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Islam and New Britishness

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I declare that I have worked on this thesis independently, using only the works cited.

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Author’s signature
I would like to thank my supervisor, prof. Mgr. Milada Franková, CSc., M.A.,
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1. Introduction

Integration of ethnic and religious minorities has been a challenge to British people and authorities for decades. In this thesis I focus on the contemporary debate concerning British Muslims and their integration into British society. The Muslim community is primarily perceived through their religious beliefs and practices, which are by some regarded as incompatible with the British mainstream lifestyle. British Muslims face obstacles on their way to a respectable and equal position in British society on both sides: the rising Islamophobic sentiments on the side of the British majority and the fragmented Muslim voice on the side of British Muslims. How shall the problematic accommodation of British Muslims in Britain be resolved? What is the current proposition of the British government? And is there anything like British Islam evolving? These and other sensitive issues related to Islam and its British adherents are dealt with in this thesis.

The first chapter is devoted to clarification of terms and a brief introduction to Islam and its principles. In the following chapter, three books *The Clash of civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* by Samuel Huntington, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* by Tariq Ramadan, and *The Islamic Challenge: Politics and Religion in Western Europe* by Jytte Klausen provide different perspectives on the relationship between Muslims and Westerners (or Europeans).

At the beginning of chapter three I introduce Huntington’s view of the world political realm as seven (or eight) distinct civilizations, of which most notably the Western and Islamic civilizations have been in conflict for centuries
and so they are today. Huntington gives a very negative picture of the Islamic civilization for which he has been much criticized.

Then I move on to a more specific relationship between Westerners and Muslims as outlined by Tariq Ramadan. He gives recommendations to Muslims living in the Western civilization on how to integrate and yet remain true Muslims. His proposal of modernization of Islam appeals both to some Muslims and Westerners, but is criticized by others at the same time. Ramadan says reinterpreting of the textual sources of Islam must be done in the light of the contemporary context. He does not think there is a clash between Western and Islamic civilization, however he warns a conflict between these two is very likely unless the mutual lack of knowledge of one another is fought and diminished (226).

An examination of Muslims in Europe closes chapter three. Here a survey among the European Muslim political elite by Jytte Klausen serves the purpose. From her survey, Klausen draws positive findings: there is no clash of civilizations, Muslims in Europe are “simply a new interest group and a new constituency” (3) in Europe and they are strongly pro-integration and pro-democracy.

A detailed analysis of the situation regarding Muslims in Great Britain follows in chapter four. Ethnic and religious diversity of British Muslims is outlined and the question of a British Muslims’ representative body is addressed. Rising anti-Muslim sentiments and predominantly negative media coverage of Islam-related issues are further discussed. Here a significant number of reports published by various British institutions and think tanks, and articles from newspapers are among the reference material.
In the next chapter, the focus is on the two integration frameworks being at stake recently: multiculturalism and new Britishness. Multiculturalism has been much criticized recently and that is why new policies are being sought and promoted, most notably the renewal of British nationalism. The new sense of Britishness should, as the Prime Minister Gordon Brown hopes for, unite British citizens of all religious, ethnic, and social backgrounds. Will the new concept of citizenship and British identity really appeal to all people living in the UK?

Doubts regarding new Britishness appear as there seems to be a crisis of the ‘old’ British national identity as well as of the religious identity among British Muslims. The British have been redefining their national identity over the last few decades and rising nationalisms in Wales, Scotland, and England have significantly contributed to the erosion of the ‘old’ British identity, which is by some people seen as anachronistic, being based on Protestant faith and the Empire (Blunkett 5). As regards British Muslims, some are in favour of secularization or Westernization of Islam, whereas others have recently promoted religious symbols, studied the Koran, and stuck to their religion more than ever. Affirming their religious identity has aroused many controversies, of which three are discussed in detail: wearing the scarf, Muslim faith schools and official recognition of Sharia courts.

Integration of the British Muslim minority is a delicate issue. It is vital to emphasize that the population make-up of Great Britain is immensely colourful and that other religious and ethnic minorities have more or less the same experience as Muslims (be it the discriminatory media coverage, xenophobia, or homogenization of minorities). British society has faced and will certainly
continue to face manifold challenges regarding integration of its manifold minorities.
2. Terminology

2.1. Terms Used and Confused

Clarification of terms seems to be most appropriate at the beginning of the discussion, as some of them have been widely used and misused particularly by the media. Some terms have acquired new – rather negative or misleading – connotations or are not clearly defined, although being widely used by scholars and others. Unfortunately, one cannot avoid simplification and generalization in many cases. Terms such as the West or Islam are labels for large and complex realities but as Edward Said in his book Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World admits, they are “notoriously vague and at the same time unavoidable” (9). The terms appear with inverted commas in the following explanatory section when mentioned for the first time, but they are without inverted commas in the remaining text.

When talking of “Westerners” in “the West” (shorthand for the Western civilization/society/culture) I refer to atheists or people of Christian belief who live in liberal democratic countries in Europe, North America and some settler countries (New Zealand, Australia). The geographical identification might be confusing at times, depending on where in the world you are standing.

“Islam” is a name of the religion and is sometimes used as a synonym for the Islamic civilization/society/culture. I use the term Islam in connection with the religion only. A brief introduction to Islam and its principles follows after this subchapter. When referring to the society or culture of Muslims, I use the adjective “Islamic”. This is not to be confused with “Islamist” deriving from
“Islamism”, which is a radical political form of Islam. Islamism is sometimes
called “Islamic fundamentalism” or “radical Islam”, and is not the same as
“Islamist terrorism”, as many Islamists reject terrorism (Mirza et al. 4). In some
publications, however, the terms Islamic and Islamist are used inconsistently as
there is no general usage consensus (Masood 10).

There is a wide range of binary oppositions used in the debate on the
relationship between the Western and Islamic society. Huntington simply refers
to the West versus Islam; traditional Muslims refer to the “Dar al-Islam” vs. the
“Dar al-harb”¹, and Ramadan talks of the “centre” vs. “periphery”, “the North” vs.
“the South”, or the West vs. “the East”. Klausen examines the relationship
between European Muslims and Europeans. She acknowledges that binary
oppositions such as the West vs. Islam contradict the fact that Muslims living in
the West are indeed Westerners too (VIII). Obviously, the West and Islam
sometimes merge together.

“Muslims” are the believers of Islam. They live virtually all over the world
and are of different ethnic origins and faith directions. According to the Institute
of Community Cohesion, there are “now at least 15 significant ethno-national
Muslim communities” (“Understanding” 2) in Great Britain. The term “British
Muslims” therefore covers this diverse group of Muslims, reportedly being the
most diverse Muslim community in the world. Some British Muslims might
object that they do not want to be defined in terms of their religion (just as the
British are not called British Christians). On the other hand, others may resist
the word British as it might remind them of the British colonial rule imposed on
their countries of origin in the past.

¹ Dar al-Islam is translated as “the abode of Islam”, where the land is owned by Muslims and the
Islamic legal system is applied, whereas the Dar al-harb is “the abode of war”. However, this
does not necessarily mean that these two spaces are in the state of war (Ramadan 65).
When labelling the ‘indigenous’ British people, again some tricky nuances arise. Dividing British citizens into Muslims and non-Muslims does not serve the purpose as the latter includes many other ethnic and religious minorities along with the ‘natives’. In order to label the English, Welsh, Scottish, and Irish predominantly white citizens of Anglican, Catholic or no religion, I use the term “the British” or less frequently “Britons”. People of other national, racial, or religious background might argue they too are British, and of course, all citizens of the UK have the right to be included within the British. Another problem with the term regards the fact that a majority of British Muslims live in England, therefore mostly but not solely the native English people face the sometimes painful integration of the minority. Bearing all this in mind, I nevertheless find it most comprehensible to call the two groups concerned British Muslims and the British.

In geographical terms, “Britain” is shorthand for Great Britain and consists of England, Wales, and Scotland. Northern Ireland is not included in this analysis as it faces rather different integration problems (in fact, Northern Ireland is neglected in a vast majority of surveys and analyses I have come across).

2.2. Islam and Its Principles

Islam is one of the three monotheistic religions in the world, along with Christianity and Judaism. Its basic beliefs are the affirmations of the oneness of God (‘Allah’ in Arabic), belief in angels, messengers, prophets, and the scriptures revealed by God, and the belief in the Last Day and resurrection (“Muslims” 13). The most important textual sources are the Koran and the
Sunna. The Koran was revealed by God to the prophet Muhammad and is regarded as God’s guidance to people. In the Sunna the life and deeds of Muhammad are described and it also functions as a guide for Muslims. Islam is, according to Muslims, the perfected version of the religion revealed to prophets prior to Muhammad: Adam, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus (ibid 13).

There are 1.5 billion Muslims all around the world (“Muslims” 13). They are required to follow the Islamic legal and ethical code Sharia (derived primarily from the Koran and the Sunna). There are five essential pillars of religious practice: “shahada” (i.e. the formulaic testimony to the faith of the one God and his prophet Muhammad), “salah” (i.e. the five daily prayers), “zakat” (i.e. the social purification tax), “Ramadan” (the month of fasting and strengthening faith), and “hajj” (i.e. the pilgrimage to Mecca) (Ramadan 178). The shahada is an individual affirmation of the faith in God, whereas the other four pillars create the sense of belonging to the “umma” – a spiritual communion of all Muslims (ibid 89).

Muslims are to stand on the side of justice and human dignity in any case, in relation to Muslims as well as non-Muslims (ibid 91). They shall not fight nor kill for money, territory or power control (ibid 98). As regards the position of women in Islam, there are some restrictions on their conduct, but as Ramadan stresses, it is essential to distinguish whether the restrictions are based on cultural customs or Islamic principles (140). Muslims distinguish between halal (permitted in Islam) and haram (forbidden). This distinction is very important when it comes to consumption of meat: pork and meat of non-herbivores is strictly forbidden. Other types of meat might be consumed after being slaughtered in a specific way (“Meeting” 23).
Do Muslims merge their religion with politics and social issues? Samuel Huntington says so and indirectly suggests such mingling hinders the development of freedom (264, 70). On the contrary, Ramadan explains Muslims are able to and do distinguish “the various orders of things” (145), but in all of them they draw from the same source: the scriptures. On the ritual level, the principles are fixed and clear, whereas on the social and political level, Muslims can exercise rational autonomy.

Within Islam there are several religious directions, which differ in respects ranging from cultural customs to interpretation of the Koran and the Sunna. Ramadan identifies six different tendencies within the interpretation of the textual sources (24). They sometimes oppose and despise one another, so it is again important to bear in mind the incredible complexity of Islam.
3. Islam vs. West: Three Perspectives

3.1. Samuel Huntington: Clash of Civilizations

Huntington argues that the Western civilization is gradually declining in its global power and others, most notably the Islamic civilization, “attempt to expand their own economic and military power to resist and to balance against the West” (29). According to Huntington, religion is usually the most important element of a civilization, therefore “people who share ethnicity and language but differ in religion may slaughter each other” (42). A civilization can accommodate people of different races, cultures, and countries around a religion. Huntington provides an overview of seven major civilizations of today: the Sinic, Japanese, Hindu, Islamic, Orthodox, Western, and Latin American civilizations (possibly the African civilization might be added) (45-7).

These days, his theory seems to be referred to very often in connection with any kind of conflict or disagreement between Muslims (or Western Muslims) and Westerners. Huntington in fact suggests there are or will be more than one clash of civilizations and as an example he gives the possibility of a power struggle between the West and China in the near future (209, 312). His most audible objections are voiced against Muslims and their religion. He concludes on the likelihood of a global war – it is not impossible and in case it breaks out, he is sure who the opposing camps will be: Muslims versus non-Muslims (312).

Huntington’s stance towards Muslims is very antagonistic. He claims the Islamic civilization is unable to live peaceably with other civilizations and provides precisely calculated arguments – his tables on ethno-political and
ethnic conflicts and militarism compare Muslims and non-Muslims and prove, according to Huntington, the “high propensity to resort to violence in international crisis” of Muslim states (258). Islamic culture is not able to accommodate democracy, he says (ibid 29).

In this thesis, attention is paid to Huntington’s view on the relationship between the Western and the Islamic civilizations. Today, the former includes Europe, North America, and settler countries (e.g. Australia, New Zealand). The Islamic civilization covers areas of North Africa, Arabian Peninsula, central Asia, the Subcontinent, and Southeast Asia (ibid 45).

Islam is, in Huntington’s opinion, an absolutist faith which is among the sources of its incompatibility with the Western and other civilizations. He goes as far as quoting and identifying with an anonymous statesman, who referred to the Muslim minority in his country as “indigestible”. The facts that Muslims mix religion and politics and clearly distinguish between the Islamic and non-Islamic realm make the immigrant Muslims simply unable to adapt to their new non-Muslim environments (ibid 264).

Contrary to the predictions of a worldwide religious decline pronounced at the beginning of the 20th century and the establishment of the rule of rationalism and science, the resurgence of religion “has pervaded every continent, every civilization, and virtually every country” in the second half of the century (ibid 96-7). Huntington explains this trend as follows: reason is not enough; in the age of urbanization and social modernization, one needs new sources of identity, meaning, and stability and finds these in a religion (97). Very broadly put, the revival of religion is a reaction against moral relativism, secularism, and self-indulgence (ibid 98).
Huntington and other political scientists (Ronald Dore, William McNeill) say the revival of non-Western religions is a manifestation of anti-Westernism. This is to be understood as a stance against the egotistic, consumerist, secular, and degenerate culture of the West (ibid 100-1), not against modernity as such. In terms of adherent numbers of Christianity and Islam worldwide, the latter wins as it is spread by conversion and a very active reproduction, whereas the former is spread primarily by conversion (ibid 65).

Religion has dictated the turbulent relationship between Westerners and Muslims for centuries: the natures of Christianity and Islam have caused the ongoing conflict (ibid 209). Taking into account Huntington’s argument that a religion is an essential pillar of a civilization, then there has always been a clash between Western and Islamic civilization and unless one of the two changes accordingly or surrenders, the conflict will never be resolved. In the late 20th century, the conflict was spiced by new realities – most importantly the renewed Muslim confidence and their resentment towards the attempted universal establishment of Western decadent values and institutions (ibid 213).

Huntington had published *The Clash of civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* five years before the terrorist attacks in the USA in 2001. Other terrorist attacks have followed, in Europe and elsewhere. Those who had doubted Huntington’s proposals before must have been quickly persuaded of the ‘veracity’ of his theory by those atrocities. Muslims living in Islamic as well as Western countries have become frequently scrutinized by the media and state authorities. In Europe, the ever-rising and more visible presence of Muslims is being watched with exaggerated negative reactions. Fearful sentiments about Europe being Islamized show marks of “moral panic”. Stanley
Cohen, a British sociologist who coined the term, explains that such panic arises “when it becomes widely believed that a particular group is dangerously deviant and a menace to social stability” (Klausen 128). Moral panics are typically fed by perpetual media coverage, which very often takes “the form of anecdotes told as facts” (ibid 129).

The relationship between the Westerners and Muslims is not as catastrophic as Huntington portrays it, neither is it satisfactory enough. In Britain and elsewhere, many factors hinder a constructive debate and the subsequent pragmatic solutions leading to a non-problematic cohabitation of Muslims and others: first and above all, it is a gross lack of knowledge of Islam and its principles, second it is the homogenizing of Muslims and – in some cases – associating them with extremism. The ignorance is then fed by distorted media coverage and books such as the one by Samuel Huntington, which as a result fuel a moral panic among the public. It might be added that Muslims living in the West sometimes lack sufficient knowledge too, e.g. in Britain they are sometimes accused of not knowing English language or the British history well enough.

3.2. Criticism of Samuel Huntington

Klausen is strongly opposed to Huntington’s theory of the clash of civilizations. In the European context, if there is any clash at all, then it is the clash between secularists and conservatives as regards religious pluralism (Klausen 3). The conflicts between Muslims and Europeans might be explained on the grounds of cultural misunderstanding (e.g. the Danish cartoon controversy). Huntington’s conclusions on the doom of the West and the
indigestibility of Islamic principles in the West are according to Klausen and other recent surveys totally unfounded (ibid VI). On the contrary, some Muslim and Christian religious leaders share opinion on some issues: particularly on the overwhelming spread of secularism (ibid 131) or homosexual couples.

Neither does Dilwar Hussain from the Islamic Foundation arrive at the same conclusions as Huntington. Hussain claims “freedom, equality, justice, … , education, charity, and security” are values people of all religions aspire to (Cooper 45-6). In addition, Tariq Modood warns of a hidden danger in Huntington’s theory. In Modood’s words “the idea of Islam as separate from a Judeo-Christian West is as false as it is influential”. The theory might function as a “self-fulfilling prophecy” (Modood). Tariq Ramadan allows a possibility of a conflict: “if the clash is not a reality, the ingredients that could lead to it are very present in current mentalities” (226). By the ingredients he means the lack of mutual knowledge, acceptance of general conclusions, and political as well as geostrategic interests.

The clash thesis is, in fact, one of those ingredients: it is a simplified view of the world dynamics and – as it has unfortunately gained currency among many Westerners – it fuels the ignorance and the spread of generalisations. Edward Said critically assesses Huntington’s theory and renames it “the clash of ignorance”. He criticizes Huntington for being an ideologist “who wants to make ‘civilizations’ and ‘identities’ into what they are not: shut-down, sealed-off entities that have been purged of the myriad currents and countercurrents that animate human history” (Said, “The Clash”).

One of Huntington’s central arguments is that Muslims are against consumerism, capitalism, and materialism (all these being dominant elements in
the Western civilization). However, there are non-Muslims sharing such 
sentiments as well and perhaps surprisingly, they are Westerners themselves. 
Jeanette Winterson, a British novelist, vented her fierce criticism of American 
and British exploitive capitalism shortly after 9/11 (Winterson). In the report 
Living Apart Together: British Muslims and the Paradox of Multiculturalism, the 
authors carried out a survey among Muslim and non-Muslim citizens and found 
out that many respondents from both groups “complained about the 
‘materialism’ or ‘consumerism’ of the West (Mirza et al. 60-1). And as a Jesuit 
Thomas Michel says, Christianity teaches other ideologies than consumerism 
and profit-oriented modernism (Michel). Banners such as “Capitalism isn’t 
working” and “Consumers suck” were held by Westerners themselves at a 
demonstration in London during the G20 summit in 2009 (“G20 Protests”).

Looking at the figures on political and ethnic “bloody” conflicts involving 
Muslims, Huntington concludes Muslims very much tend to “bellicosity and 
violece” (258). This argument is denied by Klausen within the context of 
European Muslims: “perhaps the most important argument against the ‘clash’ 
theory is that the Muslim terrorist movement has very little support in European 
Muslim communities” (Klausen X). On the contrary, European Muslims are 
“mastering the skills of democratic negotiation” (ibid 3). Some European 
politicians, however, have skilfully used Huntington’s overgeneralization when 
talking about European Muslims (especially in reference to the ‘home-grown’ 
perpetrators of London bombings in 2005) and have tarred European Muslims 
and terrorists with the same brush.

Do violent and bellicose Christians exist? They do, and the British public 
have been painfully reminded only recently about their existence: on 7th and 9th
March 2009 three British officials were killed by the Real IRA (“Who Are”). By employing terrorist methods, the Real IRA fights for annexation of Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland. Christianity has a certain role in the conflict – it may be only a symbolic role, nevertheless Catholic Christians stand in opposition to Protestant Christians. Does anybody tar Christians with the same brush and claim all Christians support violence and terrorism? I do not think so.

Many other critics of Huntington’s theory can be cited. From an interview with Samuel Huntington in 2006 it appears many of his critics have probably misunderstood him completely. Have they? In the interview, Huntington condemns thinking “in terms of two homogenous sides starkly confronting each other” and then again he repeats: “I think it’s hard to talk about the Muslim world and Christian world as blocks” (Chaudary). Later on, ironically enough, he admits in one of his answers: “I’m not an expert on Islam” (ibid). The heated debate on Huntington’s controversial theory will certainly continue, although without Huntington himself – he died in December 2008.

3.3. Tariq Ramadan: Westernize Islam

Tariq Ramadan is a controversial Muslim activist. He advocates “Westernization of Islam” arguing that Islam is based on three sources: the Koran, the Sunna, and the “state of the world, or of our society” (37); and studying and reinterpreting the textual sources of Islam in respect to the contemporary context is actually required. There are fundamental Islamic principles that shall be observed by all Muslims; however they might be subject to evolution and adaptation. Muslims living in Western countries should study the Koran and the Sunna and seek what in their religion is “changeable” and
what is “unchangeable” (ibid 9). As an example Ramadan gives Muslim communities in North Africa or Asia – they differ in their national cultures and ways of lives, but share the essence of their faith (9). Western Muslims can be perfectly faithful to the Islamic principles and at the same time be totally involved in the life of the Western society (ibid 6).

Ramadan claims there is a silent revolution among Western Muslims going on and that European and American adaptations of Islam are evolving, being “faithful to the principles of Islam, dressed in European and American cultures, and definitely rooted in Western societies” (4). He vehemently promotes theological renewal among Western Muslims and emphasizes that they have a unique opportunity to revitalize Islam, free it from the “ethnicized doctrines and rituals” and thus create a “pure faith” (Klausen 9).

The universal message of Islam, according to Ramadan, is to integrate the good. Muslims living outside the Islamic civilization should therefore regard as their own everything that is economically, socially, politically or intellectually good and not against Sharia (54). Ramadan accuses the openly anti-Western Muslims of intensifying the picture of Muslims as over-sensitive and self-protective (5). Instead, Western Muslims should root themselves in Western cultures and become more confident and active in the societies they live in (ibid 85).

Muslims in the West are bound by the laws of the particular Western country and Islamic laws at the same time. In some cases, what is allowed by Western laws is prohibited by Sharia, e.g. consumption of alcohol and soft drugs, raising interest in financial dealings, and sexual affairs outside marriage.
It is up to Muslims then to “find their way in the Western environment” in order to obey the laws both as citizens and believers (ibid 97).

Klausen agrees there is a reform and revival movement of Islam in Europe, but it is not as coherent as Ramadan would like it to be (9). Ramadan himself admits and criticizes the lack of intracommunal dialogue among diverse Muslim communities and claims that some of the Muslim representatives do not represent their religious communities at all (209). What is more, there is also a lack of inter-communal debate which would lead to better understanding of Western and Muslim communities (ibid 226).

3.4. Criticism of Tariq Ramadan

Ramadan is criticized by both Muslims and Westerners for his proposal to Westernize and modernize Islam. Strongly traditional Muslims, following interpretations of the scriptural sources done by scholars between the 8th and 11th centuries (e.g. the Taliban in Afghanistan), do not approve of any rereading of the Koran and the Sunna (ibid 24).

Among some Westerners, Ramadan is highly suspicious. Melanie Phillips, a British-born Jewish author of the book Londonistan: How Britain Is Creating a Terror State within, has attacked Ramadan for his Westernization of Islam being actually a subdued tactic of gradual Islamization of the West. Phillips bases her arguments partly on a book Brother Tariq: The Doublespeak of Tariq Ramadan by Caroline Fourest. Phillips associates Ramadan with the Muslim Brotherhood\(^2\), which was founded by Hassan al-Banna, Ramadan’s grandfather. Al-Banna invented the strategy of “graduated conquest” (Phillips)

\(^2\) The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in 1928 and later became radicalized. Today, it aims at mobilizing the predominantly Muslim Europe’s underclass “by rooting itself in civil society” (Klausen 43, 207).
of the West by Muslims and their social order. Phillips, as a proof of Ramadan’s allegiance to Al-Banna’s ideology, quotes Ramadan (in reference to his grandfather): “there is nothing in this heritage that I reject” (ibid).

Melanie Phillips admits associating people and ideologies on the basis of family relation may be unwarranted, but in Ramadan’s case it is well-founded (ibid). Nevertheless, she has been caught adopting and spreading false information as facts. In her book “Londonistan” she takes over the story of a ban on piggy banks from the Daily Express published on 24 Oct 2005. The Daily Express picked up the news from a local newspaper and put it on the front page – the title went “Hogwash: Now the PC Brigade Bans Piggy Banks in Case They Upset Muslims” ("The Search" 33). The newspaper was agonized over such expression of pandering to Muslims, so was Phillips.

The truth was, however, that the piggy-bank posters were removed in Halifax and NatWest banks in order to make place for the next promotional campaign. “The story was nonsense”, it was said in the NatWest statement for the report The Search for Common Ground: Muslims, Non-Muslims and the UK Media. The Daily Express printed the article without contacting Halifax or NatWest officials for an explanation ("The Search" 35), so did Melanie Phillips in her book. This is an exemplary case of distorted news told as facts, which then help spread moral panic among the public. Moreover, Melanie Phillips was voted the “2003’s Most Islamophobic Media Personality” by the Islamic Human Rights Commission ("Press Release").

Can Phillips’s assaults against Ramadan be trusted then? Ramadan is a Professor of Islamic Studies at St Anthony’s College in Oxford, he has been asked for advice on combating Islamic extremism by the British Government
Klausen dismisses the accusations of Ramadan being a disguised extremist and explains: “If his ideas were acted upon, no return to the controlled orthodoxy of the Islamic world would be possible” (162).

Ramadan seems sincere when promoting Westernization of Islam instead of Islamization of the West, but there are others in tune with Melanie Phillips. Charles Moore, chairman of a British think tank *Policy Exchange*, has called Ramadan a “phoney Muslim moderate” (Moore Ch. 7). Gilles Kepel, an expert on Islam, suggests Tariq Ramadan’s ideology is a “Trojan horse” tactic and claims his goal is a “Muslim-Brotherhood-type ideology” (Klausen 207-8).

Authorities in the USA have demonstrated their stance towards Ramadan clearly: they refused him a visa. In France, he has been labelled a “dangerous man” (ibid 162) and accused of anti-Semitism. Be that as it may, Ramadan is undoubtedly one of significant contributors to the current debate on Muslims living in the West.

3.5. Jytte Klausen: Muslims as a New Constituency

Jytte Klausen, from Brandeis University, Massachusetts, USA, set off to Europe with a very ambitious project: to interview over 300 members of a primarily mainstream Muslim political elite in Great Britain, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, France, and the Netherlands in order to map their “views on the accommodation of Islam in Europe” (Klausen 213). She published her findings in 2005 in the book called *The Islamic Challenge: Politics and Religion in Western Europe*. 
Klausen as well as a majority of those interviewed do not think Huntington’s clash theory is a reality. However, there certainly are some conflicts in the process of accommodating the largest religious minority in Western Europe. The question arises: what is it then, if it is not a “clash of civilizations” (ibid 7)? It is a combination of many factors, Klausen claims: a clash between secularist and conservative European parties, reluctant or inappropriate accommodation of Muslim immigrants, and Islamophobia to name the most important factors.

The two traditional European parties – social democrats and conservatives – are each in its own peculiar way facing religious pluralism, which is an undeniable reality in today’s Europe. According to Klausen, Muslims in Europe are a new interest group and the political system must change so that it is able to accommodate Muslims, their religion and rights (3) (and of course, other religious minorities too). “European frameworks for the exercise of religion” are to be blamed for the problems Muslims experience (ibid 108).

The change of public philosophies and church-state policies is slowly under way but it has not brought many significant results yet. The left-wing politicians promote secularism and reject state funding of any religion, whereas the right-wing politicians stress Christian values as an essential element of European identity and advocate the current privileges of national churches in their countries (ibid 107). Some Muslim leaders describe the situation as “birth pains” of the future social peace (ibid 71).

The two traditional camps are now challenged by “new-line” Muslim political leaders, who expect “professionalism and ‘playing by the rules’ of national political discourse” (ibid 17). This remark points at some upsetting
cases of relative equality – although Muslim leaders advocate liberal and (to a certain degree) secularist principles, they are angered when they are not allowed the right of individual choice by European governments in some cases, which in other contexts is regarded as a core democratic right (ibid 207). The European establishment, on the other hand, expects the Muslim political elite to be involved actively in seeking solutions (ibid 7).

Another source of today’s problems between European Muslims and Europeans is the “accommodation of [Muslim] migrant populations” (ibid 18). A lot has been said about the situation – particularly after the terrorist attacks in the USA (2001), Spain (2004), and Great Britain (2005), but little has been done. Klausen thinks “there has been a lack of concrete ideas about how to integrate Islam in Europe” (81) and she is right indeed. There have been many calls for ‘urgent debates’ but hardly any workable solutions found and put into practice. In some countries, the accommodation of Muslims is still on a very theoretical level, in others it is in a phase of searching for a sustainable framework (e.g. Great Britain – after the policy of multiculturalism had, as some believe, more or less failed).

It is vital that Muslims participate in the debate on their integration as well. Klausen points at a problem here: in each European country concerned, the Muslim community differ in their opinion on integration and when they are to negotiate with the authorities of the particular country, their “voice is a cacophony rather than a chorus” (81). Tariq Ramadan goes even further. He strongly criticizes the inability of Muslims to tolerate and communicate with one another: “It can never be said enough that intracommunal dialogue between Muslims is virtually nonexistent” (Ramadan 209).
According to optimistic Jytte Klausen, the evolving Muslim political elite put “emphasis on Muslim unity irrespective of ethnic or religious differences” (17) and are therefore quite unified in their political discourse. The new elite are “overwhelmingly secular”, focus on national politics, and support liberal values and the separation of religion and politics (ibid 101). What is more, results from other surveys (Pew Global Attitudes Project in 2006, Policy Exchange survey in 2007, and Gallup World Poll in 2007) show a large majority of European Muslims agree with the evolving Muslim political elite (ibid VI-IX).

Xenophobia and Islamophobia play an important role in the problematic process of accommodating Islam in Europe. Europeans are xenophobic and discriminate ethnic minorities in many areas, e.g. in the labour market or education (ibid 62). An interesting experiment in which job applications with ethnic-sounding and native-sounding names were submitted showed that people with ethnic-sounding names were turned down much more often (ibid 61).

Muslims in particular are looked down upon with suspicion – and so an exclusive type of xenophobia has been born: the Islamophobia. It is “a generalized and irrational psychological malady” which is partially enhanced by the production of distorted Islam-related news in the media (ibid 57), to which more attention is paid further on. The assumptions of incompatibility of Islamic and Western values and the “persistent mischaracterization of Islam by the media and politicians” indirectly hinder a public recognition of Muslims living in Europe as being equal and European (ibid 8, 63).

Klausen concludes that religious pluralism in possible in Europe, but changes must be made on both European and Muslim sides. European
governments, in cooperation with Muslim leaders, must introduce suitable public policies and change the existing state-church relationship (ibid 211). Muslims, on the other hand, must rethink their religious practices and theological thinking in the European context (ibid 207).

3.6. How British Society Digests Its Newcomers

Klausen thinks that “Muslims are simply a new interest group and a new constituency, and that the European political systems will change as the processes of representation, challenge, and cooptation take place” (3). Richard Bean elaborates on a similar idea in his latest play *England People Very Nice*. He takes a look at four immigration waves to the East End in London over the last four centuries: French Protestant Huguenots, Irish Catholics, Jews, and finally Muslim Bangladeshis.

Although being on the stage of the National Theatre since February 2009, so far the play has sparked a lot of controversy. Some have called it “a sharp comedy” (Clapp), others have dismissed it for being racist and offensive. The sharp humour lies in Bean’s ridicule of stereotypes. It is ironic how each newcomer group absorbs and is absorbed by the surroundings, and when ‘new’ newcomers appear on the horizon, the already settled ‘old’ newcomers resent them strongly.

However, others harshly criticize Bean’s ridicule for reinforcing racist myths. Hussain Ismail, a playwright of Bangladeshi origin, writes in a press release: “This play consists of a bunch of tired stereotypes and racist myths thrown together for cheap laughs at the expense of minorities” (Ismail). Ismail has also attacked Bean for writing about communities which Bean knows little
or nothing about (Dodd). In fact, Bean did some historical research in preparation for the play and lived in the area concerned for four years.

“I haven’t chosen to write this play; it feels like an obligation. I don’t see what a playwright can write about unless it’s his own society” (Bean), is Bean’s justification. Bean adds that the British (including the previously digested newcomers) are overly sensitive when it comes to immigration, race or religion. He advises British people to “become desensitised” (ibid) when being stereotyped by others. Only then can they live together in peace.

Some Muslim leaders in Klausen’s survey believe that social peace is being born in Europe, although going through the birth pains now. This is an optimistic outlook to the future and allows for the possibility of Muslims being ‘digested’ by the British or other European societies (and vice versa) just as the previous immigrants had been. However, recurrent resentment to any future wave of immigrants is not welcomed as it would paraphrase the current situation. According to a report in The Observer, a Sri Lankan-born post officer working in Nottingham “banned customers unable to speak English from his post office” (Hill). This rare case of a clearly articulated resentment of an obviously naturalized immigrant towards other immigrants (presumably Muslim and Polish here) does not set a good example of approaching new immigrants.
4. Islam in Contemporary Britain

4.1. Ethnic and Religious Diversity

British society has become very colourful in terms of ethnicity and religion due to an immense flow of immigrants. In 2001, when the most recent official national census was carried out, eight percent of the population of Great Britain were of non-White ethnic origin. Of these eight percent, a half was of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, or of other Asian ethnic background. In terms of religious affiliation, the majority of British people adhered to Christianity (72 percent) followed by Muslims, the second largest religious group accounting for roughly 3 percent of the population. It is worth noting that many respondents did not state their religious affiliation or held no religious belief – together comprising 23 percent (Office for National Statistics).

A study by Lucinda Platt on partnership patterns across ethnic and religious groups in Great Britain contributes to drawing an up-to-date picture of British ethnic and religious make-up, as it was conducted between the years 2004 and 2008. In the survey sample, 85 percent of the respondents identify themselves as White British; however, every fifth child under 16 is from an ethnic minority (Platt 4). This is an interesting observation and suggests a possible future development. The ethnic diversity is increasing as many partnerships are now ethnically mixed and more ethnically mixed children are born. On the one hand, the trend of high level of inter-ethnic partnership “may be celebrated as playing a substantial role in the development of new, mixed

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3 In England, Wales, and Scotland altogether 387,742 individuals in 176,469 families were surveyed (Platt 12).
identities” (ibid 7), on the other hand some ethnic minorities, e.g. the African-Caribbeans, “will virtually disappear” from Britain (Asthana).

According to the 2001 census, there were roughly 1.6 million Muslims in Britain. The census data may not be relied upon now. Klausen, already in 2005, estimated there were approximately 2.1 million Muslims (IX). The 2008 official estimation on the number of British Muslims is two million (Travis). The next scheduled official census will provide up-to-date figures in 2011.

In 2008, the Institute for Community Cohesion published a fairly detailed overview of principal components of British Muslim community and their religious and ethnic diversity. Adopting a locally based approach, the study has been successful in depicting the situation on local level and linking it with the current international and national levels (“Understanding” 4). The government has been very much aware recently of the need to focus on British authorities and Muslim communities on the local level in order to achieve a successful integration of the latter (and other ethnic/religious minorities).

Generally speaking, there are two principal sects within Islam: the Sunni and the Shia (or the Shi’ite, Klausen 163), each having many sub-strands. The Sunni vs. Shia schism in Islam is sometimes compared to the one between Catholics and Protestants. Their dispute is about the concern “who should be regarded as the proper spiritual leader of Islam” (ibid 163). Sunnis form the majority of British Muslims and so do they in the world, comprising over 80 percent of all Muslims (“Understanding” 6).

Sunni Muslims follow one of the four schools of thoughts: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi, and Hanbali, whereas Shia Muslims recognize the Jafari school of thought. These are named after Islamic scholars, who in the 8th and 9th
centuries lay foundations to the different Islamic strands based on their interpretations of the Koran and the Sunna. All the five schools of thought are among the traditionalist ones, i.e. they do not approve of rereading the textual sources in the light of today’s context (Ramadan 24).

In the study by the *Institute for Community Cohesion*, detailed intertwined tables demonstrate the complexity of Islamic thought. In this thesis, a simplified description has been provided, although one more distinction is perhaps relevant. Sufism is a movement within Sunni Islam often labelled ‘mystical Islam’. Sufi Muslims believe the deep meaning of the Koran and the Sunna can be acquired via meditation and understanding (ibid 28). They put emphasis on “personal experience of God apart from the rituals prescribed in the sharia” (Kenny J. 150).

British Muslims have their ethnic origins all over the world: in Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Turkey, Nigeria, Algeria, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Iraq, Kosovo, Somalia and elsewhere (Masood 6). Taking into account their different religious affiliations, the composition of British Muslim community is allegedly the most varied in the world (“Understanding” 2). How and by whom are the distinct groups represented? Is it possible to unite British Muslims in order to negotiate with British authorities? Answers for these questions will be sought in the next subchapter.

### 4.2. British Muslims’ Representatives

In the 2005 elections, four Muslim candidates won a seat in the House of Commons. There are six Muslims in the House of Lords (Masood 21). This is indeed a great success, but some critics say the number is still not
representative enough of the proportion of Muslim population in the UK. Ideally, there should be about 20 Muslims in the House of Commons according to Ahmed Versi, the editor of Muslim News (“Record Number”). Although these Muslim MPs are democratically elected primarily but not exclusively by British Muslims, Muslim voters cannot expect their political actions will be dictated by the interests of British Muslims only. Two of the MPs have voiced their disagreement with calls for the introduction of Sharia law, although 40 percent of British Muslims “want sharia law introduced into parts of the country”, as a poll revealed in 2006 (Hennessy). The title of Shahid Malik’s article ‘If you want sharia law, you should go and live in Saudi’ needs no comment (Malik S.).

Sadiq Khan, another Muslim MP, stated in 2008 that he “would be very concerned about sharia courts applying in the UK” and warned of the lack of sophistication of the Islamic law (“Sharia Law”).

When seeking a representative Muslim voice, British authorities have primarily turned to the Muslim Council of Britain (abbr. MCB). However, according to the study by the Institute for Community Cohesion, it is impossible to expect one organization or one spokesperson to be representative of all British Muslims, given their “diversity spanning political, economic, social and religious spectrums” (“Understanding” 4). This is an important reflection as the exclusive representative role has very often been attributed to the MCB.

The MCB was founded in 1997. Today it is with its over 500 affiliating schools, mosques, and organizations the largest Muslim umbrella organization (“Muslims” 97). A small number of paid officials is regularly elected (the present Secretary General is Muhammad Abdul Bari), although some non-Muslims as well as Muslims doubt the elections. After a controversial interview for the Daily
Telegraph in 2007, Bari was labelled “the esteemed head” of “the unelected so-called Muslim Council of Britain” (Moore et al. 31) by outraged journalists and columnists. “Who elected them? Who put them there? I don’t know, I don’t even know who they are” is a reaction to the MCB by a Muslim respondent (Mirza et al. 80).

According to Masood, the MCB is dominated by affiliates who promote “anti-colonial political Islam from the Middle East and South Asia” such as the Muslim Association of Britain or the UK Islamic Mission (21). In the survey by Mirza et al., only six percent of the respondents named the MCB as a Muslim organization representing their views. An alarming half of the respondents said no British Muslim organization spoke for them (Mirza et al. 80).

Those who oppose the MCB claim it is either too moderate or too extreme. The MCB has not been much supported by Shia Muslims. Sufi Muslims have allied under the British Muslim Forum (Masood 21). The strong dissatisfaction with the MCB explains the other recently launched Muslim initiatives such as Progressive British Muslims (2005), British Muslims for Secular Democracy, or Sufi Muslim Council (both 2006) (Mirza et al. 79). Unfortunately, there exists a contrary trend, too: some Muslims have been disillusioned by the misrepresentation of Muslims and have become sceptical “about whether anyone really cares about what they think” (ibid 83). British Muslims are misrepresented not only by their supposed spokespersons but also by the British media.
4.3. Media Coverage and Islamophobia

Are the British media as objective and unbiased as they should be in a democratic country? Two studies on British media coverage of British Muslims prove they are – in many cases – not. The British media very often provide distorted and decontextualised accounts and contribute to misperceiving Muslims and their religion. Misperceptions widely circulated by the media do not contribute to a frank and constructive debate which, ironically enough, some journalists call for. Klausen’s survey result confirms this concern: the “negative press treatment of Muslims was ranked as the single biggest problem across the countries in the study” (58).

The report *The Search for Common Ground: Muslims, Non-Muslims and the UK Media* provides many examples of exaggerated and distorted news concerning British Muslims. The ‘ban on piggy banks’ story mentioned above in connection with Melanie Phillips is one of the examples. Interpretation of such media accounts cannot produce knowledge free of its consequences. As Said comments, “knowledge of the social world, in short, is always no better that the interpretations on which it is based” (Said, “Covering” 168). In general, stories in the media are often tainted by one or more of the following narratives: (of British Muslims) failure to integrate, unreasonable demands, mixed loyalties, support for extremism, obscurantism, incompatibility of values, lack of leadership, corroborating evidence form overseas, and the British government’s attempts at appeasing Muslims (“The Search” 103-4).

Another report focusing on the media coverage of British Muslims was conducted by a team at Cardiff University. Both studies arrive at more or less the same alarming conclusion: “facts are frequently distorted, exaggerated or
Reportedly 74 percent of the British “know nothing or next to nothing about Islam”. The little they do know is gained through the media, as 64 percent admit (“The Search” 30). Consequently, their attitude towards British Muslims cannot be positive, if it is based on a predominantly negative portrayal of Muslims in the media. Peter Oborne, a frequent contributor on the ‘Muslim issue’, claims suspecting British Muslims has become a legitimate common practice in British mainstream society. Oborne goes as far as attacking the media and politicians for “systematic demonisation of Muslims” (Oborne, “The Enemy within?”).

What is to be done to combat the negative perception of Muslims? Oborne appeals to the public for an urgent change of the public culture (ibid). Authors of *The Search for Common Ground* recommend the British media to: employ more Muslim journalists (but beware of not pigeonholing them), set terminology use guides, and most importantly reconsider their coverage of Islam-related issues (“The Search” XIV). The British media must realize how influential and responsible role they play in the current situation. The British public should, being inspired by Said’s suggestions, employ common sense and critical assessment at times and not always rely on the accounts presented by “journalistic experts” (Said, “Covering Islam” 170).

The British media directly fuel Islamophobia. Headlines such as “Christmas is banned: it offends Muslims” (“The Search” 37) or “Islam set to be top UK religion: mosques to beat churches” (Moore et al. 34) undoubtedly
contribute to the spread of “unfounded hostility towards Islam, and therefore fear or dislike of all or most Muslims”, which is one of many definitions of Islamophobia (“Muslims” 93). British Muslims must face not only unfair media scrutinizing; they are also subject to verbal and physical attacks, discrimination in job recruitment, their places of worship are attacked etc. (Stone R. 7-8).

Islamophobia has become “a new form of ‘acceptable racism’”, some people think. Others go even further: comparisons of Muslims to “new Jews” (Mirza at al. 64) or “new political black” (Stone R. 3) are not infrequent. The terrorist attacks in the USA (2001), Spain (2004), and Britain (2005) have most notably contributed to the rise of Islamophobic sentiments. In a poll among the British public commissioned in 2002, 84 percent of the respondents admitted being “more suspicious of Britain’s Muslims” after the 9/11 terrorist attacks (“Attitudes” 3).

Anti-terrorism measures\(^4\) adopted by the British government have had a stressful impact on British Muslim community. As a result, British Muslims might have felt (as the Select Committee on Home Affairs admitted) and in fact have felt being negatively affected by the anti-terrorism measures more than any other group (“Muslims” 86). Muslims feel unfairly treated by the police and they are particularly concerned about the steeply increased ‘stop and search’ police practice (ibid 87). Tarique Ghaffur, a Muslim police officer, said that “the impact of stop and search and passenger profiling has been to create ‘a strong feeling of mass stereotyping within Muslim communities’” (Blick et al. 34).

Islamophobia has been present in Britain for long – as early as the 1900s (Oborne, “Muslims under Siege” 7). In general, the animosity between

Europeans and Muslims has existed since time immemorial, as Stone writes in a Huntington-like tone, so the contemporary Islamophobia is just another unique version of the animosity (Stone R. 7). The debate on Islamophobia has been vibrant in recent years and many voices, sometimes contradictory, have been heard in the quest for sustainable solutions.

4.4. The Myth of Islamophobia?

“Does Islamophobia really exist?” (Malik K.) asks Kenan Malik, an Indian-born British author, in his essay The Islamophobia myth. He suspects both British mainstream politicians and Muslims leaders of exploiting anti-Muslim sentiments. British politicians, by being responsive to Islamophobia, may actually strive for votes within the Muslim community. The political power of Muslim leaders, on the other hand, is strengthened in the fearful atmosphere. Malik argues that Islamophobia is by large an imaginary concept distant from the reality – and to prove his point, he debunks the ‘obviously Islamophobic’ police treatment of Asians (ibid).

“Pretending that Muslims have never had it so bad” (ibid) has a bad impact on ordinary Muslims in particular. Feeling constantly under attack and being treated as a distinct group reinforce a victim mentality in Muslims together with the feelings of alienation and bitterness. Muslims blame Islamophobia for their poor economic or educational performance. When Islam is a subject to constructive criticism, a charge of an Islamophobic attack is usually swiftly raised (ibid). Malik quotes a journalist Yasmin Alibhai Brown, who argues that “too often Islamophobia is used as an excuse in a way to kind of blackmail society” (ibid).
Figures from Mirza et al.’s survey speak in Kenan Malik’s favour: 84 percent of British Muslim respondents think they are being treated fairly by British society (6). Mirza’s team arrive at a similar conclusion as Malik, even though their survey was carried out after the London bombings in 2005. Expectations of rocketing anti-Muslim sentiments after the terrorist attacks have not been confirmed – at least not by Mirza et al.’s report. Moreover, some respondents admit Muslims are perhaps a bit too sensitive and exaggerate their victimisation (ibid 72).

There are some undeniable anti-Muslim feelings present in British society and a certain number of Muslims feel being discriminated against. The antagonism towards British Muslims is not as commonplace as suggested though. How to deal with Muslims then? Recognize them on the basis of their British civic identity – not their religious identity; do not emphasize their difference; and do not treat them as a vulnerable group (ibid 18).
5. From Multiculturalism Towards New Britishness

Assimilate, integrate, naturalize, respect the diverse immigrants and their cultures… all these and many other propositions have been mentioned in the discussion on a meaningful framework for cohabitation of British citizens irrespective of their ethnic or religious background. Ethnic and religious plurality under the concept of multiculturalism was celebrated in the 1980s and 1990s. However, certain developments in British society, namely the Bradford riots in 2001, growing doubts about British Muslims’ loyalty to Britain, and increasing Islamophobia have led to reassessing the policy of multiculturalism and as a result, new integration frameworks have been promoted (Alam 47). The concepts of new British identity, local sense of belonging, and community cohesion have been frequently hailed as the solution. In particular the Prime Minister Gordon Brown is among those pioneering “new Britishness”. Does this mean multiculturalism has been abandoned? Some have buried multiculturalism completely, others still advocate it and say multiculturalism and Britishness are not mutually exclusive, e.g. Tariq Modood in his article “Multiculturalism or Britishness: a False Debate”.

5.1. The Death of Multiculturalism?

A clear definition of the British concept of multiculturalism would be a most appropriate beginning of this chapter. This is, however, a rather problematic issue and as some experts in the field admit, it has been ill-defined (Cooper 59) and interpreted in many ways (John). According to Ruth Lea, the director of the Centre for Policy Studies, multiculturalism has been primarily
understood as sustaining diverse cultures without there being any “over-arching thread that holds them together” (ibid). Another perception is the one of multiculturalism as culture diversity with a common thread, be that Britishness or anything else (ibid). Moreover, some argue that the current perception of multiculturalism is outdated and that it needs to be looked upon in the light of global context resulting in the inevitable global multiculturalism (Sardar).

Multiculturalism is – very generally put – “state recognition and support for multiple cultural groups and identities” (Rogers 15). It has been rejected by some people in recent years. The critics provide versions of basically one argument: multiculturalism leads to segregation, not integration. The Chief Rabi Sir Jonathan Sacks, the Secretary General of Hindu Forum of Britain Ramesh Kallidai, and head of the Equality and Human Rights Commission Trevor Phillips all hold this opinion (Cooper 35, 52; Blick et al. 32). Dilwar Hussain sees a problem in the static character of the concept of multiculturalism. In his opinion, it should reflect the process of integration which is naturally never constant (Cooper 42).

Although there have been some disappointments and minor failures, they may not validate a total rejection. Multiculturalism has, according to many people, made British society much better and still remains a sustainable integration framework (Giddens). Modood praises multiculturalism for eliminating racism in Britain (Sardar) and claims that “the idea that multiculturalism is dead, out of date, unworkable, separatist, is really quite wrong” (Modood, “Multiculturalism” 9). Giddens argues more multiculturalism is needed in Britain, and this is in fact happening – the recently introduced

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5 Ziauddin Sardar is one of the leading Muslim intellectuals in Europe (Klausen 36).
citizenship tests and ceremonies are basic features of the ‘original’ multiculturalism developed in Canada (Giddens). Yet the tests and ceremonies are often perceived as a part of the new public policy of new Britishness.

With a paraphrase “Multiculturalism is dead! Long live multiculturalism!” Sardar closes his review of Michael Keith’s *After the Cosmopolitan?*. According to Keith, the global reality makes each of us a member of one huge global multicultural society and therefore multiculturalism in its demographical dimension is inevitable. However, this ‘new’ multiculturalism cannot be perceived in the language of the ‘old’ – conventional categories such as black, Asian, Muslim no longer fit the complex reality in which the boundaries are disappearing or merging (Sardar). Keith’s vision of one “metropolis with seven billion people” (ibid) is as impressive as frightening.

5.2. New Britishness

The idea of redefining British identity so that it would appeal to British citizens of any religion or ethnic origin emerged as early as 1999, when Gordon Brown, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, talked of ‘new Britishness’ in a *New Statesman* interview. After multiculturalism started being criticized as a disintegrative force, the idea of a shared British civic identity came in the forefront as a concept binding diverse ethnic and religious groups in Britain. Today, Gordon Brown is the Prime Minister and active citizenship and community cohesion are on top of his agenda. David Blunkett, Trevor Phillips, David Goodhart, and Linda Colley are among others advocating the public policy of new Britishness (Rogers 11).
But what exactly is new Britishness – what are its essential pillars? How shall Britishness be understood in real terms, not just abstract definitions? The concept of national identity has always been tricky and somewhat vague, not to mention its chauvinistic or militaristic tinge in some contexts (ibid 6).

In relation to the previous chapter, it is vital to ask the following question: is there a place for multiculturalism in the concept of new Britishness? There are different answers from different people. According to Nick Pearce, multiculturalism taken as a “plea for sensitivity” is welcome and as such it acts “as a means of accepting the multiple identities that are present in Britain today” (Johnson 8, 50). On the other hand, Trevor Phillips dismisses multiculturalism and promotes new Britishness “as a means to engender greater integration” (ibid 7). Gordon Brown, one of the most enthusiastic advocates of new Britishness, says multiculturalism is right to recognize the diversity but wrong to over-emphasize “separateness at the cost of unity” (Brown, “We Need”).

What is essential, according to Brown, is to renew the patriotic confidence in the British nation, which declined after World War II. The ‘old’ British identity based on the many world primacies and impressive successes of Britain (pioneering democratic institutions, Industrial revolution, the Empire) vanished in the post-war atmosphere of decline and uncertainty (Brown, “Gordon Brown’s”). In Brown’s words, Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s built the British identity on “self-interested individualism, mistrust of foreigners and an unchanging constitution” (Richards). Such identity was completely unfit for the old (English, Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish) as well as the new (of immigrants to Britain) national or any other identities.
Gordon Brown believes that a “stronger sense of patriotic purpose would help resolve some of our most important national challenges” (Brown, “We Need”), including the integration of ethnic minorities. Pointing at the USA and other countries, where the nations have successfully defined themselves by their shared values, Brown suggests the British nation should rediscover the shared binding values from its history (Brown, “Gordon Brown’s”). Brown has already rediscovered the values – at least theoretically: “the values of liberty, responsibility and fairness … are not only the ties that binds us, but also give us patriotic purpose as a nation and sense of direction and destiny” (Brown, “The Future”).

The values mentioned above are rather vague in giving directions to the British citizen which way to go to renew their British identity. Brown, towards the end of his speech *The Future of Britishness*, defines his points more clearly. There are six essential pillars of new Britishness: another constitutional reform, renewing local government, rebuilding civic society, taking citizenship seriously, aiding integration of minorities, and being “internationalist at all times” (ibid). This still somewhat fuzzy clarification will be elaborated on in the next subchapter.

5.3. Pillars of New Britishness

A further reform of the constitution is necessary, following the significant act of devolving power to the Northern Ireland Assembly in 1998, to the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales in 1999 (Leeke et al. 27, 18, 23). Brown supports the idea of devolving national power to local authorities to a certain extent, arguing this theoretically fosters the sense of local belonging
and the responsibility of citizens for their actions. On the whole, the constitutional reform should further democratise the political system and increase the participation of citizens in political decision-making. The reform also includes proposals for rearrangement of the House of Lords (Rogers 41-2), which is seen as anachronistic by some critics.

Over the past years, there has been a “decline in formal civic and political participation” (ibid 23), i.e. people have lost interest in elections and voting, and the number of members of political parties has also declined. Experts have been alarmed by the rise of individualism and decline in solidarity and cooperation (ibid 5). A clear declaration of citizens’ rights and duties would enhance taking the citizenship more ‘seriously’. Moreover, citizenship lessons at schools and citizenship ceremonies, which have already been put into practice (Johnson 52), are also aimed at greater awareness of being a British citizen and his or her rights and duties.

Aiding integration of ethnic and religious minorities in British society is nothing new, it has been on the Government’s agenda for a long time – the ongoing problem is how to help the integration. Tackling discrimination on ethnic and religious grounds, and dealing with job and education inequalities seem to be Brown’s priorities. As an example, he calls for an expanded compulsory English language training, which would open up more job opportunities to those with language difficulties (Brown, “The Future”).

Britain has always been an “outward-looking and open” country, according to Brown (Richards). He again points at the British history to illustrate his point: owing to its internationalism, Britain became “the workshop of the world … [and] a country of merchant adventurers, explorers and missionaries”
(Brown, “Gordon Brown’s”). Being internationalist naturally involves a rejection of any form of mistrust of foreigners.

In addition, other very ‘physical’ recommendations have been put forward in order to strengthen the new common sense of being British. These include an establishment of a national civic day and a youth community service, revision of the honours system, government funding of displays of the democratic heritage (public statues, artistic manifestations), and last but not least an introduction of new civic rites, e.g. in connection with births of new baby-citizens (Rogers 7-8).

How have British minorities reacted to the public policy of new Britishness so far? The citizenship ceremonies have replaced former impersonal practices. Newly acquired British citizenship is accompanied by a public affirmation “of access to the British community” (Johnson 52) and the ceremony has become very popular with the participants. This is perhaps so because new British citizens are not asked to give up their original religious, ethnic or any other identities (ibid 22, 45). The new British identity is based on universal values of liberty, responsibility, and fairness, and should bind British citizens irrespective of their religion or ethnic origins.

5.4. Criticism of New Britishness

Brown’s vision of new Britishness does not go uncriticized. Michael Gove, a Conservative MP and a Shadow Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, fears the only relationship that counts for Gordon Brown is the one between the individual and the state. As a result, “there really is no such thing as society” (Gove 116) for Brown, whose policies are in fact weakening community relationships. Gove accuses the current government of
neglecting the most important personal relationships between citizens (those
with partners, friends, neighbours, teachers, and employers). Government’s
plans to close down some post offices and GP practices due to high economic
costs are criticized by Gove for neglecting the social benefits of such institutions
to local communities (ibid 115).

Mirza et al. suggest that renewing the sense of shared values via formal
citizenship tests and ceremonies or “rebranding” of British symbols such asanknotes and the British flag is rather artificial. This approach “ends up treating
an organic identity as if it were simply a public relations invention or a marketing
ploy” (Mirza et al. 90).

The most disapproving voices accuse the policy of new Britishness for
being assimilationist. Some claim the government has moved away from
promoting pluralist multicultural society towards “the assimilationist language of
the 1960s” (Alam 47). Both left- and right-wingers criticize the new concept of
integration; ironically, comparing it to the other’s traditional thinking. Some on
the left say it resembles the conservative politics of cultural assimilation, others
on the right claim it is “typically corrosive left-wing attempt to meddle with
tradition” (Rogers 5). A. Sivanandan, the director of the Institute of Race
Relations, thinks that Britain has unfortunately drawn inspiration from France,
Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands, where “integration is what they say,
assimilation is what they do” (Sivanandan).
6. National and Religious Identities

What do we need a civic, national, religious or any other identity for? Ben Rogers and Rick Muir explain that identities “are important for well-being” (Rogers 6). Identities provide us with value frameworks, which in turn help us to make sense of the world around us. They offer concepts and categories, and “give us social standing” (ibid 6). Our identity relates us to others and helps us understand who we are and who the others are.

The currently promoted integration policy of new Britishness is based on a shared British civic identity, among others. The concept of identity in connection with state, religion or ethnicity has always been rather abstract and vague. In the USA, two written documents (the *Constitution* and the *Bill of Rights*) form the basis of American national identity (ibid 7). However, political institutions as a source of a shared civic identity are not enough – it must stem also from “shared literary and artistic canons, sporting allegiances and … natural and built environments” (ibid 8).

A problem with new Britishness may as well lie in the fact that the British have declined in thinking of themselves as “British” – instead, they have rediscovered or reinforced their English, Scottish, and Welsh identities. Northern Irish identity has remained British more than others, this trend having its roots in the desperate wish of the majority Protestant citizens to remain a part of the United Kingdom (Kumar 246), although there too patriotism has risen (Blunkett 2). Another problem may occur in connection with British Muslims, whose strong identity has developed over the last two decades. Moreover, today the Muslim youth identify with their religion more than their parents or
grandparents already living in Britain ever did (Mirza et al. 21). A detailed
discussion on identities of Britons and British Muslim follows.

6.1. British National Identity

As it has been already briefly touched upon, the ‘old’ British identity
attached primarily to imperial Britain significantly weakened in the post-WWII
atmosphere of decline and uncertainty (Brown, “Gordon Brown’s”). Some critics
argue there has never been anything like British nation, not even in the heyday
of the Empire, acknowledging the existence of Britain as a state only (Kumar
172). Certain phenomena show otherwise though. There were many
denominators of common Britishness: “a British monarchy, a British Parliament,
… , British legal system, … , and British armed forces” (ibid 173), as well as the
same language spoken and the same (i.e. Christian) religion practiced by the
inhabitants of the British Isles.

Historians conclude that a common sense of Britishness evolved in the
18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries, historians conclude. The English, Welsh, Scottish, and
Irish were bound by its essential elements: the Protestant faith (with the
exception of Irish Catholics), British democratic traditions, and the Empire with
its economic and political designs (Heath 4). The British identity worked well as
an umbrella identity for different groups then. Can an updated version of it
achieve the same success today? Only time will tell.

With a gradual end of the Empire and the decline in religious practice, the
British identity lost its gluing power. Other factors contributed to faltering of the
patriotic identity, e.g. the politics of multiculturalism and the guilt felt over British
colonial past (Mirza et al. 33), which will be dealt with later on. In general,
experts claim national identities have recently been losing ground. Globalization, international interdependence (Heath 4), and increased migration have led to the fact that “the relevance of the nation to people’s lives has diminished” (Stone L. 5).

Numerous researchers have attempted to map British nationalism over recent years. Perhaps not surprisingly, two studies on the subject I have at hand both avoid covering Northern Ireland – arguing it is “very different in so many ways from the rest of the United Kingdom” (ibid 5) or that there “are a number of special features … and a separate, detailed analysis would be necessary” (Heath 5). Nevertheless, Northern Ireland is a part of the country and had it been included in the analyses, different – perhaps less pessimistic – results might have come out.

Accepting the premise that a sense of national identity is measurable at all by asking questions such as ‘Would you describe yourself as British, Scottish, English, Irish, Welsh, European or none of these?’, the results show a decline in feeling exclusively British among Britons. On the other hand, there has been a rise local nationalism – i.e. people identify more with England, Scotland or Wales than with Britain (ibid 2). Put in percentages, 52 percent of respondents best described themselves as British in 1996, whereas it was only 44 percent in 2005 (Stone L. 6).

A fact worth reminding of is that Britons have kept dual or multiple identities, “often for very practical and economic reasons” (Kenny et al. 9). Therefore many Britons feel to be British and English, British and Scottish etc, but the so-called ‘forced choice’ in some surveys does not allow for this

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6 Respondents are required to identify with one and only one nation out of a list (Stone L. 7).
possibility. Taking into account the existence of dual or multiple national identities, in other surveys mapping the sentiments e.g. in Scotland questions such as “Do you describe yourself as Scottish not British, more Scottish than British, equally Scottish and British etc?” are asked (Heath 7).

Lucy Stone and Rick Muir in their survey advise the policymakers of new Britishness to be well aware of the current trends: growing English, Welsh and Scottish nationalism may not leave much space for the revived British nationalism, unless the policymakers try to reverse the current tendency (10). Somewhat understandably, the concept of new Britishness does appeal to black and minority groups. In 2001, over a half of black and minority groups respondents identified themselves as solely British, in comparison with 29 percent of white respondents (ibid 11).

The fact that new Britishness may not appeal to Britons themselves as they have grown to feel more English, Scottish or Welsh is accompanied by another counter-Britishness trend: the ‘anti-Britishness’, as Mirza et al. call it. This trend is traceable among immigrants as well as Britons, each having different grounds for their anti-British attitudes: it is multiculturalism in the case of immigrants and guilt over British colonial past in the case of Britons (Mirza et al. 33).

Multiculturalism taught immigrants “that belonging to Britain is something to be ashamed of and that … they have a special, superior status” (ibid 90). Promoting multiculturalism prevented immigrants from sharing a communal experience and belonging to the British community. In relation to the British

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7 The term “black and minority groups” is taken from the analysis Who Are We? Identities in Britain by Lucy Stone and Rick Muir.
Muslim community, the implication goes as far as blaming multiculturalism for the rise of British-grown Islamism, or more precisely terrorism (ibid 90).

The guilt and shame about Britons’ colonial history pushed many to join the “long march of anti-Britishness” (ibid 92) expressed in institutional and cultural life. For example children are given a rather negative account of the British Empire at schools. The research team concludes that “Britishness has become a stick to beat people with, rather than something to be proud of” (ibid 92).

Such fierce accusations should lead the reader to employ ‘common sense and critical assessment’, as advised earlier in the thesis. British think tanks and newspapers referred to in this text usually favour some political tradition. Mirza et al.’s report *Living Apart Together: British Muslims and the Paradox of Multiculturalism* was commissioned by the centre-right think tank *Exchange Policy*. Put in a more comprehensible way, the report by Mirza et al. expresses and supports the philosophies of the Conservative party, currently led by David Cameron (who does not approve of the policy of multiculturalism) (Kundnani).

After the report had been brought out, Mirza et al. were accused of abusing research and “interpreting data to promote a preconceived political [Conservative] agenda” (Smyth) by Marie Breen Smyth and Jeroen Gunning. Their article was published in *The Guardian*, a centre-left paper of course. Bearing in mind political affiliations is vital in understanding the sometimes contradictory conclusions, just as e.g. in the Brown vs. Gove disagreement over new Britishness.
Coming back to British identity, it is perhaps not in such a deep crisis as some suggest. The decline in general feeling of being British among Britons is minor and Britons remain proud of Britain – the level of their national pride is in fact higher compared with most countries from the European Union\(^8\). Nevertheless, researches and surveys show certain developments, e.g. growing identification with local nationalism, and it is advisable that policymakers bear the evolving trends in mind.

### 6.2. British Muslims’ Identity

The identity of British Muslims is again a complex issue – are they British in the first place or Muslims (or both)? Do they identify themselves on the basis of their ethnicity or ancestral nationality? What role does Islam play in their identity? And are there any differences in the perception of British Muslims’ identity between the first, second, and third generation of Muslims living in Britain? Answers to these questions will be sought in the following section. A possible development of “British Islam” will be discussed, too.

The perception of identity among British Muslims has been evolving over the time. In the 1960s and 1970s, the first generation of Muslim immigrants placed emphasis primarily on their ethnic identity (Johnson 84). With the second and third generations a notable change occurred: religion became the essential pillar of Muslim identity. According to several polls, up to 95 percent of Muslim respondents say religion is “very” or ‘fairly’ important to their lives” today (Blick et al. 19).

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\(^8\) EU15 (Heath 2).
A noteworthy observation comes from the study by Lucy Stone and Rick Muir: to 81 percent of British Muslims, their religious identity is more important than their national identity (24). This trend is also present among Muslims living in Pakistan (there, 87 percent of Muslims identify with their religion first and the nation second). Muslims of Pakistani origin are one of the largest British Muslim ethnic groups. Their number amounted to 747,000 in the 2001 census (“Ethnic Minorities" 1), so it comes as no surprise that a vast majority of British Muslims consider religion more important than nation. Are British Muslims able to identify with a British national identity – be it the concept of new Britishness or any other?

Dilwar Hussain thinks Muslims living and growing up in Britain certainly do have some sort of British identity, although it has a local character (“often displayed in the local accents, cultures and customs”, Cooper 40) rather than the character envisioned by Gordon Brown. Basically, British Muslims identify themselves both as being British and Muslims, but as Hussain admits the “crucial ‘problem’ lies in how Muslims can become entirely comfortable with being British and at the same time maintain strong ties with their faith” (ibid 40).

The concept of new Britishness perhaps lacks one essential ingredient – taking religious faith into consideration. Tony Blair, a former Prime Minister, realizes how much religion matters in the world today. Blair admits being struck by the realization “that failure to understand the power of religion meant failure to understand the modern world” (Blair). In her essay *Faith and Nation*, Madeleine Bunting says British Muslims have brought faith back to “political conversation”, and by their conduct they have proved that faith does not hinder economic prosperity or education, as promoters of secularism argue (Johnson
In defence of new Britishness, Trevor Phillips explains the concept is deliberately religion-less, saving people the dilemma of choosing “between those who share their religion … and everyone else” (ibid 45).

Religion once shaped British identity – however, it was Christianity, or more precisely Protestantism. Its prominence has undoubtedly faltered, although survey figures show there is a relatively high number of Christians in Britain. In the 2001 census, nearly 72 percent of British population adhered to Christianity (“Ethnic Minorities” 6). The question is, of course, how many of these respondents truly practice Christian religion. It is suggested that many people connect closely Christianity with their national identity or culture, but in fact they do not identify strongly with the Christian religion as such (Stone L. 23).

The two trends – the development of strong religious identity of British Muslims and the declining importance of Christian religion in the lives of the British – may have raised suspicions in the minds of some Britons. Fears of Britain becoming an Islamic country were reflected in Islamophobic newspaper articles appearing in the spring 2008. The underlying tone of the stories, published both in tabloids and broadsheets, was an unfavourable estimate of the numbers of practicing Muslims and practicing Christians in Britain. Newspapers warned that “Islam would supersede Christianity as Britain’s majority religion” (Moore et al. 34). The investigation conducted by Moore’s team proved that such conclusions were based on doubtful research and false statistics. Nevertheless, the wider society was alarmed by the ‘mosques beat churches’ sensational revelation (ibid 35).
Some experts suggest that such expressions of Islamophobic sentiment lead to fostering Muslim identity because Muslims are then “driven to formulate a collective defense” (Klausen 129). Blick et al. arrive at a similar conclusion, saying that “public devaluation and disparagement of Muslims and Islam … has led to increased in-group solidarity” (19). It is understandable that British Muslims find identifying with any kind of Britishness difficult when (not only) the British media vilify the dearest element of their identity: their faith. Perhaps one day, as Hussain hopes, Islam will become “banal and ordinary, normal and normalised” in British society and Muslims will no longer be stigmatized by their religion – they will simply be perceived as British or English and labels such as “Muslim thief” or “Muslim GP” will shrink to “thief” or “GP” (Cooper 40-1).

Leaders of all major religions in Britain (Anglicanism, Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Sikhism) have voiced their opinions on faith and nation in a collection of essays Faith in the Nation. They all agree that religious identities and British national identity “are and must be complementary” (ibid 13). If Britain is to become a secular state, in which religious and public lives are clearly separated, it nevertheless must adopt a faith-sensitive approach, so that a secular multi-faith state can develop (ibid 65). Islam occupies a prominent position in the lives of British Muslims and this fact must be taken into account in the current debate on the future of Britain and its collective identity.

It has already been said that numerous opinions on accommodation of Islam in the Western context exist within the Muslim community. Some prefer a modern, to a certain extent secular form of Islam, others promote traditional Islam. Despite this division, some people think a specific version of Islam has been developing in the British context – and call it ‘British Islam’. Madeleine
Bunting has no doubts about “the seemingly unstoppable development of British Islam” and provides its main characteristics: British Islam is on the one hand closely linked to the Indian subcontinent and is supportive of the conflicts in the Middle East; on the other hand it has absorbed “increasingly large amounts of the Western liberal tradition of human rights … as well as the manners of British political culture and debate” (Johnson 90). In British Islam strong emphasis is placed on the family, although British Muslims have been greatly affected by consumer culture just as anybody else (ibid 90).

Dilwar Hussain is not as sure as Bunting about an existing ‘Islam with a British flavour’, but he argues that its evolution is both plausible and desirable. According to Hussain, British Islam must face and resolve challenges in its new context, primarily “the inequalities in gender relations found in some misogynistic Muslim cultures” and reassessing the ‘majority mentality’ (Cooper 43). By the latter Hussain means a mental transition from a context in which Muslims were a majority to a context where they are a minority.

6.3. Islam-related Controversies

Muslims have become more visible and audible in Britain in this decade, owing to a more confident display of their religious identity. Asserting their identity by wearing traditional clothing by Muslim women, establishing Muslim faith schools, and resolving certain matters at unofficial Sharia courts has been met with support as well as protest. These controversial issues are discussed in this chapter.

Scarf, headscarf, veil, full veil, and now more often the Arabic words hijab, jilbab, or niqab – all these terms and many more are being heard today
when describing traditional clothing of Muslim women. Hijab in its literal translation means “curtain” (Masood 35), “to cover” (“Meeting” 20), or “to hide from view or conceal” (Klausen 200), and in relation to Muslim clothes it describes numerous styles of head covering. Jilbab is an ankle-length coat and niqab is a scarf covering “the whole face except the eyes” (Masood 35). Whether or not wearing such clothes by women is a religious duty remains a debatable issue among Muslim scholars, the fact is that certain Muslim cultures prefer certain types of women’s clothing (Klausen 172). Another fact is that more and more British Muslim women have chosen to wear some type of Islamic covering in public recently (Masood 35; Mirza et al. 42).

Many events have stirred a controversy on Muslim clothing recently; the Shabina Begum case and Jack Straw’s column on the niqab in 2006 are discussed in detail. Shabina Begum attended Denbigh High School in Luton in 2002. She decided to wear the jilbab in the school, but was excluded by the school authorities. Arguing that “her religious rights and education were being denied” (“Schoolgirl Loses”), Shabina sued Denbigh High School. The school authorities argued their policy on school uniforms was ‘Islamic enough’, allowing the predominantly Muslim students to wear shalwar kameez⁹. Shabina lost her case at the High Court in 2004 but the verdict was overturned in 2005 by the Court of Appeal (“Schoolgirl Wins”). Shabina was represented by Cherie Booth Blair at that time and the case “acquired celebrity status” (Klausen 183). In the end, Denbigh High School won its appeal at the House of Lords in 2006 and Shabina lost her case (“The Search” 81).

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⁹ Trousers and a tunic worn by men and women in Pakistan (Masood 35).
Later that year Jack Straw wrote a column in the *Lancashire Evening Telegraph* on his encounters with Muslim women in the full veil. Writing about such a sensitive issue, Straw was well aware of likely misunderstandings of his points. “I felt uncomfortable about talking to someone "face-to-face" who I could not see” (Straw) has become the most catchy phrase from his article. It came in handy to those who claimed that the niqab was an apparent “symbol of oppression” (“The Search” 12) and to those who pointed at the divisive force of the clothing in the society, while others were not far from calling Straw an Islamophobe.

However, Straw was neither feminist nor Islamophobic in his points. He, as an advocate of multiculturalism, recognized the right of Muslim women to wear the scarf or the niqab. He just thought removing face covering might have contributed to better face-to-face communication. Straw pointed out that the niqab was worn by “articulate, career-minded, educated women” (Mirza et al. 43), fighting the stereotypical image of ignorant and backward Muslims wearing such clothes.

Straw was surprised when a Muslim woman revealed to him that her husband or religious traditions played no role in her decision to wear the niqab. The woman “felt more comfortable wearing the veil when out” (Straw). In fact, many Europeans think of the headscarf or the niqab in a feminist way, i.e. that it restricts women’s sexual freedom and that it connotes female inferiority (Klausen 186). But as the woman from Straw’s article suggested, wearing the niqab might be liberating in a way.

Naomi Wolf, an American author, arrives at the same conclusion. It is important to understand that Muslims strictly distinguish the public sphere from
the private sphere. Muslim women wear the niqab in the public and feel “liberated from … the intrusive, commodifying, basely sexualizing Western gaze” (Wolf). In their private sphere, Muslims then experience a lot of sensual and sexual pleasure. Their sexual lives are peculiarly empowered by the fact that men do not see their wives or other women “half-naked all day long” (ibid).

In Britain, the headscarf has become very popular among young Muslim women. They feel proud of being Muslim and want to put this message across. The following quote speaks for many of them: “I didn’t used to wear a scarf. But now I follow my custom to show how proud I am of my religion” (Stone R. 48).

This religious revival among the British Muslim youth is questioned by some. Rather than preserving a traditional religious practice, wearing the scarf “seems to be more about making a political statement” to Mirza et al. (42). The Islamic dress worn by a woman conveys a clear message to the rest: yes, I am different – I am a Muslim, I belong to the Muslim community and I identify with Islamic values (ibid 42). In a way, Muslim clothing expresses “a feeling of detachment from the mainstream” (ibid 88).

Although the issue of wearing headscarves in public places seems rather controversial, British society has proved more tolerant than others. Uniforms including headscarves are available to British policewomen and parking officers, and doctors and nurses are free to wear the scarf in hospitals or any other public place (Klausen 182). Compared with French and German Muslims, who are forbidden to wear religious symbols such as the scarf in certain public places (ibid 108), British Muslims can fully enjoy their right to religious freedom.

Another controversy related to British Muslims is the establishment and expansion of Muslim faith schools and accommodating Muslim pupils in non-
Muslim schools. Some people argue that faith schools in general are irrelevant in “a modern, progressively secular and diverse society – in particular post-2001” (Berkeley 18). The year 2001 was a landmark as two major events happened: the Bradford riots and the terrorist attacks in the USA. As Muslims appeared to have played a significant role in both the events, an intense debate on many aspects of integration of Muslims in British society started and Muslim faith schools have been among the major topics ever since.

Today, faith schools are thought to be contributing to a further division (called also segregation, parallel lives) in the society by some experts. Although it is usually not explicitly stated, Muslims faith schools are being criticized. The critics point at The Ouseley Report issued after the Bradford riots, in which “‘virtual apartheid’” between Bradford schools was blamed for social separation, racial hostility, and failing to educate students in accordance with the multi-ethnic social reality (ibid 3-4).

The debate on faith schools is very often a debate on Muslim faith schools (ibid 3), however, Church of England schools, Roman Catholic or Jewish schools have existed in Britain since time immemorial. Their existence and increase in number have usually owed to a particular wave of immigrants – e.g. Roman Catholic schools boosted after the arrival of Irish immigrants in the second half of the 19th century (ibid 12). It is therefore understandable that with a higher number of Muslims living in Britain, the demand for Islamic schools has risen. In fact, there are only eight state-maintained Muslim schools10 (ibid 11) and over 140 Muslim schools funded by parents and the community11 (Garner).

10 The figure as provided in 2008.
11 The figure as provided in 2009.
These figures are very low compared with 4657 state-funded Church of England or 2053 state-funded Roman Catholic schools (Berkeley 3).

Are supposedly divisive faith schools doomed to an end in the era of new Britishness? The Conservatives were enthusiastically committed to a “major expansion of religious schools” in their 2005 election campaign (“Tories Propose”). The Blair government also promoted an establishment of more faith schools (Garner), but the current attitude of the government seems rather distanced. Last year the Brown government expressed its opinion on the expansion of faith schools via Ed Balls, the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families. His statement conveyed a clear message – it is up to local communities and governments to decide, the government itself is not “leading a drive for more faith schools” (Berkeley 17).

What do the public and teachers think about faith schools? The public did not share enthusiasm with the Conservatives and the Labour Party – just a few weeks after the 2005 elections, a survey showed that 64 percent of the respondents did not approve of faith schools being funded by the state (Taylor). The *National Union of Teachers* is strongly opposed to any expansion of faith schools; it actually falls for a gradual elimination of the already existing faith schools because their “admissions policies lead to ‘segregated schooling’” (Garner).

Purely theoretically, resolving the controversy over faith schools by closing them down and sending all students to secular schools would not be an effective solution anyway. Muslim children are brought up following more or less Islamic principles and may therefore have extra demands. Accommodating their
basic needs such as halal food, provision for prayer, suitable clothing for girls in PT classes etc would be right in order to avoid other controversies.

Muslim pupils already attending non-Muslim schools may find fulfilling their religious duties hard from time to time, but efforts at understanding their difficulties have been made: among others, guidance documents The Muslim Faith and School Uniform and Meeting the Needs of Muslim Pupils in State Schools have been published by the National Union of Teachers and the Muslim Council of Britain respectively.

An establishment of multi-faith schools might provide a better solution than the proposal to phase out faith schools. Some religious representatives agree that faith schools should do more to include pupils of different faiths or none. Kenneth Stevenson, the chair of the Church of England Board of Education, proposes that all new Christian schools “should have at least 25 per cent of places available to children with no requirement that they be of practising Christian families” (ibid). Government officials believe that provision of places for non-Muslim children in Muslim schools would have a beneficial influence on community cohesion (Masood 30).

There are already 54 maintained schools, which are attended by pupils of more than one faith. Such schools “were considered as a positive way to draw upon shared faith ethos and serve multi-faith communities” (Berkeley 61). It has been also suggested that schools should interact with other faith or non-faith schools in order to mingle students outside their compulsory school lessons. Online discussion forums or sports activities have proved helpful in celebrating and overcoming differences among young people (ibid 60).
The chapter on Islam-related controversies is closed with a discussion over Sharia law. An explosion of public outrage and a heated debate about Sharia law in Britain followed a lecture given by Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, on 7th February 2008. Although there had already existed unofficial Sharia courts in Britain, which settled primarily marital issues in Muslim families, there was little interest paid to them (Bunting). Williams in his lecture suggested that certain aspects of the Islamic law could be accommodated in the UK, but at the same time he dismissed other aspects of the law as “wholly unacceptable” (Moore et al. 32). Within a week from giving the lecture, Rowan Williams’s name appeared in 250 articles in the press. Headlines such as “Archbishop says UK must accept Islamic Sharia law” (ibid 32) fuelled anger and fierce criticism among Britons as well as Muslims and other religious groups.

The fact that the debate was so intense and aggressive owes to (at least) two significant factors. First, Williams’s speech was much distorted by the media as Moore et al. point out. The media coverage of the speech was decontextualised and exaggerated, in some cases inaccurate use of speech marks or an “inferential jump” misled the readers (ibid 32). Second, most Britons admit they know “nothing or next to nothing about Islam” (“The Search” 30) and their image of Sharia law is usually the one of unequal treatment of women and barbaric punishments such as stoning. The idea of legalizing such ‘law’ infuriated the British public.

However, Williams in his speech attempts to dispel “one or two myths about sharia” (Williams). Being armed with Tariq Ramadan’s explanation of Sharia in *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, Williams stresses the fact
that Sharia is a set of universal Islamic principles. The Sharia law practised in Afghanistan and the Sharia law demanded by some Muslims in the UK are just two of the many various concretisations of Sharia based on traditions of Islamic scholars and jurists. Williams admits that sophisticated and respected Sharia courts must be established if Sharia is to be officially accommodated in the UK. Moreover, he questions British legal system as such and proposes that “some general thinking about the character of law” is required (ibid).

As regards the general awareness of Sharia law among Britons, many of them portray Sharia stereotypically as backward and employing medieval punishments. Ironically, some British Muslims advocating Sharia claim that British society is decadent and immoral – there is too much criminality, children do not respect their parents etc – and offer Sharia law as a cure for Britain’s social ills (Mirza 48-9). In fact, Sharia had already been implemented in Britain in a way. Unofficial Sharia councils have existed in the UK since the 1970s. Sharia law helps Muslims decide on “issues ranging from rituals relating to daily prayers, dress and dietary rules through to rules on marriage, divorce and inheritance” (Blick et al. 24). Numerous surveys have been conducted in order to find out how many British Muslims favour the implementation of Sharia in Britain. The results have varied immensely due to the ambiguity of poll questions, but it may be argued that a majority of Muslims does not want to live under Sharia law in Britain (Mirza et al. 46).

A few months after Williams’s lecture another public figure spoke in support of some sort of Sharia accommodation in the UK: Lord Phillips, the Chief Justice. He again stressed the fact that Sharia law was “a set of principles governing the way that one should live one’s life in accordance with the will of
God” and made clear that Sharia law was not “only about mandating sanctions such as flogging, stoning, cutting off of hands or death for those who fail to comply with the law” (Lord Phillips). Phillips also explained that the already existing Sharia councils were not in conflict with English law, because it does allow mediation by a chosen arbitrator. He said: “There is no reason why Sharia principles, or any other religious code, should not be the basis for mediation or other forms of alternative dispute resolution” (ibid). Madeleine Bunting concludes that whoever rejects the coexistence of Sharia courts and English law in fact dismisses “the pretty fundamental option of mediation outside the legal system when agreed by both parties” (Bunting).

Both Williams and Lord Phillips acknowledge two important requirements – whether or not to dissolve a dispute within the area of civil law at a Sharia court must be optional, and there shall be no conflict of Sharia law with English law. Any criminal act may not be resolved at Sharia courts. Critics’ accusations of splintering the legal system may be dismissed by the argument that there already exist different laws in the UK: Scottish law and Channel Islands law (ibid). Moreover, there are already certain legal exemptions accommodating Sharia principles, for example those related to ritual slaughter and financial transactions (Blick et al. 25).

Not long after the speech by Lord Phillips another significant contribution to the Sharia law debate was made by Faiz-ul-Aqtab Siddiqi, chairman of the Muslim Arbitration Tribunal: “We realised that under the Arbitration Act [1996] we can make rulings which can be enforced by county and high courts” (Taher). Defining Sharia courts as arbitration tribunals and providing that “rulings of arbitration tribunals are binding in law” (ibid), the act enables Sharia courts to
issue rulings binding in law. This is on the one hand a positive development as the official recognition of Sharia courts demonstrates that Britain welcomes people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. On the other hand, other minorities may now take the decision as a precedent for their demand for own courts and councils, thus creating a chaos.

Wearing traditional clothes by Muslim women in public, Muslim faith schools and Sharia courts are three examples of the many controversial Islam-related issues upsetting the British. Other controversies regard particularly women (arranged or forced marriage, unequal treatment), ritual slaughter or burials (Klausen 108).
7. Conclusion

Britain (London in particular) has become a melting pot of people of all ethnic and religious backgrounds. Although British society has been coming to terms with the multicultural and multiethnic reality for decades and although many Britons now do appreciate the diversity, there are still some painful issues regarding the integration of minorities. In the thesis I have focused on the contemporary situation of British Muslims and their more or less successful integration into British society. A number of concerns have been addressed: the nature of the Western and Islamic civilization and their relationship, ethnic and religious diversity of the British Muslim community, a representative Muslim voice, media coverage, Islamophobia, the government approach to minority integration, and the notion of national and religious identity.

The integration of Muslims is complicated in many ways. They have been stigmatized by their religion, owing particularly to terrorist attacks perpetrated by fanatic Muslims all around the world and negative stereotyping in the media. Nevertheless, Islam is an inseparable element of the lives of British Muslims and this fact must be taken into account when designing integration frameworks. What is now quite clear is that “post-Christian religious pluralism is a social reality that has to be faced” (ibid 131) and so the secular Britain has been confronted with the dilemma over striking the right balance between diversity and integration. Should democratic rights be followed under any circumstances or should they be curtailed in the name of peaceful cohabitation: e.g. allow or ban wearing religious symbols in public?
Gordon Brown believes a renewed sense of British identity, being based on the values of liberty, responsibility and fairness, can appeal to British citizens irrespective of their religion or ethnic origin. Brown believes a civic sense of Britishness could unite Britain’s diverse population. It is certainly a well-intentioned integration public policy. However, it fails to reflect the British social reality in which religion is at the forefront in the lives of many (both Muslims and non-Muslims). Moreover, some experts warn that the rising local nationalism might hinder Brown’s vision, too. Only time will tell whether the concept of new Britishness can attract Muslims (and other believers).

There are some actions which can contribute to a successful cohabitation of British Muslims and the British right now. A respectable and representative body of British Muslims should be established in order to represent their majority opinion and a balanced debate in the media must be called for. If any controversial issues are to be settled in a satisfactory way, sufficient level of knowledge of Islamic principles and distinction between religious and cultural traditions are required. It is vital to dump any Islamophobic sentiments, acknowledge British Muslims as ordinary people and – perhaps most importantly – look at them through this lens.


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