Muslim identities in the late 1980s at the time of the Rushdie affair. We maintain that a discussion of these developments would benefit from a vocabulary that can analytically describe the boundaries between, and content within, a variety of Muslim voices, as well as evaluate what their inclusion in mainstream public discourses implies for an understanding of more macro concerns around citizenship and nationhood. This article makes a tentative contribution to this goal by critically evaluating the inclusion and representation in the national press of British Muslim voices. We wish to draw attention to the ways in which the British case illustrates how relational notions of Muslim "fundamentalism" and "moderation" are present within the inclusion and representation of Muslim voices within news reporting. This can be illustrated by how Muslim actors are characterized as angry, ambiguous, and approving. What is crucial to note is that this amounts to more than simply including Muslim voices of fundamentalist anger.

Over the last decade or so, the voices of a variety of self-consciously Muslim actors have become increasingly discernable in public and media discourses in Britain. Often invoked in matters of "integration" and citizenship in Britain, these voices are not only those of professional Muslim commentators or journalists. Within news reporting itself there is an observable pattern of Muslim perspectives, and we argue that this marks a positive contrast with the more limited

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range of argumentation (publicly reported at least) at an earlier period in the emergence of British Muslim identities in the late 1980s at the time of the Rushdie affair (Appignanesi & Maitland, 1989). At this earlier stage, Muslim perspectives were either largely ignored or monochromatic. That is to say that the more nuanced—though still outwardly religiously conservative—Muslim opposition to the publication of the Satanic Verses remained in the shadow of a public discourse oriented according to vectors of liberal-good and Muslim-bad positions.

A display and discussion of these developments would benefit from a vocabulary that can analytically describe the boundaries between, and content within, a variety of Muslim voices, as well as evaluate what their inclusion in mainstream public discourses implies for the understanding of more macro concerns around citizenship. This article could not possibly seek to provide this in any comprehensive fashion. Such a task would be patterned by numerous differences among a variety of British Muslim actors or spokespeople in civil society, each of whom may lay claim to authenticity in the representation of British Muslim life. What is required, therefore, is an incremental approach that may be developed and modified by other authors in addition to ourselves.

This article makes a tentative contribution to this goal by gauging the inclusion and representation in the national press, as a key constituent of the public sphere, of British Muslim voices. Whereas literature on the idea of the public sphere is lengthy and complex, for the purposes of our discussion it will be conceived as two interdependent possibilities of a "communicative" and "institutional" space (Habermas, 1974/2004; Dahlgren, 1991), where democracy can be *expressed* and civic engagement *practiced*. While the notion of the public sphere might be traced to Kant's essay on Enlightenment, it is in Habermas that we find the most widely discussed modern formulation. For Habermas (1974/2004) the public sphere refers to an arena that is simultaneously inside and outside civil society. This is because it is not a direct function of the State yet is open to debate on the nature of public issues on which state policy might be exercised. He thus characterized it as

> a sphere which mediates between society and state, in which the public organises itself as the bearer of public opinion, accords with the principle of the public sphere-that principle of public information which once had to be fought for against the arcane politics of monarchies and which since that time has made possible the democratic control of state activities. (Habermas, 1974/2004, p. 351)

There is, of course, both a descriptive and normative dimension to Habermas' account, and it is the descriptive dimension that we are utilizing here. The normative function in Habermas' account conceives of the public sphere as based upon notions of public good as distinct from private interest and forms of private life (notably families) (see Calhoun, 2000, p. 533). This has been widely criticized by a variety of authors including Fraser (1995) and Cassonova (1994), who either insist that it is undesirable to have public debate confined to a single, overarching sphere or that Habermas ignores how matters of both private and public life, such as religion, have historically played an important role in constituting notions of the public. In either case what is most important to note for the purposes of this article is how the mass media have become central to most formulations of the public sphere because of the ways the media distribute information to citizens and, at least in theory, facilitate public debate (Curran,

1991)—even while this relationship is subject to a variety of well established and compelling critical readings (Nightingale & Ross, 2003).

To narrow our focus on the study of Muslim voices in the public sphere, we have selected a case from the print media that concerns the national press reaction to comments made by the former British Home Secretary, Foreign Secretary, the Leader of the House at the time of his comments, and later Justice Secretary, Jack Straw, detailing how he asked Muslim women to remove their face veils during consultations in his constituency office. This article reports on a content analysis of the national press reaction to these comments and discusses specifically how Muslim voices were invoked during the coverage. The central issue we wish to stress is how this case is illustrative of the relational notions of Muslim fundamentalism and moderation that are present within the inclusion and representation of Muslim voices within news reporting. This can be illustrated by how Muslim actors are characterized as angry, ambiguous, and approving of Straw's comments. What is crucial to note is that this amounts to *more* than simply including Muslim voices of fundamentalist-anger, which in a partisan manner might reflect the political orientations of a variety of publications (see Meer & Modood, 2009b, for a qualitative discussion with senior journalists on this point). This supports our general thesis that within the news reporting of issues affecting Muslims there is a proliferation in the inclusion of Muslim voices in Britain, and this is a progressive development *where it opens up the public sphere to the expression of a variety of Muslim "differences."*

Before we elaborate, we return to Jack Straw's original statement and remind ourselves of the two-fold rationale he outlined. While this article is primarily concerned with the delineation of Muslim voices within the press reaction to his comments and not the motivation behind his intervention, we are interested in the ways in which he characterized his concerns for this and, in turn, framed some of the ensuing reportage.

READING MUSLIMS

In his weekly column in the *Lancashire Telegraph* (October 5, 2006), Straw described how he asks Muslim women wearing face veils (*niqab*) to remove them when meeting him in his Blackburn constituency office. In the article he gave two reasons for this. First, he suggested that the removal of the face veil would enable him to engage more effectively in a "face-to-face" conversation since it would permit him to "see what the other person means, and not just hear what they say," stressing the value of being able to see someone's face in a conversation. He then moved from a focus on the interpersonal to the societal, by describing face veils as "a visible statement of separation and difference" that made "better, positive relations between the two communities more difficult."[1] He continued:

> It was not the first time I had conducted an interview with someone in a full veil, but this particular encounter, though very polite and respectful on both sides, got me thinking. In part, this was because of the apparent incongruity between the signals which indicate common bonds—the entirely English accent, the couple's education (wholly in the UK)—and the fact of the veil. Above all, it was because I felt uncomfortable about talking to someone "face-to-face" who I could not see. (Straw, 2006, n.p.)

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[1]Throughout the article and subsequent interviews, Straw continually distinguished between the full face veil or *niqab* and other types of Muslim coverings such as the headscarf or *hijab*.

It is worth reflecting on the context in which this issue was raised prior to embarking upon the media analysis that forms the main part of this article. This is because the public presence of Muslim "difference" in Britain has become increasingly conspicuous. This is not limited to problematizing episodes of violent extremism that have made Muslims a more "visible" minority. The latter of course inevitably informs part of a broader picture but should not obscure what Modood (1988) once characterized as an "ethnic assertiveness" among Muslims themselves. Over the last two decades, this assertiveness has translated into forms of mobilization and claims-making which have challenged British citizenship to accommodate Muslim particularities, specifically by contesting the secular and narrowly racial focus of British multiculturalist approaches (Meer & Modood, 2009a).

This was perhaps symbolized by the way in which the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) developed and emerged as the main interlocutor in State–Muslim engagement and how it achieved some success in establishing a Muslim voice in the corridors of power (Radcliffe, 2004). The creation of a religion question on the national Census (Aspinall, 2000), achieving state funding for the first Muslim schools (Meer, 2009), and more broadly having socio-economic policies targeted at severely deprived Muslim groups (Policy Innovation Unit, 2001; Abrams & Houston, 2006) illustrate these successes. Simultaneously, and while these modifications of British multiculturalism have been important in projecting a symbolic meaning, they remain comparatively modest when compared with the race-equality components of British multiculturalism. It is curious then, given the longevity of its *ethnic* and *racial* focus, that the fate of multiculturalism in Britain should have come to be so intertwined with the political identities of Muslims (Dwyer & Uberoi, 2008).

This intertwining corresponds with how the preeminence of the MCB waned in the mid-2000s as it grew critical of the Iraq war and the so called "war on terrorism." It has also faced considerable public criticism from both government and civil society bodies (particularly of the centre-right) for allegedly failing to reject extremism clearly and decisively.[2] Indeed, while in opposition, Prime Minister David Cameron likened the MCB to the far-right British National Party (BNP) (Cameron, 2007).

Perhaps most importantly for our discussion is that allied to these complaints has been the issue of how "representative" of British Muslims the organization actually is—a question that has plagued it since the early days but which had a more damaging impact upon its credibility when allied to a handful of other complaints.[3] One outcome of this political critique has been the invitation to represent British Muslims in matters of consultation as stakeholders to a plethora of other, paradoxically less representative Muslim organizations (such as the Sufi Muslim Council (SMC) and the Al-Khoie Foundation). At the same time, newer advisory groups (such as the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Body (MINAB)) do not seek the same remit of representation as the MCB, while other older bodies such as the Islamic Sharia Council (ISC) continue to maintain an affiliate membership of the MCB.

Muslim assertiveness, therefore, has proven to be patterned by a number of internal differentiations among different Muslim actors, which can be intertwined with external discourses

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[2] Such charges are largely circumstantial owing to the links between the MCB members and the Islamist organisation Jamat-e-Islami which was founded in northern India in the 1930s by Abu A'la Mawdudi.

[3] Though interestingly, its regional affiliates such as the Muslim Council of Wales (MCW) have not faced such criticism.

concerning the ascription of names and labels. A good illustration of this may be found in the notion of "moderate" Muslim (Modood & Ahmad, 2007). As one Muslim civil society actor has put it:

> I think those are labels which are imposed on us. How can you be a moderate Muslim—you're either a Muslim or you're not. [. . .] I regard myself as a fundamentalist Muslim because I believe in the fundamentals of Islam, but I'm not what people understand as a fundamentalist. So if we accept that language then we accept the labels which are put upon us. (Abdullah Trevathan, interviewed by Meer, March 6, 2006)

Indeed, terms such as "moderate" and "fundamentalism" are among many that are enormously contested and relational and, therefore, demand qualification and contextualization. This point is convincingly made in Denoeux's (2002) insistence that fundamentalism can be a highly problematic concept because of the connotations derived from its origins in early twentieth century American Protestantism, such that it is not easily applied to Islam and Muslims in Britain (see Modood, 1990, for an early conceptual delineation). Nevertheless, and despite its origins, it is often the case that fundamentalism is made flesh by drawing upon examples of "Islamic fundamentalism" with the effect that "Islamic fundamentalism has become a metaphor for fundamentalism in general" (Sayyid, 1997, pp. 7–8).

Of course, the dividing line between categories such as fundamentalist and moderate is not only context-specific but also highly porous and dependent upon subjective value judgments (Jackson, 2008). Nevertheless, descriptive terms are required and may be appropriated in full knowledge of their contested nature. For example, Modood and Ahmad (2007, pp. 191–192) maintain that "moderate Muslim is obviously a relational term: it only makes sense in terms of a contrast with non-moderates, as is always the case in a moderate-radical couplet (cf. moderate feminist and radical feminist)." What, then, of its antithesis?

> Non-moderate Islam can be seen as ahistorical and making no concessions to interpretation and context. Actions that are prescribed in the Qur'an (e.g., compassionate treatment of slaves) are taken to be equally appropriate today, a time when slavery has no moral justification. Similarly, the harsh punishments of *hudod*, such as the cutting off of the hand of a thief, are read as if they apply to all times and places, without regard to levels of poverty and welfare, and the achievement of social justice that the Qur'an exhorts. The Qur'an and *Shariah* are thus read as not primarily enunciating and illustrating principles for correct action but as concrete and fixed sets of actions. Prominent themes and principles within the Qur'an, and reiterated in *Shariah* and the Hadith, such as mercy, compassion and social justice, are relegated to the background in favour of narrow, rigid interpretations and extreme actions. No room for critical reasoning and interpretation (*ijtihad*) is allowed but a particular dogmatic interpretation is asserted to be the only one possible. Added to this is a concept of '*jihad*' in which military action—rather than spiritual, ethical or even political struggle—is given primacy and is seen as most apposite in the world today. It is this narrow, reductionist view of Islam and human conduct, without a full understanding of the scope of Qur'anic teachings and principles. . . . (Modood & Ahmad, 2007, p. 192)

It is our argument that the salience of discourses of nonmoderate or fundamentalist Islam has furnished critics with the means to characterize Muslims as difficult to accommodate (Joppke, 2009; Policy Exchange, 2007; Moore, 2006). This is particularly the case when

Muslims are currently perceived to be, often uniquely, in contravention of liberal discourses of individual rights and secularism that are at risk of being surrendered by concessions implied in multiculturalist approaches (Hutton, 2007; Hansen, 2006; Toynbee, 2005). It is exemplified by the way in which visible Muslim practices such as veiling[4] have in public discourses been reduced to and conflated with alleged Muslim practices such as forced marriages, female gential mutilation, a rejection of positive law in favor of criminal shar'ia law, and so on (Meer, Dwyer, & Modood, 2010). Each suggests a radical "otherness" about Muslims and an illiberality about multiculturalism. Since the latter is alleged to license these practices, opposition to the practice, it is argued, necessarily invalidates the policy.[5]

A related development derives from global events and not necessarily from the acts of terrorism undertaken by protagonists proclaiming a Muslim agenda (which are routinely condemned by leading British-Muslim bodies), but from the subsequent conflation of a criminal minority with an assumed tendency inherent to the many. Indeed, in a post-9/11 and 7/7 climate, the explanatory purchase of Muslim cultural dysfunctionality has generated a profitable discursive economy in accounting for what has been described as "Islamic terrorism" (Phillips, 2006; Gove, 2006; Cohen, 2007). The net outcome of these issues is a coupling of diversity and anti-terrorism agendas that has implicated contemporary British multiculturalism as the culprit of Britain's security woes (see Modood's [2008] response to this charge).

THE METHODOLOGICAL RATIONALE

This was the context in which Straw's comments were received in the press. Yet simultaneously, in terms of the "presentational devices" the newspapers enlisted (Van Emerson & Houtlosser, 1999, p. 484), Straw was frequently characterized as an "ally" of Muslims. To explore this further, we searched the *LexisNexus* database of national newspaper archives with the key words "Straw" and "Veil" and identified 497 items in total. We purposefully limited the timeframe to data produced during a 10-day period in which the issue dominated the news agenda (October 5–15, 2006), and with the use of *Atlas Ti* we coded this data in two stages: first, according to whether they comprised 1-Newspaper Editorials or Leaders, 2-News Items or News Features, 3-Letters, and 4-Columnist Opinion or Comment; and second, according to a coding schedule devised to tap key words such as "reaction," "agreement," "disagreement," "leader," "representative," "anger," "support," and so forth, before qualitatively tracing the relationships between the ways in which these newspaper items invoked or made reference to Muslim actors therein.

This generated a considerable amount of data that cannot all be summarized here, so this discussion will be limited to a cross-section of findings from News Items or News Features and Letters.[6] One important rationale for limiting our analysis to these items concerns the ways in which the currency of different types of press discourse is sometimes overlooked, which means that the content of newspapers can be homogenized in a manner that ignores internal variations between different sections. For example, van Dijk (1999, quoted in Richardson,

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[4]Including the headscarf or *hijab*, full face veil or *niqab*, or full body garments such as the *jilbab*.

[5]See Meer and Modood's (2009a) critique of Joppke (2004) on this point.

[6]Meer, Dwyer, and Modood (2010) explore the Leaders and Comment separately.

2001, p. 148) has argued that "speakers routinely refer to . . . newspapers as their source (and authority) of knowledge or opinions about ethnic minorities." At the same time, he is unable to discern the different roles played by public intellectuals and opinion-forming commentators or columnists (Meer, 2006), as well as editorials and leaders, that consistently propagate the social and political outlooks of a variety of publications (Franklin, 2008).

Two examples illustrate this point. During the 1999 NATO-led intervention in Kosovo, columnist Julie Burchill, then of *The Guardian*, was openly and consistently hostile to the pro-intervention stance advanced by her paper. Four years later, as her paper adopted a broadly anti-war stance on the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, she deployed an aggressively pro-war argument (see Burchill, 1999a, 1999b, 2003a, 2003b). However, Sam Kiley of *The Times* resigned in protest at what he described as being forced to adhere to the newspaper line on Israeli–Palestinian relations, stating that "the *Times* foreign editor and other middle managers flew into hysterical terror every time a pro-Israel lobbying group wrote in with a quibble or complaint and then usually took their side against their writers. I was told I should not refer to 'assassinations' of Israel's opponents nor to 'extrajudicial killings or executions' " (see the *Evening Standard*'s "Kiley attacks," 2001). This means that while newspapers are capable of "influencing audience attitudes, values and beliefs" (Richardson, 2001, p. 148), they may do so in different ways. Focusing on news items in contrast to leaders or opinion pieces is one means of opening this up (see also Meer & Mouristen, 2009), and so overcoming the a priori assumption that a single publication contains no significant internal variation (Khiabany & Williamson, 2008).

MUSLIM VOICES IN NEWS ITEMS OR NEWS FEATURES

Turning now to the context of the press reaction, most of the initial news items followed a similar sequence in drawing upon Straw's credibility as a long-time, anti-racist, friendly politician with a significant Muslim electorate within his own constituency. This rhetorical maneuver frequently redeployed Straw's (2006) own statement ("if not me, then who?") on the appropriateness of his raising the issue. Many news items quoted from Straw's original article his own retelling of a conversation he had with a Muslim woman who expressed how "she felt more comfortable wearing the veil. People bothered her less. I [Straw] said I would reflect on what she had said. Would she think hard about what I had said?" (n.p.). This rationale would benefit from a critical reading that is attuned to a variety of feminist critiques, specifically surrounding the veil as a contested signifier (Dwyer, 1999). This article touches upon this below, and a theoretical discussion of contemporary implications of the veil and issues of gender is offered elsewhere (Meer, Dwyer, & Modood, 2010; Dwyer, 2008), and so we will not repeat it here. The focus instead will remain upon the variety of Muslim voices that were invoked in the press reaction to these comments.

In drawing upon Straw's framing, nearly all news items on Friday, October 6, and Saturday, October 7, 2006 (one and two days after his original article in the *Lancashire Evening Times*), moved from Straw's question to detail the reactions amongst Muslim spokespeople. This proceeded through at least two means. The first and immediate coverage reported a general Muslim reaction gauged by speaking to Muslim figures that possessed some national standing. This was followed by more specific reporting on the reaction from local Muslims in Straw's Blackburn constituency.

The immediate news items framed a spectrum of Muslim spokespeople voicing "anger," "ambivalence," and "approval" in reaction to Straw's comments, albeit with different emphases and permutations. It is worth reflecting on how these might overlap with or deviate from the characterizations of Muslim fundamentalism or moderation elaborated earlier. Following Modood and Ahmed's (2007, p. 121) reflexive consideration of these terms, a notion of the former would conceive Islam as a-historical by making no concessions to interpretation and context. It would limit space for critical reasoning and interpretation (*ijtihad*) in the promotion of a dogmatic interpretation. The latter, relationally, would be its opposite.

These notions do indeed map onto characterizations of Muslim responses in the news items. For example, the *Sun* ("Lift Your Veils," 2006) structured its reporting with a half-way subheading entitled "anger," which included comments from Hamid Quereshi, chairman of the Lancashire Council of Mosques: "This has the potential to cause anger. Women believe wearing a veil is God's command." The *Sun* also detailed comments by Massoud Shadjareh of Islamic Human Rights "Foundation" (sic) (the Islamic Human Rights Commission [IHRC]) that "it is astonishing Mr. Straw chose to selectively discriminate on the basis of religion." So there are two sources of Muslim "anger" here. The first may be characterized as typical fundamentalist response, while the latter is suspicious of selective discrimination against Muslims.

The titles of the immediate news items illustrate this. Interestingly, at least half of the *Sun*'s entire news item incorporated comments from different Muslim figures. These included the "ambivalent" admission from Dr. Daud Abdullah of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB): "The veil does cause some discomfort to non-Muslims. Muslim scholars are divided over whether a woman should cover her face. It is up to the woman to choose." It also included Ghayasuddin Siddiqui, leader of the Muslim Parliament of Great Britain, who, as an exemplar of Muslim "approval," was described as "welcoming Mr. Straw's comments" before being quoted as stating: "Muslims should recognize that wearing the niqab was a cultural requirement rather than a religious one." The *Sun* interpreted this as evidence that "a small Muslim minority are pressing their views on others [other Muslims]." The crucial point to note is that *more* than Muslim voices of "fundamentalist-anger" are being invoked, and this includes quite a sober disavowal of Straw's criticisms, as well as something in between. This supports the general thesis of this article that not only sensationalist Muslim voices are being distilled in news reporting on Muslims and that this is worth registering.

During the following day's coverage the *Sun* ("Muslim Fury," 2006) opened with the statement: "Jack Straw faced a bitter backlash yesterday as he said ALL British Muslim women should stop wearing veils. Angry Asian groups claimed his remarks were divisive and provocative."[7] It is difficult to discern from the rest of the news item whether the reference to "Asian groups" betrays a conscious attempt to differentiate some Muslim groups from others, or whether it is due more to slippage. Nevertheless, the *Sun* ("Muslim Fury," 2006) justified its account with some on the ground reporting from Blackburn in a way that most newspapers

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[7]During a BBC Radio Lancashire interview that followed his newspaper article, Straw said: "Communities are bound together partly by informal chance relations between strangers people being able to acknowledge each other in the street or being able to pass the time of day. That's made more difficult if people are wearing a veil. That's just a fact of life. I understand the concerns but I hope there can be a mature debate." When asked if he would rather that veils be discarded, he replied: "Yes. It needs to be made clear I am not talking about being prescriptive but with all caveats, yes, I would rather" (October 6, 2006, available from http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/5410472.stm).

sought to detail in the days after the initial reaction. These included the following testimonies, attributed to Muslim women in Straw's constituency:

Shazia Ahmed, 19: Muslim women don't have to wear veils but there are deep religious reasons why they do. What business has Jack Straw to say we should not wear them? I have never met anyone who has considered it a problem. His comments are misjudged and are not helpful in the current climate.

Baksedha Khan, 34: I would refuse to take off my veil if I visited Mr. Straw's surgery. We are supposed to live in a free country. I reserve my right to be fully clothed from head to toe. Mr. Straw's been the MP in this area for a long time so he should know full well why veils are worn. Why is he making a big issue of this now? Does he have an ulterior motive? This is all about his political future and he is looking for publicity.

Fauzia Ali, 23: I choose not to wear a veil or a headscarf. I know some women would refuse to leave the house if they had to remove them. It is trivial to suggest that you need to see someone's face to speak to them freely. People can still communicate with a veil on.

The length of each extract is worth noting, especially as they were published in a tabloid newspaper and give a degree of nuanced voice to Muslim women who hold broadly critical perspectives of Straw's comments. As such, this highlights a remarkable contrast with how newspaper editorials broadly cast the veil as an impediment to Muslim women's autonomy (Meer et al., 2010). In the latter case, what was observable was a paradoxical tendency to simultaneously cast Muslim women as the main vehicles of integration as well as the first victims of the failure of integration. In this context, freely choosing to wear the veil is, in some ways, a greater offence than being forced to wear it, or as Khibany and Williamson (2008, p. 69) put it: "Veiled women are considered to be ungrateful subjects who have failed to assimilate and are deemed to threaten the British way of life." Yet in these news items the reporting of Muslim women's voices lends support to what Malik (2009) conceives as an "iteration of agency" in that Muslim women challenge the assumption of subordination by speaking for themselves.

Further evidence of the tendency within news coverage to frame Muslim voices within a matrix of anger, ambivalence, and support is found in the *Mirror's* (" 'Face to Face,' Muslim Anger," 2006) use of Ghayasuddin Siddiqui's position in full:

What I think we need to recognize is only a very small number of Muslim women put on the veil. It is not an Islamic requirement—it's a cultural thing. A woman who doesn't cover herself is as good a woman as a woman who does. They are equally good Muslims.

The *Mirror* contrasted this with comments attributed to the MCB: "If anything, this is going to alienate Muslim women and be a catalyst for more to wear the veil. This country is meant to celebrate diversity" (based upon other sources, it transpires that these words were specifically spoken by Sheik Ibrahim Dogra). The only exception to the pattern delineated above and elaborated further below was the *Daily Star* ("These Veils," 2006), which focused exclusively upon the "angry" variety of Muslim responses. These included Muhammed Umar, chairman of the Ramadhan Foundation, who the paper described as having "hit out" in stating that:

"Mr. Straw's stance is disgraceful. For a Muslim woman it is important to wear a veil. Surely statements like this will not help promote racial integration one iota." In support of our analysis of the exceptional stance of the *Daily Star*, we point to how, in its reporting, this paper gave significant emphasis to Hamid Qureshi, chairman of the Lancashire Council of Mosques, who maintained that:

> I don't know what principle he's [Straw] trying to establish. This is not helpful. It is disrespectful and can only cause anger and division. Many Muslim women feel uncomfortable without a veil because they should not expose their face to men who are of an age of marriage.

The *Daily Star* ("Get Em Off!," 2006) then followed this initial coverage with the findings of its poll which it reported as: "Straw's call for Muslim women to remove their veils is backed by a massive 97% of Brits." Notice that this news header ("Get Em Off!") reads more like a leader than a news item. Also, it is unclear from the item whether the alleged sample of "Brits" included Muslims. Elsewhere, Qureshi and Shadjareh are also included in the *Daily Mail's* ("Take Off Your Veil," 2006) report subheaded: "Jack Straw engulfed in race row." Despite this emotive header, the paper presented an otherwise sober account that included comments from the Muslim figures elaborated above.

Among the broadsheets, during the same period of immediate news reporting, the *Independent* ("Straw: I Feel Uncomfortable," 2006) referred to Shadjareh and Qureshi but nuanced their positions with other oppositional statements. These included Rajnaara Akhtar, chair of *Protect-Hijab*, who lamented "a deep lack of understanding of the values of this religious choice to many women ... the veil is not taken lightly by the vast majority of women who choose to observe it." The *Independent* perhaps also contained the fullest example of an "ambivalent" Muslim response in its reference to Daud Abdullah, introduced as a "spokesman" for the MCB, who "acknowledged" that the veil

> *can* cause some discomfort to non-Muslims. Even within the Muslim community the scholars have different views on this. There are those who believe it is obligatory for the Muslim woman to cover her face. Others say she is not obliged to cover up. (Emphasis in original)

The opening sentence of the *Guardian's* ("Take Off the Veil," 2006) news item read: "Jack Straw provoked anger and indignation among broad sections of the Muslim community." It quoted Shadjareh as asking: "Would he say to the Jewish people living in Stamford Hill that they shouldn't dress like Orthodox Jews?" before the paper contrasted the views of two Muslim politicians. The first was Khalid Mahmood, Labour MP for Birmingham Perry Barr, who voiced concerns that "Jack is at risk of providing succor to people who hold anti-Muslim prejudices. Someone of his stature and understanding of the community needs to look at this in a bit more depth." The second figure was the Muslim peer Lady Uddin, who the paper described as having "defended Mr. Straw's decision to raise the issue, although she said Muslim women should be able to choose what they wore." The fuller statement attributed to her by the *Guardian* maintained: "He should have the right to raise this question and people should have a right to disagree. I think the Muslim community needs to address this, not just throw its hands up." The concerns of a third Muslim politician, Shahid Malik, the MP for Dewsbury, were reported in the following edition of the *Guardian* ("Niqab Controversy," 2006) as follows:

> It's not so much about what he has said as the climate in which he has said it, in which Muslims—and non-Muslims—are getting tired of Muslim stories. The veil isn't the problem; the problem is that people are frightened of it—they've never spoken to someone with a veil. This cannot and must not be about blaming one group, but about saying we have all got to take collective responsibility.

Malik's views were nestled alongside others which included Ghulan Choudhari of Radio Ramadan Blackburn, who insisted that while the take up of the face veil had increased, only a small minority of women in Blackburn wore it. The *Guardian* ("Niqab Controversy," 2006) reported his explanation: "It's partly down to the increased interest in our religion, especially among young people. But I can see Jack's point about the veil making some people uneasy. To be honest, I get uneasy talking to people who are wearing sunglasses. I don't like not being able to see their eyes." The paper contrasted this with the reactions of other local Muslims, with perhaps the most distinctive attributed to "one mother wearing a headscarf and shalwar kameez, but not a full veil," who it quoted as maintaining that "when our mums and dads came here it was all work, work, work for them, no time to study and no mosques. Now we have lessons in English, Urdu, and Arabic, and women are learning what their religion really asks them to do" ("Niqab Controversy," 2006). The *Daily Telegraph* ("Take Off Your Veils, Says Straw," 2006) repeated the *Guardian's* characterization that Straw had "provoked anger," though curiously this paper afforded more space than any other national paper in detailing *some* Muslim complaints in full. It did this through concentrating on the reactions of two MCB figures. The first was Sheik Ibrahim Nogra, who stressed the virtues of Britishness as consisting of an acceptance of difference and elaborated his own conception of multiculturalism contra assimilation:

> On the one hand he says this is a free country. On the other, he is denying that free choice to a woman who chooses to wear the veil. Does Mr. Straw mean that people should give up certain cultural and religious customs and practices simply because a vast majority of the country do not share them? That is calling for assimilation. That is saying that one culture or one way of life is superior to another. If we are truly multicultural, we have to accept that there will be women who want to dress in this way. I have a beard and I wear a traditional long shirt. Sometimes I wear a turban and a hat. Am I going to be his next subject of concern?

The second Muslim figure quoted in this news item was Rafeet Drabu, chair of the MCB social and family affairs committee, who repeated Nogra's complaint and emphasized the importance of dialogue. Drabu also, however, endorsed the view that Muslims who wear the veil hold separatist intentions:

> If you are trying to build bridges, you need to listen to what Muslims are saying. The problems that alienate women are to do with foreign policy and no one seems to take any notice of that. This country is supposed to celebrate diversity. That is the wonderful thing about this country: that it accepts, that it is tolerant. Women who wear the veil are making the statement that they are separate from society and that is why they wear it.

What is interesting is that this paper routinely and vehemently pushed an anti-veil and anti-multicultural line through both its leaders and commentators (Meer et al., 2010). Yet it gave much space to detailing the views of Muslim spokespeople who employ a discourse of

multiculturalism to defend the wearing of the veil. It is also interesting to note that the *Telegraph*, unlike every other broadsheet, presented the most critical reactions from the MCB when other publications were more likely to cast the MCB as ambivalent on the matter. The *Times* ("Straw Tells Muslims," 2006), meanwhile, repeated references to Quereshi, Shadjareh, and Abdullah but also referred to Salim Mulla, a councilor in Blackburn who represents the Queen's Park ward (home to a high concentration of Muslims) who urged Straw to "respect the decisions women make." This item opened its reporting from Blackburn with the statement that "it might just have seemed this way but every Muslim woman in Blackburn appeared to be wearing a veil yesterday.... In this area a great many abide by the Hanafi philosophy, which advocates the wearing of veils." The *Times*'s following addition ("Anger and Headscarves," 2006), however, delivered a more embedded, less flippant "ground-up approach" in canvassing the views of Blackburn Muslims. Among those it included was Rukhsana Aslam, age 20, who was described as "outraged" and quoted as saying: "He cannot start asking women to remove their veils and scarves, I feel sinful for not wearing my veil all of the time in public."

The paper maintained, however, that "not all women were affronted by Mr. Straw" and pointed to Shazhad, 28, and Pravina, 53, who "both said that they chose not to wear burkas." It is instructive to note how the *Times* accentuated the concern, attributed to Pravina but not substantiated in the text through her own words, that "many women did it to please their husbands." This was a key suspicion amongst editorials and leaders but does not appear to be substantiated by the news reporting of Muslim actors. This news item ended by noting that Shazhad thought it was "bad manners" to wear a burka in a one-to-one situation. In its Sunday edition (*The Sunday Times*, "Sunday a Veiled Threat?," 2006), however, it elaborated two more nuanced Muslim views at length. The first was provided by Mufti Abdul Kadir Barkatullah, a London Imam and member of the MCB:

> The niqab is not obligatory in Islam at all. If someone wants to wear the niqab, it is an optional thing. This is a cultural matter. The Koran does not mention the niqab. There are very few verses that talk about the hijab. According to a majority of scholars, both modern and classical, Islam only requires women to cover all their bodies except their face, hands and feet. The requirement on men is that they should cover themselves from navel to knee.

The second was from Iram Hussain, a 28-year-old IT teacher at a Manchester secondary school, who takes classes of GCSE boys but wears the full niqab:

> Jack Straw is missing the point; community integration is not about clothing. You could conform on clothing but still be a very angry person. Some people just don't know how to communicate. Just because he prefers to see my lips and nose, unless it was for the purposes of identification, I wouldn't give in to that preference. My religion is definitely not through my culture ... I am more British than Pakistani. I prefer chips over curry. But I needed to understand Islam and Islam requires you to dress modestly.

In addition, a number of tabloids, even those vehemently anti-veil and openly hostile to Muslims throughout their editorials, ran news items recording anti-Muslim hostilities. To the extent that even the *Sunday Express* ("Straw Criticism Blamed," 2006) contextualized its reporting of an attack on an imam at the Dawat ul Islam centre in Glasgow, as a reaction "to Mr. Straw's comments about veils."

MUSLIM VOICES IN READERS' LETTERS

On one level, readers' letters by themselves comprise a less significant source of information with which to explore the inclusion of Muslim voices within the mainstream press. This is because the publication of readers' letters is widely understood to reflect the concerns of a newspaper's core readership. So it is accepted from the outset that, with some variation, a newspaper is much less likely to print reader's letters that criticize an editorial line or leader (the issue of right to reply is a different matter), albeit with exceptions that prove the rule (Richardson, 2008). It is impossible to ascertain what ratio of critical and supportive reader's letters were sent to various publications, but there was a cross-section of the kinds of ways in which reader's letters were published were framed on readers' letters pages.

Instead of offering comment on each letter, it would be more fruitful to focus on the tendency of newspapers to print letters from Muslim figures in support of Straw's comments. Typical examples include the *Times* publication of a letter by Hesham El-Essawy, chair of the little known Islamic Society for the Promotion of Religious Tolerance:

> Sir, Jack Straw is absolutely right. The veil that covers the entire face is not at all an Islamic tradition that can be supported by the Koran or the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. It is only a cultural phenomenon indicating excessive piety. It must be remembered that the Prophet warned his followers not to become excessive in their practice and their conduct. ("Letters: Hesham El-Essawy," 2006)

From the *Guardian*, Fatima Martin Al-Fulk:

> I am a Muslim woman wearing the headscarf, but nevertheless find myself agreeing with Jack Straw. The veil makes a separation, even between Muslim women. In cultures where women are segregated, a woman will not wear her veil when working or socializing, as it necessarily will be a women-only environment. In British society, however, almost all work and social environments, even the mosques, are mixed. Veiled women are thus separated, even from their sisters. The veil also excludes women from many professions: who would want to be treated by a doctor or a nurse or be taught by a woman whose face was hidden? We have to adapt our cultural traditions if they no longer make sense. ("Letters: Fatima Martin Al-Fulk," 2006)

And from the *Independent*, Fawzi Ibrahim:

> Sir, the reaction of Muslim leaders to what can only be described as a reflective piece by Jack Straw in his local paper shows how desperate they are to keep Muslim women in check. Lady Udin says that Muslim women "should be able to choose what they wear." If only! Just what choice does a 12-year-old schoolgirl have in deciding whether to wear the hijab or not? She has as much choice in this as she has in choosing her religion. A very strong sense of tradition, coupled with intimidation and even violence, ensures that wearing a hijab is seen as a natural extension to growing up that no Muslim woman in her right mind could or should dare reject. So long as this attitude remains unchallenged, Muslim women will never have a real choice in the matter. Grown-up women conditioned into wearing the veil throughout their childhood cannot exercise true choice. My mother could not walk out without the veil even after the revolution of 1958 in Iraq, and with the full support of her enlightened family. She said she felt naked. The "right to choose" in this case is pandering to women's subjugation and to the mullahs. ("Letters: Fawzi Ibrahim," 2006)

The endorsements of Straw from these variety of Muslims themselves, and the degrees and means of authenticity this lends to a newspaper's position, are not to be underestimated when they come from both men and women, and from defenders and critics of Islam. This is wholly different from the kinds of argumentation which might, for example, invoke conceptions of an exclusive nationhood to challenge the public manifestation of Muslim difference. To the contrary, what these newspapers seek to illustrate with the inclusion of these critical Muslim voices is how Muslims *themselves* aspire to challenge fellow Muslims in a way that correlates with and augments each newspaper's editorial position (Meer et al., 2010).

CONCLUSIONS

It is worth reminding ourselves that Islam and Muslims in Britain have only relatively recently achieved the sort of prominence accepted as a familiar reality today. As Poole (2002, p. 3) has described, it is only in recent years that Muslims have moved from "the margins of coverage in the British news media," from being a "distant object in the consciousness of the majority of the British people," to now form "an uncomfortable familiarity." She continues: "Islam is suddenly 'recognizable' but it is the form in which Islam is known that is of concern." Since external narratives on minority identity have been shown to impinge upon the sorts of citizenship minorities experience, we should not underestimate the implications of how minorities are publicly represented (Meer, 2010). In this respect we find that some progress is evident if this is measured in the variety of Muslim voices that are being included. As the news reporting of the reaction to Straw's comments detail, Muslims voices are able to traverse the "fundamentalism-moderate" couplet in a way that is illustrated by the matrix of Muslim voices of "anger," "ambivalence," and "approval" that have been invoked in the news reaction to Straw's comments. These are, of course, tentative findings that *do not* erase the ways in which Muslims can be routinely racialized in the press (Richardson, 2001, 2006; Meer, 2006, 2008; Meer & Noorani, 2008; Meer & Modood, 2009b). They do, nevertheless, underscore the need for further analyses of the inclusion of Muslim voices in the press.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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