A 'System of Self-appointed Leaders'? Examining Modes of Muslim Representation in Governance in Britain

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Research Highlights and Abstract
This article

- Contributes to theoretical debates about the significance of group identity and political representation;
- Contributes to academic research into the shift from formal and hierarchical to more informal and network-based styles of governance;
- Contributes to research on the integration of Muslims in Britain by elucidating the emergence and diversification of Muslim representative organisations in Britain since 1970;
- Demonstrates the multifaceted and dynamic nature of Muslim representative claims-making in contemporary UK governance by identifying and analysing a range of modes of Muslim representation.

Since the turn of the century Britain has seen a proliferation of Muslim civil society organisations and an increase in the number of points of contact between Muslim spokespersons and government. Yet, this increased participation in UK governance has been a source of fierce controversies centring on the role of conservative male leaderships and the influence of radical Islamic groups. Drawing on interviews with 42 national elites who have engaged in UK Muslim–government relations in the past decade, this article charts the emergence of national-level Muslim representation and assesses its relationship to democratic participation and accountability. Building on the work of Michael Saward, we argue that unelected civil society representatives can act as an important supplement to elected representatives. We show how four modes of Muslim representation have emerged in the last decade—'delegation', 'authority', 'expertise' and 'standing'—creating dynamic competition among representative claims.

Introduction

Whether it refers to ethnicity, sexuality, gender, disability or religion, the argument that an identity group requires representation has often been divisive. The claim that people on the basis of their distinct identities require greater presence in political parties, elected assemblies, consultative forums or public debates frequently provokes animated debates about authenticity, authority and the undermining of debates about ideas and policies (Phillips 1995; for recent discussions see

Mansbridge 1999; Young 2002; Saward 2009). Yet, for a whole host of reasons, in the last decade, debates about Muslim representation have been uniquely heated, drawing in not just Muslim minorities and those who seek to speak for them, but a range of journalists (Bright 2006), think tanks (Maher and Frampton 2009) and politicians, including, in Britain, Prime Minister David Cameron (2011).

During this time there has been, on the one hand, increasing demand for people capable of speaking for Islam and on behalf of Muslims. The proliferation of (for the most part negative) accounts of the beliefs and practices of Muslims since 9/11 has created a widely felt need for people who are able to speak credibly about the Islamic tradition (Abou El Fadl 2007). Throughout Western Europe, as Muslim migrants have become increasingly settled, new discourses of citizenship have emerged with Muslims making distinctive political claims (Ferrari 2005; Meer and Modood 2013). In Britain, the increasing recognition given to religious—as distinct from ethnic—minorities since the 1990s in formulating policies on security, integration and equality has led to new opportunities for Muslims to interact with government. The desire to renew local and national democratic participation by involving 'key stakeholders' in the development and delivery of policy has also led to new 'governance spaces' (Newman 2005) being opened up to the leaders of Muslim organisations (Dinham and Lowndes 2008; Chapman 2009).

Yet, on the other hand, an atmosphere of hostility has emerged toward Muslim representation. Attempts by government to identify organisations able to represent British Muslims have been fraught given the sheer range of theological and ethno-cultural traditions among British Muslims. Partnerships between Muslim leaders and government have been criticised for privileging the perspectives of religious or community elders at the expense of women and young people (Sahgal 2004; Kundnani 2007). And perhaps most notably, a variety of allegations have been made that since 1997 the UK government has enabled the penetration of governance networks by groups that aspire to undermine liberal democracy (and whose members are variously characterised as 'Islamists', 'fundamentalists' or 'religious absolutists': see Bhatt 2006; Bright 2006; Maher and Frampton 2009). This hostility has grown steadily over the last five years, with an increasing range of Muslim individuals and representative bodies being scrutinised by journalists and scholars on both the right and left. It has become particularly pronounced since the election of a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition in May 2010, with senior Conservative minsters accusing the previous government of forming relationships with Muslims affiliated with extremist Islamist groups (see Cameron 2011).

In this article we offer an outline of the development of Muslim representation in national-level governance in Britain. In so doing we highlight some theoretical and practical difficulties associated with the representation of Muslims, and particularly some limitations of current debates about Muslim representation. Drawing on recent studies of the changing nature of British governance (Bevir and Rhodes 2003; Newman 2005), we suggest that debates about Muslim representation have focused too much on relations between politicians and national-level Muslim umbrella bodies. Building on recent work looking at political representation in the context of new forms of governance (Saward 2005, 2009, 2010; Hendriks 2009; Taylor 2010) we outline a range of what we call *modes* of representation that have

operated in British Muslim politics. Ultimately, the article provides greater clarity about what Muslim representation is, where it emerges, why it might be needed, who is involved in it and how representative claims can be evaluated.

Method

The article is based on research conducted as part of an ESRC/AHRC-funded qualitative project entitled 'Muslim Participation in Contemporary Governance'.[1] In particular, our analysis is based on 42 interviews carried out with MPs, civil servants, Muslim civil society actors and faith leaders who have engaged in governance at the national level. Our research began by reviewing academic literatures and policy documents related to UK Muslim-government relations since New Labour took power in 1997. We then identified three major interlocking public policy fields in which the state has engaged with Muslims: equality, diversity and cohesion; faith sector governance; and security (including the Prevent strategy: see DCLG 2007). We then built a sample of approximately equal numbers of interviewees from each of the three policy fields, with roughly equal numbers of 'Muslim' and 'government' actors (recognising that these two categories overlap in many cases). We sought to vary the sample by gender, party affiliation, government department, and religious or ideological affiliations. The resulting sample, then, comprised a wide spectrum of actors involved in engaging with Muslims, representing Muslims, or contesting this representation.[2] Our interviews were semi-structured, including common themes and interviewee-specific questions designed to specifically tap into an interviewee's area of expertise. The main interview themes were: (i) experiences of participatory governance; (ii) developments in Muslim-government relations; (iii) views on the proper role of faith in the public domain; (iv) policy-specific questions; and (v) questions on the interviewee's biography and personal motivations. All five of these sections provided material relevant to the analysis in this article.

The article is divided into three sections. First, we analyse the history of Muslim representative organisations in Britain and the developing critique of their links with government. Second, we engage with theories of governance and the transformation of political representation, with particular reference to Michael Saward's work on representative claims-making. Third, we apply these insights to the subject of Muslim representation in Britain, highlighting the emergence of a range of modes of Muslim representation and exploring the legitimacy of these different claims to represent.

A History of National Muslim Organisation

The vast majority of academic writing on Muslim representation in national politics has concentrated on the development of Muslim umbrella bodies—their emergence, achievements and, in some cases, fragmentation and decline. In Britain, the history of these organisations can be organised very loosely into three stages, running from 1970 to the present. It begins with the emergence of the first national representative organisations, such as the Union of Muslim Organisations of the UK

and Ireland (UMO), which was founded 1970 and celebrated its 'silver jubilee' in 1995. These first bodies rarely managed to make headway in the national political arena. Often they struggled to bridge ethnic or sectarian divisions among the UK's Muslims. The two largest umbrella bodies that emerged in the 1980s for example—the Council of Mosques for the United Kingdom and Ireland (COM, founded 1984) and the Council of Imams and Mosques (COIM, founded 1985)—tended to attract members of different South Asian Islamic traditions and consequently saw each other as rivals (Ansari 2004). For this reason, this first stage can be seen as one of limited and fragmented Muslim self-organisation.

The second stage, running from the Rushdie affair in 1988 to the attacks on London in July 2005, saw more influential organisations emerging and deeper links with government being formed. Britain's history in this period runs parallel to a number of other European states, as national Muslim representative organisations with strong links to the state were formed in many European countries at this time, including Germany, France and Belgium (Ferrari 2005; Meer and Modood 2013). In the UK, though, the protests around *The Satanic Verses* played a distinctive role, leading to the formation of the UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs (UKACIA), one of whose convenors, Iqbal Sacranie, provided much of the impetus behind the establishment of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) in 1997, a few months before the election of a New Labour government. To date, the MCB has been the most influential national Muslim umbrella organisation, having taken advantage of the new government's willingness to recognise faith identification to lobby success-fully for strengthened religious discrimination legislation, legal accommodation for *halal* and *shechita* slaughter, state funding of Islamic schools, and the introduction of a question about religious identity in the decennial national census.

Critics of the partnerships developed between the British state and Muslim organi-sations have tended to depict the establishment of the MCB as government-driven, with ministers not working with its leaders because of their grass roots support but, in Kundnani's words, 'on the basis of their effectiveness in containing dissent and serving strategic interests' (Kundnani 2007, 181; see also Bhatt 2006). This percep-tion is understandable given events that preceded the MCB's formation and the relationships built up with influential figures within the Labour government. In March 1994, the then Home Secretary Michael Howard hosted a widely reported meeting of Muslim activists, during which he is reported to have argued that for Muslims to influence policymaking they would need a body enabling them to speak as one (see Ansari 2004; J. Birt 2005). From 1997 onwards former Labour Home Secretary Jack Straw was also, in his own words, 'heavily involved' with the MCB (interview, 4 April 2011), and the leaders of the organisation were often invited to receptions at the Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, even representing the latter as part of delegations to Muslim-majority countries (McLoughlin 2005a). It is important to stress, however, that in comparison to the 'corporatist' approaches to national Muslim representation in France and Germany, the MCB's formation was civil society-led. Sacranie, its founding Secretary General, insists the MCB emerged from a widespread perception that Muslims needed a more stable, vertically integrated, institutional structure to engage with govern-ment, with public consultations beginning before government became involved (interview, 8 March 2011).

With the London bombings of July 2005, however, a third stage was inaugurated that involved a 'rebalancing' of relations between Labour and the MCB (Kelly 2006). Although Labour support for the MCB was strong, it was never shared by all members of the Cabinet. Indeed, former Home Secretary Charles Clarke commented that the relationship with the MCB caused 'deep divisions ... as to whether or not we should be giving them the status ... as being the representative body of the British Muslim community' (interview, 9 February 2011). Following a series of well-publicised disagreements with Labour ministers—over the decisions to go to war in Iraq and Afghanistan (J. Birt 2005), the MCB's boycott of Holocaust Memorial Day between 2005 and 2007, and the response of the MCB's former Deputy Secretary General, Daud Abdullah, to the Israeli government's incursion into the Gaza strip in February 2009—the MCB was marginalised by a succession of unsympathetic ministers. Government, as Ruth Kelly (2006), the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, said in a 2006 speech, 'actively sought to develop relationships with a wider network of Muslim organisations', especially those considered to be 'taking a proactive leadership role in tackling extremism and defending our shared values'.

Relatedly, a number of 'competitors' to the MCB started to come to prominence around this time. Some of these, such as the British Muslim Forum (BMF) and the Al-Khoei Foundation, could be linked to ethnic or theological differences.[3] Others, such as British Muslims for Secular Democracy (BMSD) and Progressive British Muslims (PBM), emerged at least in part to offer a counter-argument to specific positions that the MCB had taken on subjects such as education and schools. Still others came into existence as a direct response to the government's aim of 'rebalancing' Muslim engagement, and the associated goals of reforming mosques and promoting a 'mainstream' form of Islam. These included: the Sufi Muslim Council (a body that came to prominence as part of Labour's efforts to partner with the 'Sufi Majority'); the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB, an organisation designed to act as the central organising body for the UK's mosques); Quilliam (a 'counter-extremism think tank'); and Radical Middle Way (RMW) (an initiative that grew out of the Muslim magazine *Q-News* and that sought to promote classical Islamic scholarship). As a consequence the MCB went from being, in Birt's (2008) words, 'the darling of the political establishment' to being 'just another voice at the table'.

A Claims-focused Approach to Muslim Representation?

This necessarily brief account of the fortunes of Muslim umbrella organisations is important to any understanding of the changing involvement of Muslims in national-level politics, but it does not, we suggest, tell the whole story of Muslim representation in Britain. Indeed, we argue that previous discussions (especially critical evaluations) have too often viewed the representation of British Muslims only as a process of negotiation between politicians and a range of competing Muslim organisations seeking to be recognised as *the* political voice of Muslims. This, we contend, is limited in two senses. As an empirical account of Muslim representation in Britain, this approach does not cover the full range of ways of speaking politically for Muslims or all the different forms of engagement. More

significantly, the focus upon representative *organisations* and *persons* is not always helpful in facilitating the evaluation of attempts to represent Muslims (and to an extent other identity groups). In the following sections we propose an alternative *claims-focused* approach that is, we contend, more helpful in understanding and evaluating attempts speak for Muslims in public life (see Dobbernack et al. 2014).

The notion of a claims-focused approach to representation is drawn from the work of Michael Saward (2005, 2006, 2009, 2010). Saward is one of a number of authors with an interest in the legitimacy of unelected representatives (Mansbridge 1999; Rehfeld 2006; Montanaro 2010), and he is by no means alone in his interest in the representation of identity groups (Phillips 1995; Young 2002). His work is, however, distinctive for its attempt to encourage those involved in evaluating the legitimacy of different political actors to 'view political representation through the lens of the "representative claim"—to view it as an economy of claims-making, rather than as a fact resulting from (free and fair) election' (Saward 2009, 3). We should, Saward contends, focus less on representative persons or organisations and focus instead on the idea that political representation is a dynamic competition between claims-makers.

This distinctive focus emerges out of a desire, in Saward's words, to move discussions of political representation beyond 'the architecture of electoral democracy' (Saward 2005, 183). This desire stems partly from the recognition that electoral representation is never perfect: elections reveal only a snapshot in time; they are limited by territory; some (such as the very young) may not be able to vote; the choice of elected representatives is always limited to certain options; and elected representatives are always part of an electoral system that is *not* chosen. But Saward also stresses that electoral representation has become, for a variety of reasons, less reliable as a means of identifying popular opinion: there has been a decline in voting rates; disaffection with mainstream parties and politicians (though not with political action) has grown; and fewer political decisions are limited to the boundaries of nation-states. Most importantly of all, in Saward's opinion, a new focus on the representative claim is needed because there has been a shift in styles of politics in the West 'from the more formal and hierarchical to the more informal and network-based' (Saward 2005, 179). At local, national and international levels informal consultations and partnerships are becoming increasingly common.

Muslim political engagement in Britain in fact reflects and can be used to illustrate this shift. Muslim and other faith representatives have been involved in national public policy consultations and reports since at least the mid-1990s, when the Inner Cities Religious Council, of which Sacranie was a member, was asked to provide feedback on regeneration initiatives (Austin and Taylor 1998). At local level this history of faith participation is even more extensive (Chapman and Lowndes 2009). There have been particularly notable developments since the so-called 'rebalancing' of Muslim-government relations following the attacks on London in 2005. As part of its efforts to seek out new partners from 2006, the Labour government set up numerous consultative forums with the aim of reaching those perceived as lacking a voice in the organisational networks of Muslim representative bodies, especially women and young people. These included a set of Preventing Extremism Together (PET) Working Groups, a National Muslim Women's Advisory Group (NMWAG)

and a Young Muslim Advisory Group (YMAG). All of these new initiatives were framed by the government's overriding policy goal of thwarting Islamist extremism (via the Prevent agenda) and as such they suffered from various flaws. As Brown (2008) has persuasively argued, the new forms of engagement with Muslim women were generally justified as a means to the end of combating extremism, meaning that in policy reports Muslim women were typecast as 'wives and mothers' who could act as a 'civilising influence' on 'combative masculinist' forms of Islam (see DCLG 2007, 9–10; 2006). Nevertheless, they involved new forms of representation that the conventional accounts of umbrella organisations have tended not to discuss.

One of the central aims of Saward's work is to reduce the gap separating elected from unelected political actors. He suggests elected and unelected representatives involve themselves in similar language games when making claims to represent. A politician may, for instance, claim to speak for 'hard-working families', rather than only his or her constituents, and such framings can always be ' "read back" or contested or disputed by observers or audiences. ... [T]here is no representative claim without its being open to a counter-claim or a denial from part of the very audience that the claim invokes' (Saward 2006, 304). Saward is keen to stress that elections remain vital in politics, not least because they act as a test for the representative claims. Yet, a wide range of elected and unelected individuals can be involved in the same game of claim and counter-claim, and there is always the possibility that the unelected person's claims might be more accurate. According to Saward, the ineradicable faults of electoral mechanisms mean that unelected representatives have a role to play in calling elected representatives to account. They also have certain advantages over their elected counterparts. They are free from geographical and temporal constraints, for instance. They do not have to pretend to represent all interests or wants, and so can be more flexible and dynamic. They do not have to represent all people. And finally, they must 'work harder to make their representative claims convincing, because the symbolic architecture of our political systems doesn't do that work for them' (Saward 2009, 8). As Chapman and Lowndes's (2013) research into the representation of religion in local government helpfully demonstrates, unelected representatives face a constant need to justify their status and are constantly open to challenge.

Modes of Representation

What, then, are the implications of this for Muslim representation? Saward's work not only provides a variety of reasons for why conventional electoral mechanisms cannot be regarded as sufficient, and why, in certain circumstances, some form of Muslim representation might act as a valuable supplement to these mechanisms; it also suggests an approach to claims-making by Muslim groups that emphasises dynamic contestation, and focuses on the *claims made* rather than the *claims-makers*. In other words, it implies that it may not be helpful to search for a body that can represent all Muslims' interests, but that does not mean giving up on Muslim representation completely. Critics of the recent recognition given to Muslim spokespersons (K. Malik 2009) frequently suggest that Muslim representation is unhelpful because there is no 'Muslim community' to be represented. On almost every social

and political question, they observe, the Muslim population of Britain is divided. Often in these critical accounts polls are referred to that demonstrate that very few Muslims in Britain—especially the young—feel that any one organisation represents their views consistently (Field 2011). Elements of the coalition government that came to power following the general election of May 2010 appear to be sympathetic to this line of thinking. Of the five current and former Conservative politicians we interviewed, four were sceptical of Muslim representation, with the following quote representing a striking example:

> [T]here isn't a Muslim community; there are Muslim communities. Muslims in Britain don't seem to me to have the cohesiveness that the Jewish community ... does with the Board of Deputies and its long history. Muslims are differentiated in Britain (Paul Goodman, former Conservative MP, interview, 23 February 2011).

According to Saward, however, accepting the fact that the British Muslim population is diverse and divided does not mean jettisoning the idea of Muslim representation entirely, as the critics mentioned above appear to believe it does. Representation can be taken on a claim-by-claim basis. Groups can speak for Muslims—or Muslim women, Muslim converts and so on—on some issues and not on others, at some times and not others. Interestingly, almost all the leaders of Muslim organisations we spoke to saw their role in this way, admitting they were not able to—and usually did not want to—represent all Muslims' interests:

> Why [is there] this obsession of who represents? Whenever I speak, 'Oh you don't represent anyone'. Why should I represent anyone? I represent an issue and that issue you will find most people—Muslims and non-Muslims—agreeing with me. There: that's what I represent (Anas Altikriti, former MAB President, interview, 3 February 2011).

> [While we] do represent significant sections of a community, we never say that we represent the whole [Muslim] community. We're not that arrogant. We know that it's very diverse—many communities are not fully with ours (Muhammad Abdul Bari, former MCB Secretary General, interview, 24 January 2011).

To illustrate Saward's stance, it is helpful to consider the following example. As noted above, very few Muslims in Britain regard the MCB as representing their interests consistently, but at least some of the changes for which the MCB lobbied in the 1990s almost certainly had the support of large numbers of Muslims. Its campaign to strengthen religious discrimination legislation, for example, was supported by individuals who had been critical of the organisation on most other issues (for example, A-R. Malik 2007). This is a particularly pertinent case because it included Muslims irrespective of ethnic origin. Despite the obvious fact that the British Muslim population is highly diverse, all can potentially be discriminated against *as Muslims*, and so have a stake in this political issue. Perhaps better than any other example, this case demonstrates why the idea of Muslim representation as a whole cannot be disregarded.

In addition, Saward's work implies a need to cease regarding Muslim representation as something that is done only by Muslim umbrella bodies. The competition

between Muslim representative claims is not only a competition between groups such as the MCB, the BMF and BMSD, but includes a range of activists, policy experts and indeed elected politicians. Individuals from all these arenas have found themselves in a position to represent British Muslims over the last decade, and have offered alternative representative claims. In the final sections of this article we provide illustrations of what we refer to as four different *modes* of Muslim representation. It is important to emphasise that due to the empirical focus of our study, our analysis is limited to representative claims encountered *within sites of governance* rather than in protest movements or the media. The typology below is thus not exhaustive: we touch only briefly on, for example, claims made by leaders of Islamic revivalist movements who have received media attention, but who have not been engaged with by the state. The four modes that we focus on we call 'delegation', 'authority', 'expertise' and 'standing'. These can in most respects be thought of as *representational positions*, and it is important to stress that individuals can, and sometimes do, shift from one mode of representation to another, depending on context. In the remainder of the article we examine each in turn.

Delegation

'Delegation' refers to the best known mode of British Muslim representation: the building up of 'grass roots' support from community institutions or voluntary associations and using that to try and establish credibility and ultimately influence policy. In the UK the obvious example of this is the MCB, which claims a network of just under 400 affiliate organisations (though 250 may be more accurate: see Pedziwiatr 2007). Bodies that operate on a similar basis include BMF and the Islamic Society of Britain (ISB), though the latter has tended to concentrate on social action rather than Muslim representative politics (interview with Dilwar Husain, former ISB President, 18 May 2012). This mode of representation has both benefits and drawbacks. On the positive side, it should, in theory, be independent of and thus untainted by the formal political process, with all the compromises that can involve. (As we have seen, this has always been disputed in the MCB's case: it has often been seen as subservient to government interests.) On the negative side, reliance on established community infrastructures can lead to the organisation reflecting the opinions of a limited set of community leaders while claiming to speak for a wider Muslim constituency. This has been perhaps the most compelling criticism of the MCB.

Often the MCB's leaders have justified their representative claims by stressing they act as surrogates for wider Muslim interests. Its Secretary Generals have stressed that Muslims are 'not that strong as a community' (Muhammad Abdul Bari, interview, 24 January 2011) and that they are usually 'treated as on the fringe' (Iqbal Sacranie interview, 8 March 2011). The MCB has always presented itself as speaking for Muslims as a group rather than Islam as a religious tradition (Meer and Modood 2013), but its leaders have made claims about Muslims being committed to certain traditional practices that deserve recognition and accommodation. These kinds of claims have proven to be contentious. For example, in 2007 the MCB released a report giving guidance to schools which, among other things, recommended that sex education for Muslim pupils avoid explicit discussions that may

compromise the pupils' 'sense of modesty and decency' (MCB 2007, 48). This cut against the views of other organisations such as BMSD—a smaller network of Muslim professionals—which subsequently produced its own alternative guidance (BMSD 2010).

Authority

By 'authority' we mean specifically religious authority, and the role that religious authority can play in allowing individuals a public voice and access to government. This mode has not been particularly significant for British Muslims, especially relative to the Church of England, whose clergy often have a civic role and twenty-six of whose bishops sit in the House of Lords. As has often been observed, Islam is a less hierarchical tradition than Christianity, and in Britain the majority of mosques are run by local lay committees, with the imam sometimes being a minor functionary (Lewis 2007; Gilliat-Ray 2010). Nevertheless, a growing number of 'pioneering' Islamic scholars are becoming prominent on the national stage and involved in new forms of state engagement. The late Zaki Badawi (d. 2006) represents an early—and perhaps still the best—example of a religious scholar who successfully took on a representative role, acting as Principal of the COIM and becoming a 'figurehead' for Muslims in Britain (Lewis 2007; Gilliat-Ray 2010). More recent examples include religious leaders such as Maulana Shahid Raza (former Chair of MINAB) and Ibrahim Mogra (MCB and MINAB).

Since the emergence of Prevent the relationship between government and Islamic authority has become increasingly complicated. Having been as far as possible avoided in the 1990s when the state engaged with the MCB, religious interpretation began to interest government from 2006 onwards, with policy reports identifying a need to promote 'mainstream' forms of Islam (DCLG 2007, 12). Increasingly, government has not only formed partnerships with individuals and groups seeking to represent Muslim 'community interests', but also with those involved in speaking for the Islamic tradition itself. For instance, public funding was given to organisations, notably RMW, whose main function has been to offer a platform for religious scholars at 'roadshows' across the UK. This has led to popular scholars from the UK and overseas—such as Abdal-Hakim Murad (a.k.a. Tim Winter), Ingrid Mattson and Tariq Ramadan—becoming involved in state-funded religious events. These individuals, though, have rarely used these platforms to speak out about policy directly. Although RMW's funding was discontinued when the coalition government was formed in 2010, the new Prevent strategy nonetheless promises to 'support the efforts' of Islamic religious scholars in challenging extreme perspectives (HM Government 2011, 52).

Expertise

When Saward (2009, 11) names 'specialist expertise' as a type of representative claim, this may at first glance appear to inflate the concept of representation to the point where it no longer serves a useful function. Yet, expertise has played an unusually significant role in the representation of British Muslims. Some Muslim

civil society actors have styled themselves as 'experts' in order to disrupt what they see as the monopoly on Muslim representation held by 'self-styled' community leaders. The clearest example of this is Quilliam, a controversial organisation that describes itself not as a representative body but as a 'counter-extremism think tank'. Launched in 2008, Quilliam received strong support from many Labour and Conservative politicians, and until 2010 received substantial funding from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Home Office. Its claim to expertise is strongly linked to the personal experiences of its two founders, who were members of the revivalist group Hizb ut-Tahrir (Husain 2007). In the following quote one of those founders, Ed Husain, explains how Quilliam was founded partly to disrupt the 'cosy' relationships established between government and certain Muslim civil society organisations:

> I hadn't [initially] wanted to start up an organisation. ... [I was just interested in] challenging the status quo. ... [But the political landscape was] very much dominated by the MCB and a whole of host of others who are walking in and out of Downing Street like they were the only representatives of Muslims. The whole representation model sought by government, send us your representatives: all that I found problematic (interview, 3 May 2011).

Beyond this specific example, expertise in a given field—such as discrimination law—has given Muslim individuals the opportunity to enter governance spaces in which they can then speak for the interests of an identity group. The various forums established in the wake of the 2005 London bombings, such as the PET Working Groups and the NMWAG, included a wide range of individuals whose official reason for inclusion was expertise developed in the private sector or in anti-discrimination or other public policy contexts, but whose identities as Muslims nonetheless were salient in those settings. The PET Working Group on regional and local strategies and the event 'Engaging Muslim Women' with Tony Blair (see DCLG 2006) were both convened by a Bangladeshi Muslim woman, Nahid Majid, with a background in planning in the private sector. She was supported in the PET Working Group by Alveena Malik, a Muslim woman with a background in equality and race relations who has worked as an adviser to the Communities and Local Government Select Committee on Migration and Cohesion.

Another example is Rokhsana Fiaz, previously the Director of the Change Institute in London, and now Chief Executive of the Maimonides Foundation and Labour Councillor in Newham. Fiaz has a background in Labour Party activism and policy research, but became involved directly in Muslim representation through her membership of the NMWAG and more limited involvement in MINAB. As she explains, through these activities, as well as in other work she has done for the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), she has been able to give Muslims a greater voice within the public domain:

> [P]ublic authority was framing a lot of its thinking around engagement with Muslim communities based on the security agenda; and I think there was, for me particularly, a set of frustrations ... [about that. So I wanted] to use [my work for DCLG] as a mechanism to give voice to these communities, to communities that are at best the least understood or

> acknowledged and at worst, ignored and denigrated because they're not
> understood and they're seen almost as a kind of fifth column. (interview
> 20 April 2011)

The fact that these three individuals are all women is not incidental. As Gilliat-Ray
(2010) and McLoughlin (2005b) have observed, traditional male community lead-
erships are increasingly being challenged by the participation of well-educated
professional women in public spaces, and this kind of 'expert representation' can
act as a useful way of bypassing conventional representative organisations, which
are generally dominated by men. This is not to say, though, that this alternative
form of representation is always successful. It is notable that all of the Muslim
women to whom we spoke about their involvement in consultative forums—
including the three mentioned above—found the experience difficult. Sometimes
this was because they felt that they were seen by established community repre-
sentatives as, in the words of Alveena Malik, 'not Muslim enough' (interview, 19
April 2011). In many cases they felt they were seen as a 'disruptive influence' in the
policy-making process, or that their participation in policy consultations was, as one
of our interviewees said, 'just a token' gesture.

Standing

In one article on unelected representation, Saward (2009, 1) uses the example of
the U2 singer and political activist Bono's attempts to speak for marginalised
populations in the developing world to highlight how different forms of public
standing can facilitate surrogate representation. Though perhaps not the best
example, this case illustrates how public prominence can enable an individual to
speak out on topics that have relatively little to do with the reason why that person
is in the public spotlight. In the context of Muslim representation, standing has
played a distinctive role, with claims to represent sometimes being strongly shaped
by, or even ascribed by, external agencies. The boxer Amir Khan's decision to wear
the Union Flag at fights following 7/7, for instance, led to him being regarded as a
role model making a statement about the compatibility of British and Muslim
identity (Lewis 2007). Similarly, journalists Yasmin Alibhai-Brown and Medhi
Hasan have periodically made arguments rooted in their Muslim identities, though
neither of these individuals came to prominence because of their being Muslim.

Within UK governance, this mode of representation is most obvious among elected
politicians. As in most jurisdictions, in Britain correspondence of identities between
representatives and constituents is far from irrelevant; indeed, ethnic and religious
minorities have faced a struggle to achieve better representation in Parliament, with
the number of Muslim MPs going from zero in 1996 to eight today. Nevertheless,
overwhelmingly the Muslim MPs that sit in Parliament operate according to the
traditional 'promissory' form of representation (Mansbridge 2003), where a repre-
sentative is elected on a mandate and endeavours to follow his or her constituents'
expressed desires. The MP who has arguably aligned himself with Muslim identity
and Islamic principles most overtly—the Respect MP George Galloway—refuses to
publicly speak about his religious beliefs, while many MPs of Muslim heritage feel
the need to downplay their Muslim identities, working against the tendency of the
British press to focus on the religious identity of Muslim politicians. Sajid Javid,

recently appointed to the dual role of Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and Minister for Equalities, for example, has been characterised as 'the Tories' first Muslim MP' (Mail on Sunday 2010) despite describing himself as not particularly religious. Javid claimed in interview to have declined numerous approaches from Muslim groups since becoming an MP on the basis that if he were to act on behalf of Muslims he would be failing in his proper role:

> I don't want to get tagged as being someone who's just interested in Muslim issues. I'm not avoiding any Muslim issues but I just don't want to be the guy that only deals with issues because ... lots of reasons, but number one amongst them, it's not even my constituency. I don't have any Muslims in my constituency, or hardly any, so why should I go out backing for those particular issues when I'm a first-time elected MP? (Sajid Javid, interview, 27 April 2011).

Nevertheless, Muslims who are elected to Parliament can sometimes feel the need to speak out *as Muslims* rather than for their constituents. Sadiq Khan for example, the Labour MP and current Shadow Lord Chancellor, is in many respects similar to Javid. In his view, the British media and some politicians have become 'lazy' since alternative representative bodies began to challenge the MCB, looking to Muslim politicians to simply replace the MCB. He insists that he was 'democratically elected by the people of Tooting to represent Tooting's interest in Parliament, not by the two million British Muslims to represent their interest in Parliament'. Previously a solicitor, he is, he suggests, 'happy as an expert in human rights, civil liberties ... but not as a Muslim spokesperson'. Nonetheless, Khan does admit to having felt the need to speak out for Muslims during periods of crisis, especially following the attacks upon London in 2005:

> [V]ery shortly after [I was elected] July 7th happened [and] there were very few British Muslims able to articulate how we were feeling, [the] fact we are all [supposedly] terrorists. And I couldn't run away from the fact that I'm a Muslim so I did media and talked about the impact on Muslim communities (interview, 9 March 2011).

Khan's claims-making, then, went beyond both his area of expertise and his constituency. His decision to act as a surrogate for those who, he believes, are rarely given a voice is particularly notable because it was in an important sense forced: his case provides an excellent illustration of how the pressure to speak out as a Muslim can, as Modood (2007, 137) has observed, come from 'outside' as well as from a personal sense of identity or religious conviction.

Conclusion

It has not been our intention in this article to suggest that the representation of Muslims has not been trouble-free. Complaints made by Kundnani (2007) and others that Muslim representatives tend to be ignored by government when they do not serve strategic interests have a great deal of force. So, too, do concerns about the marginality of certain voices and perspectives within some Muslim civil society organisations. Our aim here has not been to contest this critique, but to: (i) develop an argument, following Saward, about why some form of Muslim representation

might be needed *despite* the difficulties involved; and (ii) highlight the growing range of Muslim representative claims being articulated. We have argued against two suggestions: that Muslim representation as such should be rejected out of hand, and that the representation of Muslims only relates to 'self-appointed leaders'.

The approach to unelected representation that we have outlined here implies that the presence in public debate of representative claims authored by a wide range of individuals and organisations is a positive development. Thus, even though the number of Muslim representative organisations has grown at least in part because of the British government's recent record of capriciously offering support to some groups and then to others, this has arguably had the positive effect of locking those seeking to speak for Muslims into a dense network of competing civil society actors. There has been a pluralisation of Muslim representation, causing a move away from a single or small number of umbrella organisations and a reliance on a 'take me to your leader' approach, and towards a more complex 'democratic constellation' (Modood 2007) of representation, which should be welcomed. As one of our interviewees, the Labour MP Fiona Mctaggart, observed, this could possibly result in Muslim representatives being forced to work harder:

> One of the ways to create more effective and impactful representation is to bring in more voices, simply to create some contest so that people have a duty to demonstrate their legitimacy as compared to the other person who's claiming the same legitimacy. I think that isn't trying to 'divide and conquer'; it's simply trying to make sure that people have some pressure ... to demonstrate their credentials as being in touch with a kind of wide spectrum of views, of generations, of politics and so on (interview, 19 April 2011).

Nevertheless, the outlook for Muslim representation and participation is not entirely positive. We have suggested that the evaluation of the legitimacy of Muslim representatives should concentrate on the claims that are made, and whether those claims are divisive or have the support of a broad constituency. Unfortunately, recent debates about the representation of Muslims in Britain have been almost the opposite of this: they have focused upon the personal connections and sectarian affiliations of specific Muslim organisations and individuals. Organisations such as the MCB have been stigmatised as 'Islamist-infused' (Maher and Frampton 2009, 25), an accusation that implies a secretive agenda aimed at undermining secular democratic traditions. As we have said elsewhere (O'Toole et al. 2012; see also J. Birt 2005), such allegations tend to be misleadingly simplistic, paying almost no attention to the issues on which the MCB and other similar organisations have lobbied. The willingness of certain elements of the current coalition government to accept these accusations has led to a large number of Muslim civil society organisations being treated as 'toxic'. Furthermore, a recent report of the Commons Public Administration Select Committee on the coalition's 'Big Society' agenda included contributions from the Chief Rabbi, the Assistant General Secretary of the Catholic Bishop's Conference in England and Wales and the Anglican Bishop of Leicester, but no Muslim voices (House of Commons 2011). With this kind of neglect of

Muslim voices, it becomes all the more important to understand the diversity of Muslim representative claims, and what such representation ultimately seeks to achieve.

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Notes

1. See: http://www.bristol.ac.uk/ethnicity/projects/muslimparticipation/. The project was conducted within the AHRC/ESRC Religion and Society programme in the University of Bristol Centre for the Study of Ethnicity and Citizenship. We thank the AHRC/ESRC for their support for this research.

2. The full list of individuals interviewed for this project is included as an appendix in O'Toole et al. 2013.

3. The BMF is primarily Barelwi, whereas the MCB's leadership is comprised mainly of Deobandi and 'reformist Islamist' Muslims. The Al-Khoei Foundation is a small body of Iraqi Shi'a that came to prominence following 9/11 (J. Birt 2005).

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