

“ISLAM ACHIEVEMENTS AND CONCERNS IN THE GREAT BRITAIN”

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Résumé

Cet article explore le conte le contexte social qui a facilité l'institutionnalisation de l'Islam dans la société britannique. L'importante communauté musulmane vivant actuellement en Grande-Bretagne (entre 1 et 2 millions de personnes, dont plus de la moitié sont d'origine sud-asiatique, notamment pakistanaise) s'explique par la vague d'immigration en provenance des pays du Commonwealth qui a eu lieu à partir des années 1950. La communauté musulmane britannique est très hétérogène sur le plan culturel, social et linguistique. Mais l'émergence d'un corps politique musulman a plongé le multiculturalisme britannique. Malgré leur impact dans la société britannique, la plupart des organisations islamiques se retrouvent à exprimer les mêmes revendications, dans un désarroi théorique et pratique.

Mots-clés : *islamification, expertise, performance, immigration, statistiques*

Abstract

This article explores the society context that facilitated the institutionalization of Islam in British society. The large Muslim community currently living in Britain (between 1 and 2 million people, more than half of whom are of south Asian origin, especially Pakistani) is explained by the wave of immigration from Commonwealth countries that took place from the 1950S. The British Muslim community is very heterogeneous culturally, socially and linguistically. However, the emergence of a Muslim political body has plunged the British multiculturalism. Despite their impact on British society, most Islamic organizations find themselves expressing the same claims, in a theoretical and practical disarray.

Keywords : *islamification, expertise, performance, immigration, statistics*

Introduction

In the aftermath of the Second World War, in an exsanguinated Great Britain, the needs of reconstruction quickly made it necessary to resort to mass immigration from the Commonwealth and the remaining colonies. A year after the independence of the former “Jewel in the Crown” and its division on a rough religious basis into states (India, mostly Hindu, and Pakistan, overwhelmingly Muslim), the British Nationality Act (1948) was passed. This act granted British nationality, full citizenship and residency rights to all nationals of former British

colonies (Indians, Pakistanis), as well as to colonial subjects, many of them from the English-speaking West Indies (Jamaica, Barbados, etc.). There are about 50 countries where the majority of the population is Muslim. Worldwide there are about 30 countries with a Muslim population. In which more than 90% of the inhabitants belong to Islam. There are another 20 countries with a Muslim population of between 50% and 80%. In 26 countries is Islam the state religion by Constitution.

British Muslims are often viewed as holding values incompatible with “Britishness”, regarded with suspicion and sometimes subjected to gendered forms of racism. Research projects have found that identifiably Muslim women face every day micro-aggressions, yet little is known how they negotiate both this and their identities over time. The number of Britons embracing Islam has almost doubled in the past decade, from about 60,000 in 2001 to 100,000 today (Rhouma, 2011, p. 72). While doubt about these numbers has not been fully dispelled, the evidence is clear: Islam is attracting more and more Britons each year, despite the prejudices and negative images about Islam and Muslims. *“The first recorded Englishman to become a Muslim was John Nelson, who converted to Islam at some point in the 16th Century”* (History of Islam in the UK”. Last updated 2009-09-07. BBC Website). This article will attempt to trace the conditions of the emergence of the British “Muslim community”. People from countries with a Muslim tradition in Britain have been slow to assert their religious identity. If the public authorities do not wish to cut off contact with these communities, they intend to keep them under surveillance.

The study of these relationships and, more generally, of the place occupied by Islam in Great Britain today will then allow us to draw conclusions about the change of course of universalist inspiration initiated in the integration policies across the channel since the beginning of the last decade.

I) British muslims rooted in british history

Meanwhile, knowledge of Islam was growing as translations of histories, chronicles, and other primary sources from Arabic and Turkish began to appear in print, both in English as in Latin. The first English Quran was published in 1649, and although a hostile diatribe prefaced it, the edition proved so popular that there were a quick re-issue, which worried the

interregnum authorities. The idea of the Muslims becoming subjects of the crown became so important for John Locke that in 1689, he urged “Neither pagan nor Mahometan nor Jew ought to be excluded from the civil rights of the Commonwealth because of his religion.” (Locke, 1689, à. 56)

Although there was no change in the status of aliens that date, no naturalization without Christianization. English and perhaps British, society as a whole, was becoming accustomed to Muslims.

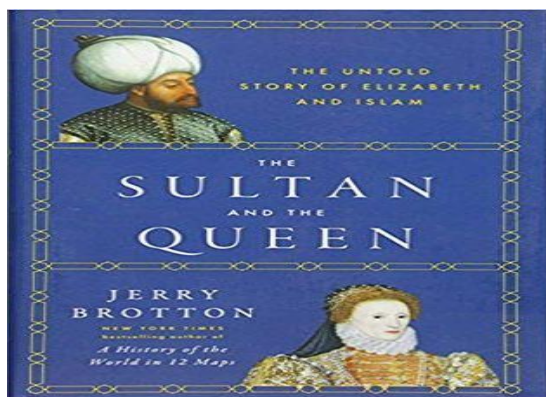
People from countries of the Muslim tradition in Britain have only belatedly claimed their religious identity. In the early days of their settlement, they were identified according categories based first on race relations and then on ethnic quantities.

- The British Victorians who became Muslims

Solicitor William Henry Quilliam who after adopted the name Abdullah after his conversion became interested in Islam after seeing Moroccans pray on a ferry during a Mediterranean break in 1887. “They we’re not at all troubled by the force of the strong wind or by the swaying of the ship. I was deeply touched by the look on their faces and their expressions, which displayed complete trust and sincerity, (he recalled. (Locke, 1689, à. 56)

According to Simon Worrall in 1570, Elizabeth I was at an impasse. The Pope had excommunicated her and the rest of Europe shunned her country. To avoid ruin, England needed allies. The queen then made the unexpected choice to turn to the Islamic world. The Tudor period has been the subject of many films and series, but this story has rarely been told. Jerry Brotton explores the forgotten history of Anglo-Muslim alliances in his book *The Sultan and the Queen*. From his home in Oxford, England, Brotton explains why Elizabeth thought Islam and Protestantism had more in common than Protestantism and Catholicism.

The reason Queen Elizabeth developed this relationship with the Islamic world was primarily theological. She was in the process of creating a protestant state and England has become the *de facto pariah of catholic Europe*. That is why she turned to the Islamic world... Elizabeth worked hard to convince Sultan Mura that Protestantism and Islam were two sides of the same coin and that the real heresy was Catholicism... What followed was an exchange of trade and goods, regardless of sectarian and theological differences. Elizabeth did not contact Sultan Murad III out of nobility of spirit or to seal a religious agreement. She did so for specific political and commercial reasons.(WORRALL. Simon. 2019. L'Alliance secrète de Elizabeth Ire et l'Islam)



Photography of Penguin Random House

Simon Worrall stated that the first known Muslim woman to enter Britain was named Aura Soltana.

Anthony Jenkins, one of the very first Englishman to establish diplomatic and commercial relations with Persia, returned to England by way of the Volga River, in what we now call Greater Russia. In Astrakhan, he bought this woman, Aurra Soltana...

There is a bewitching portrait of an anonymous woman by Marcus Gheeraerts, entitled the Persian Lady, which some assume to be Aura Soltana. She is dressed in an opulent, oriental way; she could very well be this slave turned house cleaner of Elizabeth. (<https://www.nationalgeographic.fr/histoire/lalliance-secrete-delizabeth-ire-avec-lislam>)

II) The “islamification” of Britain: record numbers embracing muslim faith

British tradition. Asian Muslims in Britain are divided into two main doctrinal trends that coexist in most places: the deobandis, who practice a rigorous and orthodox Islam, with some tendencies sometimes presented as fundamentalist, and the barelvis, who practice a more traditional and Sufi-tinged Islam. In both trends, the regular practice of worship in mosques helps to explain the strong demand for the construction of the latter. This is especially the case since these populations often come from rural backgrounds that have recreated in their new urban contexts the old village community structures, be it extended kinship ties or religious leadership. “*The first major step towards British Empire in the Muslim world came in 1765 when the East India Company received from the Mughal emperor the right to raise revenue and administer justice in the rich province of Bengal.*” (Robinson, (2009). *The British Empire and the Muslim World*, p. 34). Mosques operate mostly autonomously, and their daily work remains focuses on their local, social and political environment. They combine activities of a civic nature, such as education or social services, with purely religious activities, which means that so-called religious leaders also carry out extra-religious and representational tasks (for a presentation of this type of problem. (Césari, Bargach, Moore [2002, p. 34]). A large majority of women change their clothing styles in the short to medium term after their conversion, adopting the hijab. However, wearing the full veil (*niqab*) remains an uncommon practice.

By Faith Matters director Fiyaz Mughal’s own admission, the figures are still open to debate, but “*few would dispute that the numbers of conversions to Islam in the UK has risen dramatically over the last 10 years. In any case, they reflect the findings of other “think tanks” (Joly, 1995; Anwar, Werbner, 1991;*

McLoughlin, 2002], in Europe, which argue that conversions are very common on the continent, despite the negative image conveyed by the far right and the media.

Table 1 Religion in Great Britain

RELIG11 Religion GB level	
1 No Religion	23,725,080
2 Christian (all denominations)	33,111,246
3 Buddhist	263,398
4 Hindu	1,021,449
5 Jewish	336,965
6 Muslim	3,372,966
7 Sikh	404,891
8 Any Other Religion	1,028,513
Total	63,264,508
Missing	2,023,914
Total	65,288,422

*Annual Population Survey April 2017 to March 2018, weighted Person Weight
APS 2017*

The growing demand for unskilled workers in British industries also led to large-scale immigration. The second wave of immigration came from East African countries. Many Asians had British passports and therefore decided to come to Britain. In the early 1960s, many Muslim countries were sending their students to Britain for further studies (Malaysia, Iran, Pakistan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries). Gradually, several students decided to stay and became important members of the community. Finally, in recent years, many Muslim refugees have come from other parts of the world, including the Middle East and Eastern Europe (e: g Kosovo). A diverse community British Muslims come from all over the world, including Africa. The British Muslim community is very heterogeneous culturally, socially and linguistically. Different groups have, however, worked together to establish mosques and schools, but the basis for this cooperation was more denominational than geographic or linguistic.

Islam in the United Kingdom is the second most prevalent religion in the UK according to the results of the national census released in January 2016, establishing the British Muslim population at 3, 114, and 992.

According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), nearly one in ten children under the age of five. As a proportion of England's population, the assessment shows that the Muslim religious group accounted for 5.6 percent in 2016 compared with 4.7 to 5.6 percent. This is the main finding of a study conducted by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), published in December 2019. Indeed, the percentage of cremation in Britain is very high and the proportion of religious ceremonies is drastically lower than in France.

III) Immigration

The Commonwealth Immigration Act in 1962, and particularly the 18-month period before the act was passed, transformed the South Asian community south of the city, with many new arrivals. The 2001 census shows the Muslim population to be 136,000 people in the city at the time. (Early Arab and Muslims. (2022). *the Manchester Council*).

First, there is no doubt that Muslims can be characterised by the intensity of their religious identity. Indeed, regardless of the dimension of identity we construct, the percentage of Muslims having an intense religious

identity is roughly twice as much as that of non-Muslims. For instance, 79% of Muslims in the sample answer that religion is “very important” to how they live their life. Compared to only 42% of non-Muslims claim that they would mind very much if a close relative married a white person, compared to 37% of non-Muslims to cultural integration is also signalled by the percentage of Muslims speaking English at home or with friends, Which is always significantly lower than that of non-Muslims. (Bisin, (2007). “*The Specific Pattern of Muslim Immigrants*”.

Such large differences in the overall assessment of the community are obviously matched by differences in the assessment of the major groups by ethnic and national origin. It can be argued with certainty that the Muslim community only became numerically significant with the arrival of large numbers of immigrants from the New Commonwealth, mainly in the 1950s and 1960s, with family reunification and natural increase reinforcing primary immigration.

For all that, the current consensus on immigration (end of mass immigration) did not in any way translate into a de-politization of immigration, and of an increasingly central issue: the future of a society that is now ethnically, culturally and religiously diverse. Where populations of immigrant origin, for some years now, have begun to symbolically mark their presence in the major urban centres. In the UK, Muslims are part of the population. They have not benefited as much from public policies as others. In fact, all poverty indicators show that they are still the most disadvantaged. Several factors contribute to this situation. Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, who make up the majority of the UK's Muslim population, moved to the UK when the economic depression hit, and many came from very rural areas. Many impoverished people who were handicapped by the low levels of education in British society migrated to the areas most affected by the economic downturn in the UK. After that, prejudice against Muslims increased their discrimination. Overall, Muslims are the most marginalized and disadvantaged group in the UK. Religious questions in the 2001 census allow for detailed data collection. Muslim unemployment is three times higher than average. In addition, Muslims

Minimum wage jobs at three times the average rate. The authorities do not intend to sever ties with these communities, but they do intend to keep them under surveillance.

One year after the independence of the former “Jewel in the Crown”, India and its division on a rough religious basis into two states (India, mostly Hindu, and Pakistan, overwhelmingly Muslim), the British Nationality Act (1948) was passed. This act granted British colonies (Indians, Pakistanis), as well as to colonial subjects, many of whom came from to English-speaking Caribbean (Jamaican, Barbados, etc.). This declared universalism was at odds with the differentialism inherent in colonial policies, which were based on the idea that the British were inherently different from other nations and “races”, to use nineteenth-century terminology, if not, of course, superior to them. This belief had led the British to interfere as little as possible with local beliefs and customs.

IV) Muslims put the “Great” into Great Britain

Interest in Britain Muslims and Islam in general has increased dramatically in the UK with the “Rushdie affair”. This spectacular and cumbersome political issue has propelled Islam onto the front pages of newspapers and has opened the way for in-depth articles and dossiers aimed at better knowing and understanding a community that has become more politically present, better organized and that is increasingly difficult to ignore or to confine within reductive or very erroneous stereotypes. (Hellencourt, 2016, *La communauté musulmane et l'Etat au Royaume-Uni*, *Saphir News*). David Cameron attended the 12th Muslim News Awards for Excellence ceremony on Monday, March 31. Launched in 2000 by the British Newspaper the Muslim News, which is celebrating its 25th year, it rewards personalities from the Muslim community for their contribution to British society, in fields as varied as politics, business, sport or the arts. (*La Rédaction 2016*, « *La réussite de musulmans britanniques célébrée ave David Cameron* », *Saphir News*). On this occasion, a special award was given to Ola Lawal, a volunteer who works to improve the lives of disabled young people. Fifteen other prizes were awarded, including Mohamed Farah, known as Mo Farah, Olympic

medallist for long-distance running. Ahmed Saleh, karate and kickboxing champion, and Roohi Hasan, of ITV News.

The British authorities ask Muslims to adhere to Western standards of democracy and human rights, while the strategy of mediation by supposedly representative bodies reduces Muslims to religious identity, a paradox underlined by many alternative structures founded in recent years. Their right to agnosticism or even the indifference to religion is implicitly denied by this strategy. In addition, the British troops (Muslims) made a great pilgrimage to Mecca. This was part of the Great Britain efforts to build a multi-faith army. The Saudi army receives these Muslim soldiers for the Hajj. The hajj, which is an obligation for able-bodied Muslims, is one of the largest religious pilgrimages in the world and usually draws about 2 million people a year. Recently, on the 22 of June 2022, *“British Muslim travel companies have said they face going out of business, with travellers potentially losing thousands of pounds, after Saudi Arabia launched a new system for applying for the hajj pilgrimage”* (Hellencourt, 2016, *La communauté musulmane et l’Etat au Royaume-Uni, Saphir News.*)

Muslim women are opening up new educational and career pathways across the UK, pioneering roles in digital media, fashion design and visual art. However, their contributions to the economy and culture are rarely the focus of media and government reports. Now, Saskia Warren draws on in-depth fieldwork with British Muslim women working in these roles, taking a narrative approach to look at how the frame their own everyday labour experiences.

According to the Daily mail, Islamic courts in Britain can issue rulings sanctioned by the High Court. Hijaz College Islamic University in Nuneaton (east London) heads these Islamic courts of justice, home of the Muslim Arbitration Tribunal (MAT), headed by Faisal Aqtab Siddiqi, a rigorous jurist of Somali origin. This accreditation was made possible by the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) system that emerge from recent forms of the British legal system, dealing with commercial, civil and matrimonial matters as well as domestic violence and other neighbourhood disputes. Philip Davies, Conservative MP for Shipley, said: *“Everyone should be deeply concerned about the number of these courts. They divide society and do nothing to promote integration and social cohesion. They lead to*

a segregated society” (*The daily mail, Tribunaux islamiques en Angleterre, 29 janvier 2010*).

V) Performance and expertise of islamic schools

In Great Britain, 7,000 of the 25,000 schools are denominational and receive public funding, but the majority are Christian schools, Minority Muslim, Sikh and Hindu schools are growing rapidly and have only been state-funded since 1997. (*Renaud, & all, 2016, Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal*). Statistics from the Ministry of Education have shown, for example that the Muslim school Tauheedul Islam “*is ranked as the best of the non-selective schools, nationally with students from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, this is not the first time this school has achieved such results; it has previously earned numerous award titles.* (« Grande Bretagne : les écoles musulmanes ont les meilleures résultats scolaires ». (2014). *Igra.com*. In March 2012, it was selected “secondary school of the year”, by the Times Educational supplement annual awards and in May, the inspectors report called the school “highly effective” in its teaching. In London, the girls school, Tayyibah, recorded a 100% pass rate for 2012. The excellent results of the Muslim schools prove that these students are well prepared to pursue a good higher education. Many of these students come from modest backgrounds, and through school, they will be able to obtain better living conditions than their parents will. There are an estimated 400,000 Muslim students, according to the Muslim Council of Britain.

If Muslim constituencies are granted greater participatory space in form of provisions for Muslim schooling, it could contribute to the reconciliation of faith commitments and citizenship requirements within a public sphere that has historically included and incorporated other religious minorities’ before it. This is a key point because it appears increasingly unjust not to afford Muslims with schooling provisions parallel to other faith groups, particularly because this has historically been an effective method of integrating religious minorities throughout the development of the education system in Britain. (Meer, 55, 2007)

First, what can be called the international solidarity of Islamic institutions? Of course, there are no clerics in Islam in the sense of a hierarchy with sacramental powers, as in Christianity, which exercises considerable social control over the Church, notably through the Catholic sacrament of penance. Nevertheless, of course, there is a “staff” dedicated to worship and doctrinal tasks, which in the Muslim world constitutes a group of scholars, *‘ulama’* (**Ulama is the guardian, transmitter and interpreter of religious knowledge in Islam, including Islamic doctrine and law**), jurists, *‘fuqaha’* (***A Fuqaha is a specialist in Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh). The term can be understood in French as jurist or jurisconsult***), prayer leaders, imams, countless mosques or shrines, Friday preachers, judge, *‘qadi’* (**Qadi is a Muslim judge who renders decisions according to the Shariah (islamic law) ;)** Muslim religious count. All the practical and intellectual, legal and political questions posed to these people were discussed at international conferences, congresses of scholars and jurists, Muslim heads of state or their ministerial meetings. The Islamic community in the United Kingdom is culturally, socially, and linguistically heterogeneous. However, various groups have worked together to establish mosques and schools, but the basis for this cooperation was sectarian rather than geographic or linguistic.

An extremely young population also characterizes the Muslim population in Britain. The dynamism of this population is reflected in the percentage of young people under the age of 16. The number of Muslims under the age of sixteen in 2001 was just over thirty-five percent, which is almost double the white population. According to Moustapha Traoré, a Specialist in Integration in Great Britain: “*About a third of all British Muslims are under fourteen years old.*” (Traoré, 2011, *Atlantico.fr*) Interest in British Muslims and Islam in general has increased dramatically in the UK with the “Rushdie affair”. This spectacular and cumbersome political issue has propelled Islam to the front pages of newspapers and has also opened the way for in-depth articles and dossiers aimed at better knowing and understanding a community that has become more politically present, better organized and increasingly difficult to ignore or to confine to reductive or totally erroneous stereotypes.

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