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Laura Zahra Mcdonald

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Securing Identities, Resisting Terror: Muslim Youth Work in the UK and its Implications for Security

LAURA ZAHRA McDONALD

ABSTRACT

The chronological regularity of actual and attempted attacks committed by a tiny number of young, British-born or British-based Muslims, including shoe bomber Richard Reid in 2001, the two Tel Aviv 'Mike's Place' bombers in 2003, the four 7/7 London bombers in 2005 and the Christmas Day bomber Umar Farouk Abdulmuttallab in 2009, has seen the wholesale stigmatisation of young Muslims in Britain. Specifically, young Muslims have become a focal point in the War on Terror, identified both by state security and by terrorist recruiters as vulnerable to violent radicalisation. Despite, or perhaps because of, the lack of consensus in defining and explaining this process of radicalisation, certain factors have been identified as key in increasing or curtailing this vulnerability. One such factor is identity, and this article explores the way in which, at the level of discourse, each 'side' in the War on Terror competes for control over the social, political and religious positionality of young Muslims. Identity thus becomes a symbolic battleground coopted through three recurring narratives: belonging, loyalty and duty. For young people, the impact of these dominant and regulatory discourses in pathologising their identities, especially in the sensitive social context of post-7/7 Britain, can be devastating, creating further insecurity and alienation. This article identifies the role of specialist Muslim youth workers who provide a coherent, grassroots-orientated challenge to these narratives, and who, at considerable personal and professional risk, work with the most vulnerable young people to create alternative articulations of identity. I suggest that Muslim youth work not only encourages more positive ways for young Muslim people to engage with and experience the world, but also, in resisting the binaries created within the War on Terror, contributes to a more holistic, human-focused approach to security.

Introduction

In the context of security in the post-9/11 era, identifying vulnerability to violent extremism has become a key feature in countering terrorism. In relation to Al-Qaeda-related violence – considered the greatest form of terrorist threat to western states – young Muslims have come under increasing scrutiny, identified as the most susceptible to Al-Qaeda (AQ) ideology and in need of support (HMG, 2008, p. 6). Despite the contested nature of radicalisation models (Hutson *et al.*, 2009, p. 18) this vulnerability is understood by experts in terms of risk factors (contextual features in a person's life) and specific drivers (such as belief in violent extremist theology), which are considered as contributing towards the development of an individual's violent radicalisation

(Abbas, 2007; Horgan, 2008). In an effort to prevent these processes, British counter-terrorism has seen the increasing engagement of community-based youth workers able to connect with young people and able to intervene directly at a personal level with those considered vulnerable to radicalisation or already radicalised (Spalek, El Awa and McDonald, 2008; Spalek and McDonald, 2011; Spalek, Baker and McDonald, 2011).¹ The focus is therefore on addressing the relevant factors of concern and working with young people to reduce vulnerability.

One such factor is identity, the ways in which Muslims relate to the world around them, especially – socially, politically and theologically – to non-Muslims and to western states (Abbas, 2007, pp. 432–33; Ceric, 2008, p. 26; Lowe and Innes, 2008, p. 5; Schmid, 2007, p. 15; Silber and Bhatt, 2007, p. 7; Silke, 2008, pp. 109–10). Yet as this article proposes, concern about violent radicalisation, articulated through the prism of dominant New Terror narratives, has escalated the question of identity from a factor to a focal point, problematising young Muslim identity and locating it as a central theme in the opposing rhetoric of western states and AQ. For the individuals working with young people, the resulting politicisation and stigma pose a series of challenges. Drawing upon data gathered through ongoing primary research,² this article aims to explore the ways in which Muslim youth workers negotiate their own positions to help young people to resist top-down narrative. Three facets of identity that dominate regulatory discourse – belonging, loyalty and duty – will be used to illustrate these processes, alongside the corresponding responses of Muslim youth work. It is suggested that the alternative frameworks and spaces developed by Muslim young people have implications for the development of community-driven, human-centred notions of security.

New Terror and Faith and the Challenge for Muslim Youth Work

The contested concept of New Terror (Lambert, 2010; Mythen and Walklate, 2006; Spalek, 2010) rests on two key assumptions. First, it identifies AQ-related ‘Islamist’³ violence as intrinsically linked to Islamic theology, and thus as an extreme articulation of Muslimness. Second, it defines it as a new phase in terrorist practice, one in which terror is an indiscriminate and unrestricted end rather than a bounded, pragmatic means (Morgan, 2004). From this perspective, the state’s enemy is not only the individuals and groups perpetrating violence, but the ideology understood to drive them, thus necessitating a ‘War on Terror’ itself. This notion, that a state of war exists between the West and its allies on the one hand and ‘Islamist’ terrorism on the other, perpetuates an escalated form of the ‘clash of civilisations’ theory (Huntington, 1996; Vertigans, 2010). This is the idea that Muslims and non-Muslims are not only socially, politically and theologically incompatible, but in a state of natural conflict. Conceptually, and somewhat ironically, the New Terror and AQ paradigms are therefore in agreement.

In Britain, the state response to these political circumstances has echoed that of the USA, with increased counter-terrorism powers such as stop-and-search under section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000, control orders and pre-charge detention. The government’s CONTEST (1 and 2) security strategy with its four-pronged approach to countering terrorism – prevent, pursue, protect and prepare – has mainstreamed security awareness and activities into the remit of all government departments, with a focus on the preventative aspects in almost all state dealings with its citizens, from education to healthcare provision. In the public sphere, highly charged, politicised and interconnected debates have raged regarding the balance between state security and

human rights, the compatibility between Islam and ‘western values’ and the legitimacy of Muslim citizenship in predominantly non-Muslim western states. These are ideas encouraged and reiterated by AQ. In this context – the era of New Terror – issues of Muslim faith, young people and sociality are viewed, interpreted and experienced through a securitised lens of suspicion and stigma.

Alongside the process of securitisation, a resurgence of faith as personal and communal belief, framing and identity has been identified as having increasing importance in understanding and managing social relations (Woodhead and Catto, 2009, pp. iv, 5, 32). In the UK, in which diversity and plurality are viewed as foundational in government approaches to social relations, policymakers have increasingly sought to mainstream faith provision (see, for example, Equality Act, 2010). However, the focus remains closely bound with state approaches to ‘race relations’, the persisting framework used to identify, delineate and manage minority ethnic groups in relation to predominantly social, rather than political and economic, matters. Within this framework, the notion of the faith community has been incorporated. For example, the most recent British ‘race relations’ policy, community cohesion, places great emphasis on identifying communities by faith – especially Muslim communities – as well as categories such as ethnicity and cultural heritage.

These developments – the mainstreaming of faith and security – have affected young Muslims in different but related ways. The impact of counter-terrorism has been dramatic and negative: a generation of young Muslims have experienced their formative years in a post-9/11 world in which state and non-state violence – a ‘War on Terror’, on Afghanistan, on Iraq, on ‘Islamism’, and a stream of terror attacks across the world – have been linked to their own beliefs and identities by the most dominant discourses of their day. Each self-proclaimed ‘side’ proselytises competing ideologies of justice, revenge and righteousness. However, the increased recognition of faith perspectives has also created a space for working with the identities of young people, rather than around or against them.

Against this background Muslim youth workers, working with or in some cases from a Muslim faith perspective, have seen a greater level of respect and interest in their work. Since 2005, when the National Youth Agency reported widespread suspicion of Muslim youth work (Khan, 2005, p. 2), engagement by police and city councils under the ‘prevent’ agenda has become commonplace, with Muslim youth workers viewed as credible and connected to a ‘hard-to-reach’ Muslim youth (Spalek, El Awa and McDonald, 2008). In positions of trust and responsibility, and working with a range of issues affecting young people, such youth workers are dedicated to supporting and facilitating the development of young people. For Muslim youth work, not only is faith – in the broadest sense – acknowledged, but it is viewed as being as central as each young person declares it to be, from active interest in theological issues to identity-led expressions of Islam, in which religious practice plays little part, but identification as Muslims and with Muslims is paramount. Young people are not viewed as homogenous, and religion is not ‘preached’: the case of each young person is approached individually. Innovative and religiously or culturally appropriate projects are developed, according to the needs of young clients: for example, forms of conflict resolution to tackle gang tensions. Other examples observed through research range from opportunities to debate social and political issues to theological education such as Muslim etiquette and addressing antisocial behaviours from a faith perspective. From a state perspective, Muslim youth workers are ideal gatekeepers to sections of young people who may be viewed as vulnerable to many social problems, including the possibility of violent radicalisation, and who are therefore in a position to intervene

and safeguard. Yet the increasing interest in youth workers' abilities to connect can create a tension: between the need for trust and credibility with communities and young people fundamental to youth work, and the extent to which to engage with the often stigmatising policies and practices of state security.

To understand the level of this tension, it is important to explore more deeply the impact of state security on British Muslim communities, and particularly the experience of young people. During the course of research (Spalek, El Awa and McDonald, 2009, 2011), participants from communities have consistently highlighted the levels of fear and mistrust felt at the grass-roots level. This is in relation to counter-terrorism practices and much wider issues, such as Islamophobia in the media and day-to-day interactions (Lambert and Githens-Mazer, 2011), concern and anger at British foreign policy, and the sense of being part of a suspect community.

'In one day he was stopped and searched, he was stopped seven times, just in one day' (participant quotation, drawn from research data, Spalek, El Awa and McDonald, 2008, 2009). In relation to the experience of security practices, the greatest levels of criticism are aimed at 'hard' practices: those involving the pursuing and disruption of terrorism. Community participants do not suggest that such practices are invalid *per se*, but that the implementation, for example, the way in which officers carry out operations, is often insensitive and frightening. For young people in particular, stop-and-search tactics under section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000 have become a common experience. In some cases individuals have reported several stops a day, engendering a sense of humiliation and harassment. Disruption techniques, such as direct, aggressive contact by security officers, and attempts at informant recruitment are also viewed as extremely threatening. For some previously engaged and active members of communities these have led to high levels of anxiety and disengagement from interacting with state institutions.

As well as primary forms of victimisation felt by community research participants, there are the forms of secondary victimisation in the experience of other community members. Examples of negative state interaction with friends, family members and strangers – the high-profile Forest Gate raids of 2006, for example – continue to have a powerful and negative impact. Such is the effect of state tactics that official AQ operatives have sought to use them within their own narratives: for instance the case of Forest Gate was used by Adam Yahya Gadahn in the video released on the first anniversary of 7/7 (MEMRI, 2006). Wide-net spying and intelligence-gathering programmes in particular geographical locations are also reported widely, such as Project Rich Picture (Bennetto, 2006) and the controversial Project Champion which used covert cameras in predominantly Muslim areas of Birmingham in 2010, which resulted in an official apology from the West Midlands Police. The theme of mistrust between state and citizen is further strengthened, echoing AQ's claim that the War on Terror is in reality a war on Islam and Muslims.

A climate of fear is generated not only by the actual experience of security practices, but also by perceptions of secondary victimisation by security practices, exacerbated by wider issues of discrimination and disenfranchisement. From this context a strong and coherent narrative has developed: that Muslims as a section of British society are systematically suspected, monitored and marginalised. The fundamental root of this mistrust is the cross-societal perception of Islam as dangerous, in relation to both belief and identity. As a result, a tension may be located between the needs of state security and community security, the community narrative on state-citizen relations indicative of a failure to achieve equality in the basic area of personal and communal safety.

For young people, these issues are further magnified. Individuals are attuned to the heightened focus on Muslim young people by the state and the wider society, and to the pathologising of their social, political and religious positionalities and identities. This includes a strong awareness of media attitudes, knowledge of preventative counter-terrorism strategies aimed at young people within communities, and the aforementioned experiences of hard security tactics. Additionally, young people describe challenges from within Muslim communities, including intergenerational disconnect: a lack of recognition of the vulnerability of young people to the most challenging of social issues, such as drug usage or sex work. Young people also report the impact of their changing cultural and religious frameworks, in which differing interpretations of Islam, particularly Salafi-orientated, may sit uncomfortably with more established community practices (Spalek, El Awa and McDonald, 2009). The resulting sense of alienation from the state, wider British society and Muslim communities can be felt acutely.

Positioned at the problematic intersection of the British state and Muslim communities, Muslim youth workers must therefore negotiate a difficult set of competing and sometimes conflicting demands. Whether formalised into local Youth Inclusion Projects or carried out within third sector and informal voluntary groups, the work requires an inherent understanding of young people's perspectives, and of their multiple identities and experiences. Trust and the ability to communicate at street level is also fundamental, involving an inclusive approach that seeks to work with young people in their own spaces and environments. In a context where other spaces – community and state – may be deemed hostile or judgmental, Muslim youth work provides opportunities to discuss, debate and challenge. This is the point at which one may locate the first tension: for those youth workers involved with young people at the very margins of our communities, the most pertinent issues are often those most problematic in relation to the state and law.

Where young people are involved in forms of criminality, such as drug dealing or gang activity, youth workers rely on their professional judgment to help their clients, allowing them space to discuss and deal with problems, while conforming to legal requirements. However, this challenge has become more difficult in the context of security and the catch-all character of current British counter-terrorism laws. For those youth workers equipped to deal with issues of violent extremism, allowing young people space to discuss their views, or in some cases to raise concerns about the behaviour of peers, becomes a potentially dangerous activity. Knowledge of potential – and ill defined – radicalisation may be deemed of state interest, yet is necessary in order to work through issues with individuals, maintain trust, and challenge views to avoid escalation of a situation and the involvement of the authorities. This is an area of risk taking and management that can mean the difference between failure and success regarding interventions. It may have a direct impact on the safety of youth workers in relation to the law and on state perceptions of their work.

Furthermore, the insider positionality of Muslim youth workers may sit uncomfortably with political sensitivities and ideological frameworks at government level. 'The fact remains that because they [some youth workers] are Salafi-oriented, because of that sort of street background, there are commentators who say they're much more part of the problem than part of the solution' (participant quotation, drawn from research data, Spalek, El Awa and McDonald, 2008, 2009). For example, the ability to understand the motivations and emotional states that may underpin the support for, and intention to act out, violent extremism is often rooted in a history of personal experience including violent radicalisation. This includes youth workers who have belonged to religio-political organisations such as Hizb ut-Tahrir or proscribed

groups such as Al-Muhajiroun and its offshoots, and those who have been involved in conflicts such as Bosnia and Afghanistan. Furthermore, some youth work experts belong to political groups or religious communities which are considered to be marginal within a state-articulated binary of 'moderate' and 'radical' Islam. This includes those categorised as Salafi and members or affiliates of 'Islamist' groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood (Lambert, 2008; Spalek, El Awa and McDonald, 2009). Concomitantly, the CONTEST policy includes a narrative on 'values' that serves to exclude such groups on the grounds of social and political incompatibility with counter-extremist narrative. This policy is based on the idea of AQ-affiliated or AQ-influenced violent extremism as existing in a linear form, with Muslim religio-political ideology and theological methodologies forming the thin end of the wedge (Spalek and McDonald, 2009, pp. 127–29). This idea is further strengthened by political rhetoric:

Our strategy rests on an assessment of firstly whether an organization is actively condemning, and working to tackle, violent extremism; and secondly whether they defend and uphold the shared values of pluralist democracy, both in their words and their deeds. By being clear what is acceptable and what isn't, we aim to support the moderates and isolate the extremists. (Blears, 2008)

Governments must also be shrewder in dealing with those that, while not violent, are in some cases part of the problem. We need to think much harder about who it's in the public interest to work with. (Cameron, 2011)

We can thus identify a high level of grassroots practitioner expertise, the legitimacy of which in communities is endangered by engagement with a state. This threatens Muslim youth work at the legal and political levels, on the basis of perception of identities.

Muslim Youth Work in Practice: Resisting Discourse, Securing Identities

While rich and complex in lived experience, as a recurring and unifying theme within the discourses and practices of New Terror securitisation identity is reduced to a stigmatised, causal factor in violent extremism and state insecurity. The centrality of young Muslim identity in the analysis of violent radicalisation, from both state and AQ perspectives, requires scrutiny. A term used to capture the complex, fluid and changing facets of individual and group belonging, it is not only about self-expression and self-identification, but also about the ascriptions of others. Identity includes the ways in which people are perceived and labelled by others, and the impact that this may have. As Abu-Lughod reminds us, these processes are 'rarely innocent of power' (Abu-Lughod, 1993, p. 5), especially when ascriptive discourse emanates from the 'ruling apparatus of society' (Abu-Lughod, 1993, p. 8, quoting Smith, 1987, p. 62). The discussion within this section aims to explore this politics of representation through three key facets: belonging, loyalty and duty. I consider that these aspects of identity demonstrate the problem of Muslim young people which, as I shall illustrate, Muslim youth work helps to challenge and subvert.

British State Perspectives: Cohesion and Terror

At the 2011 Munich Security Conference, British prime minister David Cameron declared the 'hands-off tolerance' of multiculturalism as contributing to the

'rootlessness' of some young Muslims, connecting it with a subsequent process of violent radicalisation. The resulting furore belied the normative nature of this socio-political trope. The theme of Muslim 'belonging' and its conceptual link to issues of state security and insecurity developed in the aftermath of the three era-defining traumas. Shaping the socio-political landscape of early twenty-first-century Britain, the British population experienced, in quick succession, the Northern Disturbances, 9/11 and 7/7.

Clashes between young, mainly Muslim men, far right gangs and the police became known as the Northern Disturbances of summer 2001, occurring against a backdrop of postindustrial unemployment, overt racism and high levels of social alienation in the former mill towns of Northern England. With images of burning vehicles beamed onto television screens, the British government commissioned an enquiry, from which a series of documents known as the Cattle Report (see Cattle *et al.*, 2007) identified the root cause of the Disturbances as a lack of 'community cohesion'. While recognising the historical and social context to some degree, in the tradition of the racialisation of social problems through a race relations paradigm (Miles, 1982, 2003), the report focused on the problem of minority integration. More specifically, the report and subsequent cohesion discourse suggested that a multiculturalist attitude to social relations had allowed Muslim communities to develop separate, anti-integration identities (Allen, 2007). The danger exemplified by the Northern Disturbances was therefore not understood as economic, social or political disenfranchisement, but as community identity, and specifically the belonging of young Muslims in British society (Back *et al.*, 2002; Werbner, 2005).

While the Northern Disturbances remained a local, British issue, the link between young Muslims and violence became ingrained in the popular imagination on an international scale with the New York terror attacks on 11 September. While the focus rested on AQ and the Taliban in Afghanistan, a strong sub-issue developed in relation to the lives and characters of the primary perpetrators, with debate regarding why young clean-shaven men, like Mohamed Atta, who had strong links with the West, had chosen to murder 'in the name of Islam'. In particular, much interest rested on the tension between a perceived Muslim–Western cultural binary (Lappin, 2002), echoing historic Orientalist fears regarding the violent and barbarous nature of Islam and Muslims (Said, 1979).

This concern with identity, integration and violence cumulated in 2005, in the aftermath of the 7/7 London bombings. As the perpetrators were 'home grown', young British Muslims, the concern about separated communities and their link to the process of violent radicalisation crystallised from a state perspective. Evidence was gleaned from academic analysis and debate, used to support the idea that a 'crisis in identity' was indeed a factor in violent radicalisation (Choudhury, 2007; Wiktorowicz, 2005, referenced by CONTEST 2 (Home Office, 2009, p. 42, section 9, para. 23)). The state perspective, in which the cohesion model is operative, thus presents a narrative in which young Muslims' lack of integration and subsequent disloyalty is central to their capacity for violence against the western other. Within this model, as defined by academics such as Elworthy and Rifkind (2006), part of the solution rests on creating a sense of duty in relation to identity, to foster a sense of citizenship and shared values (Home Office, 2009, p. 87, section 9, para. 21). 'Preventing terrorism requires more effective interventions to build and reinforce social, inter-cultural and community cohesion Participation of citizens should be also promoted at all times' (Elworthy and Rifkind, 2006). Muslim violence, from the perspective of the British state, is

therefore a problem which may be resolved at least in part through the careful correction and management of identity.

Al-Qaeda Perspectives: Coopting the Ummah, Appropriating Jihad

As indicated at the start of this paper, the discourses of the British state and AQ are often inverse, relying on versions of the same themes. A fundamental principle of AQ is to attempt to legitimise indiscriminate violence through a binary of Muslim and non-Muslim. Part of this binary is to demonstrate the difficulty that Muslims have in living in western states, and their natural lack of belonging – the aforementioned speech by Gadahn a case in point. AQ narratives rely in part on the coopting of a Muslim sense of communal bond, with a focus on the notion of the ummah, or global Muslim community. Through this concept Muslims identify with each other as a community of believers, a sense that AQ discourse attempts to appropriate. Through this rhetoric the goal is to foster the belief that AQ ideology is reflective of a homogenous Muslim group identity and standpoint. The narrative found within *Inspire*, an English-language on-line magazine attributed to AQ in the Arabian Peninsula, is typical of this type of construction, building on the notion of ummah to claim that AQ-related violence is demonstrative of Muslims’ ‘borderless loyalty’ to Islam and each other: ‘... We say to the kuffar: the borderless loyalty is a religious sentiment of the people in your midst’ (*Inspire*, quoted in Maher, 2011). The AQ model is therefore one in which Muslims are present in western states but cannot, by definition, through a binarised loyalty to Islam, belong as citizens there. Duty is therefore against the state: inverting the War on Terror narrative, the Islamic concept of jihad is appropriated and redefined to promote acts of terror. Furthermore, the duty is considered a personal obligation on each individual Muslim, *fardu ain* within the AQ interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence (*Inspire*, quoted in Maher, 2011). In this construction, the British state model is reversed, with Muslim violence a duty, derived through the coopting of Muslim communal identity and religious loyalty.

Resisting Discourse and Securing Identities: Muslim Youth Work Responses

The challenge for Muslim youth workers is not only to understand and resist state and AQ discourse on a personal level, but also to assist young people in this process. In relation to identity, the key is negotiating spaces that defy the damaging effects of each narrative. This includes the ability to embrace Islamic identity and British belonging, to feel loyalty to the state and the ummah, and to understand jihad as a duty, but reject terrorism. Young Muslim research participants illustrated the challenge: ‘I always feel white people are thinking bad, I think about what they are thinking about me’. ‘You know you are a “British Muslim” but you don’t feel it. Feeling it is totally different’ (participant quotations, drawn from research data, Spalek and McDonald, 2011).

These two statements articulate a core issue: while each individual experiences processes of identity uniquely and personally, young research participants repeatedly describe a crisis not in their own self-identification, but in relation to the ascriptions of others. The discourse and related practices of security and insecurity act to delete diversity and autonomy. This allows for the construction of homogenised images of ‘young Muslim’ with which young Muslims themselves are forced to interact. Discourse claims that young people do not fit in, that their self-defined identities are a problem. Young people in our research describe the challenge posed not by how they feel about themselves, but by how others view them, and how they must then interact

with these ascriptive identities. Acutely aware of the conflicting expectations, young people suffer from a continuous flow of epistemic violence regarding their belonging, loyalty and duty as Muslims. This shapes their experiences and perceptions of social and political interaction: the problem lies in knowing that they are viewed as outsiders.

However, the ascriptive nature of this discursive abuse also represents a way in for Muslim youth work. While a literal crisis of identity – of self – might necessitate psychiatric help, the issues faced by young people regarding belonging, loyalty and duty, and social, religious and political identities operate at the point of interaction with the ascriptions of others. Muslim youth workers describe numerous methodologies for challenging the discourse, showing young people ways to counteract and resist. Youth work thus demonstrates that the challenge is not within, but from outside their own selves.

In relation to belonging, empowerment is fostered, for example, through education on the historical import of Muslims to the British state. A focus on knowledge and the creation of safe spaces is encouraged and fostered, in which debate is open, however controversial or sensitive. For example, Muslim youth workers have developed programmes to explore the long history of Islam in Britain and the Muslim contributions to Allied victory in both World Wars, to the economic success of Britain, and to cultural richness and diversity. In showing young people that they already belong, that Muslims have contributed to the history of the state and the development of British society and its ways – the very values over which they are questioned – it becomes possible to challenge discourse and for young people to realise that the battle is to stake their claim.

Work around the subject of loyalty is closely related, but the dialogue incorporates political and theological dimensions. The subject of foreign policy, of Muslim interaction with an often hostile state, is imperative, by allowing young people access and voice. Muslim youth workers create the possibility for young people to attend political events such as anti-war demonstrations or debates with members of the establishment such as politicians, policy makers and police officers, often taking the risk of incurring criticism, and in some cases vilification, from the authorities with which they work. The subject of loyalty also necessitates theological education and debate, with specialist youth workers able to break down AQ narratives regarding Muslim relations with the non-Muslim state, especially the concept of upholding the law, and the covenant of peace between Muslim citizens and western states.

The theological input in facilitating young people's identity resistance is especially vital regarding the notion of duty. While questions of civic contribution may be asked, a fundamental aspect is the discussion of jihad. In order to challenge the appropriation of this concept by AQ and its demonisation by the British state, youth workers participating in the research are vocal and uncompromising in their standpoints. In dealing with young people who may already be inclined towards violent extremist narrative, articulating the importance of jihad is central. This is not a diluting or moderating of the concept for state sensibilities, but a reiteration of classical Islamic perspectives: jihad is a noble and complex set of duties, incorporating physical defence that is bound by a set of explicit and uncompromised principles. Youth workers are often outspoken in their focus on the concept and through this stance are able to challenge the way in which jihad is considered a source of terrorist violence in state and AQ discourse. They challenge individuals regarding their duty and action to protect and serve the communities around them. Again, the risk to Muslim youth workers is high, with reputations easily tainted by suspicion.

Through the creation of safe spaces and ‘hard dialogue’ with young people, Muslim youth workers support and foster new ways for individuals to understand identity. They function to empower interaction with ascriptive and regulatory discourse as well as relationships with others, with communities and wider society. This aspect of the work – the focus on identity-related issues – is an important part of the specialist Muslim youth work that has achieved successful, documented interventions with young people (Spalek, Davies and McDonald, 2010). It therefore contributes directly to community and state security, as well as the personal welfare of young individuals.

Conclusions: Developing Alternative Notions of Security

In the context of security and of highly politicised and powerful ascriptions, Muslim youth work enables young people to resist and find alternative spaces to experience and articulate their identities. There are several implications that may be drawn from this analysis. On the broadest level, the tensions between practices and policy point to an inherent tension between current state security methods and ideas on the one hand and those of community security on the other. More specifically, they reveal a disconnect between the British state and cross-sections of Muslim communities, which while expressed and magnified through the current security paradigm, are connected to much wider issues of community safety and plural democracy (see Malik, 2008). They also raise serious questions about the inclusion of religious minorities, including those considered within state narratives as radical. Finally, they demand a pertinent question: who are the experts? In dealing with marginal ideas and marginalised people, the specialist Muslim youth workers engaging in the prevention of violent extremism must take risks and by their very nature remain positioned in credible social, political and religious spaces. They may be able to bridge the gap between young Muslims and the British state, but not without first negotiating a series of practical and ethical problems. In an arena that deals directly with the safety and security of state and citizen, the negotiation between politics, policy and practitioner success is ongoing as it is complex. But by listening to the experts connected to the grassroots, it may be possible to contribute to the development of long-term security: not only the prevention of terrorist violence and forms of state oppression, but the interlinked and interdependent promotion of community safety and psychological security for all citizens.

Notes

- 1 It is vital to note that as the vast majority of young people, including Muslim young people, have never been and never will be involved in terrorism, it would be inaccurate and unwelcome to suggest that all Muslim youth work is relevant to security. However, the research explored in this article has involved organisations which do work with the issue of violent radicalisation and which come from specific and highly relevant standpoints, dealing with young people whose views are sympathetic to violence, and who can draw on personal experience and empathy.
- 2 Spalek, El Awa and McDonald (2008, 2010), under the auspices of the AHRC Religion and Society Programme, at the University of Birmingham (see: <http://www.iass.bham.ac.uk/staff/basia-spalek/projects.shtml>) At the time of writing, in-depth qualitative interviews, textual analysis and participant observation has been carried out with a total of 104 individuals who are directly involved in or affected by the engagement between Muslim communities and the state in relation to counter-terrorism. This includes young people, youth workers, members of

community-based organisations including mosques, counter-terrorism police officers (overt and covert), policy makers and other key stakeholders.

- 3 The use of the term ‘Islamist’ is highly problematic: it is ill defined; it implies that those labelled with it adhere to a stronger Islamic framework than other Muslims; and it is used to decontextualise, group together and homogenise a diversity of religious and political ideas, acts and organisations. For these reasons I flag it between inverted commas throughout this article.

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