

Making a Place for Muslim Youth Work in British Youth Work

Introduction

This is a reflective account of the National Conference on Muslim Youth Work held in Birmingham. This edition of Youth and Policy has accurate reports by the contributors. Textual scholars may enjoy comparing my misunderstandings with what was actually said. I see the conference as a quest seeking many trails. What is Muslim Youth work? Is Youth Work done by Muslim youth workers? Is Youth Work rooted in Islam? Is Youth Work to spread Islam? Can Youth Work to develop what Islam might be? Is Youth Work to address the needs of young people who might be described as Muslims? How can youth work with young people who have grown up in conversation with Islam in the UK reflect the contradictions and benefits of that relationship? All these questions overlap and influence each other and all were addressed in part. The conference was stimulating and I was left with questions and more to follow up. I hope that this article contributes to your engagement with this highly practical debate.

Participation

The National Conference on Muslim Youth work (December 5th 2005) attracted 211 participants of whom, maybe, 137 were Muslims. The participants were in positions of influence and responsibility in a wide variety of agencies including 43 working in public sector youth work. Nationally there were good representations from Greater Manchester, the West Midlands, and some from London. I got the impression (and it may be a misapprehension) that the public bodies represented were where there are Muslim workers needed to address a significant issue for the agency. From other work I do (for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister) I am aware of the difficulties that exist for the development of local voluntary Muslim groups. As well as the highly articulate, thoughtful, professional conference goes; we need to keep in mind the wider range of potential youth workers who may contribute to this agenda.

I work in the North East and so was particularly interested in the participants from my region. The North east was represented by Abdul Amin from Sunderland, Rizwan Shah from Newcastle, Abdul Khan from Connexion Tees Valley, Tony Jeff and Jean Spence (Youth and Policy and University of Durham), Catherine Duce and Susannah Moon (University of Durham, and Churches Regional Commission: research project into faith based youth work), and Yahaya Nurthidayati from Durham University. Potential participants from the north east who were not there include: Azaad Youth project in Middlesbrough, Mosque representatives from Middlesbrough, Stockton, Sunderland, and Tyneside, Apna Ghar South Shields, Bangladeshi Centre Sunderland, International Family Centre Stockton, BECON, and the Angelou Centre. As usual for the North East region we tend to have undersupported projects with British Muslims (c.f. OfSTED report November 2004 for Middlesbrough Youth Service) and are cautious about taking part when the networks and practice in London, or Birmingham may reflect large groups of

BME young people (PAT 12 (2000): 88); or the sheer cost of travel and participation are too great. However the region's representatives also show the commitment of the Regional Development Agency, statutory bodies and Universities in showing leadership to create a better way forward.

Impressions and themes

The abiding impression was of a discussion that was finally being had in public. There was real gravitas to the contributions: there was a desire to use the best forms of research, and words to underpin what was said, and an awareness of an international critical scholarly perspective. There was respect paid to the influential shapers of identity (the Muslim faith, of course, but also the British context). Contributors and participants could be sensed as describing a new pathway which had not been walked before, but where there was a mass of people already wandering in many interesting directions. We should look forward to seeing some of the descriptions applied and developed in the days ahead.

I thought that I was reasonably well informed, but I was acutely aware that I was in the presence of people speaking with authority, and making reference to texts and contexts that are not regarded as sufficiently important to be part of the mainstream. Much of the current literature is based on the themes of race, gender and tackling inequality; this conference was trying to look to different resources to address subtleties of identity, culture and the consequences for the young Muslims in the UK. But even writing that sentence does not express adequately the 'axiological' 'paradigmatic' sense of difference of some conference contributions from the limits of the social sciences constructs I am used to. The Policy Action Team 12 in 2000 expressed a similar caution about their levels of understanding (PAT 12: 88). There is a need to listen, read and think about a different literature, hermeneutic tradition, and frame of reference.

Islam

It is reassuring for me, having spent a long time with Christian Youth Workers, to hear similar utterances from the mouths of Muslim theologians: youth work isn't explicit in the Koran, human beings are there to look after God's world, and there is shrewd wisdom about different stages of growing up (c.f. Ashton 1986). Sheika Halima Krausen encouraged us to look at a new synthesis of religious potential of Islam that might create something other than the polarised positions of idealizing the eastern tradition or being absorbed utterly in the western lifestyle. She encouraged us to go back to the sources and rethink. Perhaps it would be good to revive plurality in competing for the common good. There needs to be space for the religion to engage prophetically for each generation and this space might allow reflection, discovery and self education, including the scope to make mistakes.

Listening to Krausen I am struck by the plea for freedom to begin to think about and interpret the tradition in less constrained ways. Elsewhere in the conference there were comments and questions about the well meaning

Imans who are brought from abroad to teach the faith. I was reminded of the cultural clashes faced by the English clergy in Africa: the shared faith is real but there comes a point where the capacity of the faithful is sufficient to begin to grow their own intellectuals, theologians and leaders. The limits of the organisational capacity to make the space for freedom seemed very evident. There is no comparison in British Christianity (except perhaps in the Black majority churches) with the struggle to have places to worship, organise, teach, learn and create the key professionals. The influence and financial support even in the earliest days gave Methodism, Roman Catholicism, and the Salvation Army, the resources to train and build social welfare centres even if they were excluded from the Anglican preserves of learning. The conference offered a space to discuss and reflect beyond what is usually available; what needs to be done to maintain and develop this space?

Tariq Ramadan spoke well on the relate theme of engaging in the dialectic between the western culture and Islam. I shall look forward to finishing his book (Ramadan 2005), and he clearly is worth reading (at the time of the conference none of his books were in our university library). In the conference his comments were well made to open up closed definitions. On *Umma*: does it mean supporting Muslims right or wrong? No, there are conditions; 'Islam is great, not all Muslims are'. On *Shari'a*: is it just a penal code, where the harsher it is the more Islamic? Or is it social justice? Or, is it a straight path to ideals of justice and integrity? Sharia objectives may be achieved in many ways, 'if it gives an Islamic result then it is my law'. On *Culture*: Islam is a religion with universal principles but there have always been Islamic cultures, and now this includes French Islamic and English Islamic cultures. He encouraged his hearers to have confidence as British Muslims, with a commitment to the common good, to have a critical mind and to contribute creatively to society. On being questioned he expressed the need we have to see Muslim role models between the Mosques and the streets with the organisations for them to work in. What sort of development opportunities will be required for these role models to be encouraged?

Listening to Ramadan and Krausen there are certainly different starting points and presuppositions, and there is a different rhetorical tone about the discussion. I have sometimes been struck by almost medieval speeches from Middle East leaders translated using archaisms that can seem harsh. At this conference the tone lacked the stridency both of those speeches and of youth workers in the UK (questioning Beverley Hughes at the Third annual YPN national Youth Conference 2005). On the heels of a conference, where 'our minister Beverley Hughes was treated so shabbily' (Wylie 2005:23), this was a conference marked by listening and careful dialogue that covered a wide range of central issues.

So what did this listening and dialogue seem like to someone brought up in the British Christian tradition? The core themes they drew on are not simply the common inheritance of the Abrahamic faiths: the call to respond to God. Nor are the themes of community, law, culture and social ethics; heretical mistakes to be sorted out. There is a strangeness to my tradition with a resonance that challenges my own integrity and believing. I have experienced

this in other ways in crossing faith boundaries: when Methodism sang differently, when Friends used the silence of a group differently, when Catholics built community; I have lived through all of these and been changed. Harder are the experiences of Methodism lacking a focus on Holy Communion, the Friends lacking a professional caste of religious leaders, and the Catholics lacking women celebrating the Mass. Dialogue that is real has both creative realities that I warm to, the empty spaces of what I am attached to, and new things which are as other as an experience of God. What will this dialogue between British Muslims and other British youth workers be like? The only way I will know will be to see the dialogue continue and grow, and this will depend on the good will and hospitality of the other.

Listening to Ramadan I was also struck by the rich variety of organisation I have access to. The Christian church has never been shy about setting up new structures and forms of organisation: new churches, parishes and dioceses to respond to the changes in population; organisations with a Christian basis but separate from a church (YMCA, Boys' Brigade, Oasis) and organisations working across a whole range of church structures (YWAM, YFC, Greenbelt). The range of approach of Christian organisations has grown over the years. Some organisations are interested in deepening young people's faith; others, on the sustaining base of their faith, offer an open agenda to the young people they work with; and still others draw a theme from their faith (e.g.: healing, hospitality, learning) which they offer as a specialism to those who need it. In part these organisations represent a desire to get things done, but they also represent the response to not being able to act within the present institutional framework - a recent example might be the Metropolitan Church response to the exclusion of the gay and lesbian Christians from much of visible church life.

The most significant national organisations for young Muslims at the moment may be the help lines, and web based advice. These sit alongside local examples of individual youth projects. In contrast to the presence of Christian projects in rich and poor areas, and at local and national levels, there appears to be a lack of provision and a limited range of approaches. How shall we see a development of a more diverse Muslim Youth Work practice?

Young British Muslims

I was strongly put in mind of the spirit of the Albemarle report in its declaration of a sea change needed in the nature of youth work. That Report had faced the baby boom, the end of National Service (Albemarle 1960:13), increased prosperity and a desire to provide something good for young people and it recommended a rethink of resources, training (Albemarle 1960:55) and curriculum (Albemarle 1960:135). So now, we are faced with the demographic reality of 46% of the Muslim population under 25 (Tom Wylie), with higher levels of overcrowding in housing, lower levels of educational achievement. The conference was trying to hold together themes about the condition of the (Muslim) young and the potential contribution of youth work, while not wanting to suggest that youth work alone can answer some very large social issues. Albemarle coincided with other policy developments and so too this

discussion connects with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's efforts to improve life chances for the BME communities through the Neighbourhood Renewal strategy (SEU 2001:14). This has been reinforced by the recent study of the life chances of Britain's minority ethnic communities which emphasises the comparative lack of social mobility among the British Muslim population (Platt 2005:28-30). There are clearly other government themes too: Community Cohesion and the events of July 2005 both carry a sense of threat. But it is worth remembering that we were frightened of young people at the end of the 1950s too (Albemarle 1960:16f), and indeed have been fairly persistently ever since (Cohen 1973, Davies 1986), MacDonald (1997)). Maybe what we understand about the changed needs of young people will lead, among other things, to a renewal of appropriate youth work. How will we address the specific needs and aspirations of the British Muslim young people?

The difference with the Albemarle report was that there existed a Voluntary Sector and local authorities (Albemarle 1960:108,134) to build on. Felicity Winters, speaking for the DfES, emphasised that the green paper 'Youth matters' offered an invitation to all to provide for all young people, this means providing for all Muslim Young people and not just faith based youth work. I asked her if there was yet and equivalent to the historic headquarters grants for the voluntary sector faith Youth Work (such as the Methodist Association of Youth Clubs, or the Church of England's Youth Work); her reply was that there was currently no equivalent body to talk to for Muslim Youth Work. How can the same specific entitlement, that has been made available to British Christians for over 60 years, be delivered at a national level to British Muslims?

A further difference was the nature of the imaginations at work on the young Muslim population. Dr Salman Sayyid described the 'immigrant imaginary': a situation where Muslims never cease to be immigrants: there is still an assumption that that is what Muslims are, no matter their place of birth and it will be what they will be because the only ways out don't seem to function. Sayyid outlined the failure to overcome the chasm by avoiding histories of migration and union. He pointed out the fantasy of the host consuming the immigrant over time, as they lose their nature and character to the terms of the host. He noted the extraordinary measurement of the process of absorption over time units called generations, which gives no sense of causality in historical, psychological or social terms. The combination of these elements was creating a fantasy where the new generation of young Muslims must inevitably be the one where the new world is forged. In contrast to these public discourse fantasies there are the lives of young people: young people live in network of social relations, with their families, their school friends, in a national and global context of life for young people. These inform and create the actual identities, and as well as positive creative aspects there are the impacts of racism – even if people won't own up to it, doesn't mean that it doesn't happen.

Youth Work

The DfES concern for 'Youth Matters' (DfES 2005), the engagement with the green paper by youth workers and the National Youth Agency in particular mean that we did indeed talk about youth work. It is the business of youth work to seek good outcomes to the five themes of Every Child Matters (safe, healthy, enjoy and achieve, contribute, and find economic well being). Tom Wiley got his tongue round the Dublin declaration of 1916 to claim the task of 'cherishing all the children of the nation equally' (Pearse 1916). He emphasised the NYA commitment to the intervention 'youth work' as being about:

1. The personal, social and political development of young people.
2. Characteristic methods: learning from experience, that a relationship with an adult is deployed to enable learning, and that there will be work in small groups.
3. Proceeding on the basis of values: the needs of young people are the primary concern, that diversity will be recognised and responded to, and that young people will be empowered.

Wiley placed the debate firmly at the heart of evidence based policy making: moving from the ambitions of policy to matching the Muslim young people of Britain up with the target group, and the need to see good youth work done in that context.

When giving his sketch of the life-chances of young Muslims he referred to the 10-15% 'who find life a struggle.' I wondered what this might mean and pursued my enquiries using the Muslim Helpline website. There is an analysis of data of what is currently happening to young Muslims:

- 'Drug abuse and smoking are shown to have a significantly higher prevalence amongst Muslim youth between the ages of 16-25 years, despite the fact that an estimated 45% of Muslim youth have never used illicit drugs, smoked tobacco or drunk alcohol.
- Mental illness occurs more frequently amongst Muslim youth, particularly those that enter Britain as refugees. Almost one-half of the Muslim Youth Helpline's clients complain of mental anxiety, depression or suicidal feelings.
- Muslims make up 7% of the country's prison population, a figure that is five times that of the total Muslim percentage of population in Britain today. Numerous clients of the Muslim Youth Helpline have been to prison and one client recently accessed our service from prison.' (MYH 2005)

I prefer, like Bernard Davies (Davies 2005:11), young people to choose to become involved, and to start where young people are starting. But, like Robert Beckford (Beckford 2004) working in prison with young black offenders, some of this youth work will need to take place where young people have ended up and where they have fewer choices than we would like. It is precisely in the black tradition that, like Malcolm X (a.k.a. El Hajj Malik Shabaz) it is the prison that is the institution in society where educational change can come. I am struck again by my preconceptions of where safe spaces are in society, and what might constitute freedom of choice. Is it likely

that Muslim youth work might include effective informal learning in prison, or a therapeutic community?

Tony Jeffs invited us to look at faith based youth work as a paradoxical phenomenon. Certainly it produced great moral and social wonders in the portrait he painted of Hannah Moore, the Eve of youth work, challenging slavery on the basis of her Christian faith. But like other biographies of that faith he reminded us of the harsh attacks and betrayals she endured from other Christians: accused of weakness to Methodism, banned from using church premises, and bankrupted. He pointed out that Christian youth work has often been strongest in the areas that needed it least, and, if youth work is about children's rights, what right do parents have to impose their faith. The theme of placing the power in youth work with the young person, and the subversive nature of dialogue making the familiar unfamiliar; (replacing certainty with doubt) was picked up in questions during the conference by Bernard Davies. It was certainly striking to have two grand old men of youth work testing the robustness of doubt based youth work, but, for once, they did not seem to be setting the agenda for the conference. Jeffs' approach might encourage us to find youth workers inspired by their faith while warning us to find allies in youth work, and not just to rely on the priorities of faith communities.

MG Khan was perhaps closer to the interests and aspirations of the conference participants with his investigation of what seems to be going on in Muslim youth work. He described 'missing conversations' and 'breaks in conversation' and the lack of a genuine youth work. This description certainly captured with authority the experiences of the group of thoughtful and excellent workers at the conference who seemed to be either quietly competent, or critically creative with stories of being excluded from their starting point. Is it the case that those of us white British youth workers who have been trying to manage youth work over the last couple of decades have recruited Muslim youth workers as part of a commitment to tackling racism, or offering a multi-cultural youth service? Perhaps we were challenged (Chauhan 1989) to hear the community development needs identified by the young people (and workers) from within the Muslim community, but we have been ineffective in listening, learning and changing.

Khan emphasised the courage that can be found to engage with British society, from Muslim faith. He also spelt out the way in which youth work has within it the values and processes that can achieve the change needed. His discussion was a powerful affirmation of youth work as a place where what is needed more widely for the British Muslims might find the opportunity to be developed: not everything will need to come from elsewhere. Khan argued that youth work has the dynamics of change built into it. People have a need (and I heard this as being particularly addressed to Muslims) to make sense of what they do. Youth work allows people to place intention (I note the power of this word in Islam). There needs to be ownership and participation for genuineness (these are all common youth work themes (Thompson 1982) but the conclusion must be that we have still not got genuineness as a result of current policies (Thompson 1982 6.41)). Khan wants to see space given to

thinkers and reflective practitioners, not just representatives. There needs to be a choice about the framework of thought and time to develop an understanding. Just as British youth work responded to the 1980s challenge of the Rastas that we were living in Babylon, so we should be able to respond to the challenge of young Muslims now. Khan's plea, that we should respect the diverse traditions and richness of intellectual history, seemed like a reasonable request in a city where religious range and intellectual exploration have been a hallmark for over two centuries (Uglow 2002).

Khan went on to suggest a struggle to come to terms with self (and not just the *Umma*), with God and the deep beliefs that are held, with society and with creation. His model of reflection has the potential of making impacts for individuals, faith groups and organisation. Looking at it I am reminded of the reflective cycles that are developed by faith organisations trying to achieve real holistic development of young people, and those who work with them. The YMCA (1985) has taken a model of reflection to encourage groups to explore spiritual development. Margaret Kane (1986:86) developed a model of reflection in the North East to connect the rigors of sociological criticism and use of the sacred text in dissecting current lived experience. The Church of England (1996) undertook a national process of enquiry leading to a report with a theological model for youth work (1996: 23-38). The National Occupational Standards for Youth Work include units to 'Enable young people to explore and develop their values and self respect' (NOS 2002: B1), and to 'Enable young people to explore and develop their values and self respect' (NOS 2002:B2). This is not an alien concept, but a statement of the failure of much of the youth work decision makers to go beyond the tackling of racism and presenting a multi racial image to the world. I have worked with people who described 'coconuts' as being black on the outside and full of white culture on the inside. This conference expressed a cry from the heart to let Muslim youth workers be themselves and not a projection of white decision makers.

Activities based in religious communities have received an interesting endorsement in the research undertaken by Feinstein (2005). This longitudinal study based on 11,261 people over the period 1970- 2000 focuses on the result for those involved in church based activities and these might give some clues about what might be the case for those involved in Mosques. The description of the participants is not unlike that of the young Muslims:

'Church-going attracted girls more than boys. Young people from low income middle class families, with parents showing interest in their children's progress at school were also more likely than others to be engaged in Church-based activities. Parents tended to approve of these children's activities and the children tended to be high primary school achievers in classes with a high proportion of middle class children living in good neighbourhoods. The young people themselves were characterised by a high internal locus of control, doing homework and helping at home; though their self-efficacy tended to be low. They tended not to go to pubs.' (Feinstein 2005:3.5)

The results of church going activity was that 'it appeared to enhance the prospect of high achievement' (Feinstein 2005:4.2.3) and high social capital (Feinstein 2005:4.2.4). Overall, they are less likely to undergo social exclusion (Feinstein 2005:ii.10). There are significant issues of difference between the social position of Muslims in Britain and established (and, indeed, Established) church resources, but the research challenges long held assumptions that there are fewer benefits in the social development of young people in faith based social groups.

What then should we do?

The National Conference on Muslim Youth Work 2005 has contributed significantly to building the capacity of the UK to address the needs of Muslim Youth Work. The speakers and workshops (and I have not covered any workshops in my comments) have started, and continued important debates. But if that is how it left we will have missed an important opportunity. There is a series of issues which require a policy response and commitment by a range of interested parties: here is my list, based on the structure of the Albemarle report.

The Department for Education and Skills can show some leadership. A ten year programme (Albemarle 1960:108) that addresses the coming groups of young Muslims might be timely. It would be worth seeing a document that does better than the Thompson report (Thompson 1982 6.35- 6.49) in describing what the situation is and how it might best be addressed. My reading of 'Youth Matters' is a document that (understandably) addresses all and invites all. The problem is that the Muslim team is still (in cricketing jargon) 'following on' lacking the equipment, training nets, coaches to improve their chance of success. Other government departments and initiatives have identified explicit issues to address and there is a need for joined up action in an area of life where the rest of the British population gains support from public money and accountable qualifications as it receives its entitlement.

The Department for Education and Skills can also support the development of resources. This may best be done with the National Youth Agency but like 1960 (Albemarle 1960:108-109) 2006 needs to see encouragement for voluntary organisation.

Muslim Youth Workers need to form an independent charitable company to take forward the agenda of Muslim Youth Work across the country. This would form a regular place for development and help the DfES engage in productive and constructive development. It could be a place where it is possible to engage in learning and thinking as well as practice.

Trainers of volunteer youth workers need to set up entry level learning for Muslim youth workers. This has been a mainstay of Christian youth work over the years and a current resource that has been developed and renewed over the years with government funding is Spectrum (2005). This allows groups of interested adults to develop skills and understanding in a fairly short space of

time. Clearly any such project now would include the Youth Work National Occupational Standards, especially Unit B2.

Higher education institutions need to consider how they address the particular issues of understanding, learning and qualification. We have Youth Work courses, so may not need an emergency training college (Albemarle 1960:110); maybe the development of modules where the intellectual, reflective and practice issues raised by the conference can be investigated and assessed. Not all HEIs will want to do this but there will be some where there are regular links with British Muslims where it will be a timely development. It may be that a small development grant is all that would be needed to encourage HEIs to take the step. There are existing research programmes being undertaken with British Muslims (Green 2005, Duce and Moon 2005), the challenge is to build these links into the mainstream programmes in better ways.

The National Youth Agency to continue to combine the analysis, leadership as a critical friend with the space to discuss and publish. The NYA and Youth and Policy have done a good job in helping this conference to happen.

Youth workers need to continue to grow their understanding and practice of Muslim youth work. There are good youth workers, good Connexions personal advisors, who engage with real understanding and help young Muslims make the most of their lives. But we need to recruit more role models who can help negotiate the dialogues between young people, their families, and the wider society. These role models need to reflect the diversity of regional experience and to speak and act in a way that challenges peer pressure. Youth work has a particular skill in addressing peer pressure.

Why should we do it?

The public data is readily available (NS 2006) that shows the current age profile of the Muslim population in the UK as 'the youngest age profile of all religious groups in Great Britain' (NS 2006: Age and Sex). The 2001 census reported 535,853 Muslims between 0 and 16, in a Muslim population of 1,588,890; this is about 33.72% of the Muslim population, of whom 71% are under 34. This compares with a national population of 11,460,801 between 0 and 16, in a total population of 57,103,927; this is about 20.07% of the whole population, of whom 45% are under 34. Certainly, the Muslim population as a whole makes up 'only' 2.78% of the population, but when we look at the younger cohort of 0-16 year olds it makes up 4.6%: almost twice as significant to the development of the Every Child Matters policy. The National Statistics summary of the UK population is that 1 in 5 are under 16 and 1 in 6 are over 65 and many of our public policies reflect this aging population. For the British Muslim population the profile is more like the UK in the 19th Century: 1 in 3 is under 16 and 1 in 25 over 65. The priorities are more like those of the founders of youth work over a hundred years ago: how to provide the best life chances for the exciting, vibrant young people who fill so much of the community?

The public data also reveals the need to provide help in developing youth work (and no doubt other interventions, like Early Years work). The Muslim population in the UK experiences the highest rate of unemployment: 14% for men and 15% for women in contrast to 4% for Christian men and women, and between 5% and 11% for other religious groups (NS 2006: Labour Market). The Muslim population in the UK experiences the highest rate of ill health: 13% for men and 16% for women in contrast to 7-8% for Christian men and women (NS 2006: Health and Disability). The Muslim population in the UK experiences the highest proportion of having no qualifications: 31% in contrast to 15% for Christian (NS 2006: Education). The Muslims born in the UK (irrespective of age were twice as likely to have a degree (NS 2006: Education). These statistics reveal a strong form of multiple deprivation in the British Muslim community that shows how 'cut off from the prosperity and opportunities that most of us take for granted' (Tony Blair in SEU 2001:5). It is a current policy goal of Neighbourhood Renewal to 'narrow the gap' (SEU 2001:8). Muslim Youth Work appears in this context, not as a minority interest, as a key element in effective Neighbourhood Renewal practice. There are particular issues that need to be addressed in ways that target the particular character of the lives and contexts; general 'one size fits all' approaches has done little to change the situation in the last 20 years. The conference revealed both: evidence of good practice, and the need to devote time, resources and thought to the development of Muslim Youth Work.

Why should youth work be one of the key approaches? One reason is that we carry the history of similar transitions in the foundation documents of youth work practice. The mosque in Fournier Street London E1 is well known as a former synagogue, (Merriman 1994 plate 2) Methodist Church, and (originally) Huguenot Church. Not far away was the 'house of friendship' developed by Basil Henriques for the Jews in Whitechapel for fifty years in the 20th Century. Henriques described the area as 'an unwallled ghetto, within a mile of the Bank of England, a community almost untouched by the world outside of it' (cited in Jeffs 2003:138). He was thorough in addressing complex needs: 'new members supplied details of family, interests, employment and health' (Jeffs 2003:142) and the club facilities addressed crowded substandard housing in providing showers and quiet rooms (Jeffs 2003:145). The specific character of that provision would be justified in our own time because of the continuing concentrations of populations in particular areas. Currently 38% of Muslims live in London (less than the 56% of Jews and 52% of Hindus), and they are 'highly concentrated spatially. Muslims made up 8% of the London's population overall but 36% of Tower Hamlets and 24% of the Newham populations.' (NS 2006; Geographic Distribution). Sometimes it looks as though the ideology of integration has ignored the real character of particular communities in the hope that a universal service might hide the characteristics and needs of the people who most need to benefit. The arguments used a generation ago against special Muslim projects would never have been used against Miners' Welfare Halls, because we all knew within the welfare state that socialism thrived on unity to tackle common issues, and cooperation to give the right sort of support for those distinctive communities.

Youth work is also a good place to improve the lives of British Muslims because youth work has been used to achieving functioning partnerships between faith groups and the state. The voluntary sector and faith groups in particular, have been a continual source of youth work. The history of partnership working includes such landmarks as Circular 1486 in 1939, the Albemarle report in 1960, and even the current commissioning of youth work. The key element in this partnership is the development of structures of accountability. Being part of the nation's youth work means subjecting what you do to professional scrutiny expressed in JNC pay scales, National Youth Agency validation of courses, and National Occupational Standards for Youth Work. Accountability means using, interpreting and developing the legal and practical frameworks for Child Protection, Health and Safety, Tax and National Insurance. It means that faith communities choose youth work missions, aims and outcomes; some of which may be shared with public bodies, including government. Accountability in such partnerships means that faith communities take part in the improvement of structures in society so that they are more effective, inclusive and responsive. My impression of the conference in Birmingham was of a group of people who want to do this sort of partnership work. We should seek ways of making this happen more widely, soon.

In conclusion

Two middle aged men compared notes over coffee at the start of the conference on their childhoods in Birmingham. Both remembered the shock of the pub bombings and the bag searches afterwards that were part of our lives. It was terrorists and not the Irish or the Catholics who were to be overcome in the 1970s. The long term weaknesses in the response to those bombings were based on stereotyping and a failure of the justice systems. Both have spent their adult lives trying to develop youth work and look with horror at the simplistic prejudice reacting to all of Islam's children. As one of those men I remember that a placement report written 20 years ago about some of my first youth work next to the Birmingham central mosque was criticised for being excessively anxious about the future of young Muslims. It was hard to develop the conversation then and we have all been the worse for it. This conference shows a real opportunity to develop understanding, practitioners, and a better practice.

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