



**TIMOTHY JOSEPH FORD**

**DISSERTATION**

**Title:** *Does Islamic critical realism provide a useful 'lens' for researching contemporary British Muslim leadership and civil engagement?*

**September 2015**

**CARDIFF UNIVERSITY**

# Cardiff School of History, Archaeology and Religion



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**Student number: C1456658**

**Degree programme: MA ISLAM IN CONTEMPORARY BRITAIN**

**Module number: RTT501** .....

**Module title: DISSERTATION MODULE**.....

**Module tutor: PROFESSOR SOPHIE GILLIAT-RAY** .....

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**TIMOTHY JOSEPH FORD**

*A dissertation submitted to*

**CARDIFF UNIVERSITY**

*in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree:*

**Master of Arts in Islam in Contemporary Britain**

September 2015

School of History, Archaeology and Religion

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Professor Sophie Gilliat-Ray for her tremendous support supervising this dissertation. Without her guidance and wealth of knowledge this thesis would not have been remotely possible. I owe a special thanks to Maulana Dr Mansur Ali for introducing me to the theory of Islamic critical realism and also for his inspiring classes throughout the year. I would like to thank Dr Saira Malik who commands an excellent grasp of the subject she teaches and Mark Bryant for his warmth, hospitality, extra-curricular seminars and ongoing support at the UK-Islam Centre. I would also like to thank my classmates for providing a stimulating and fun environment to study in as well as companionship to explore the many restaurants of Cardiff with. Lastly but certainly not least I would like to thank Mr Jameel, without whose generous scholarship it would not have been possible for me to have taken the incredible journey of this MA, hugely strengthen my knowledge in this important field of study whilst developing my career and importantly myself. I sincerely hope I can live up to the enormous debt all the above people have put me in.

## **ABSTRACT**

By using secondary analysis of qualitative interview data from 'elite' young British Muslims alongside an analysis of speeches made by a 'British Muslim leader', Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, this dissertation explores the extent to which Islamic critical realism (Wilkinson 2013; 2015) offers a useful 'lens' to research contemporary British Muslim leadership and civil engagement.

**Key words:** British Muslims, Islamic critical realism, leadership

**Word count:** 19309

*After interviewing the German sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas in 2002, Mendieta (2002: 28) summarises the viewpoint of Habermas in his interview as follows: “religion without philosophy is speechless, philosophy without religion is contentless”*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| Acknowledgements.....  | i         |
| ABSTRACT .....   | ii        |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS.....   | iv        |
| <b>1. INTRODUCTION.....</b>  | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>What is Islamic critical realism and why is it important? .....</b> | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>What is ICR? .....</b>  | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Why use ICR? .....</b>  | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>Why research young Muslims? .....</b>                               | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>Why look at ‘elite’ young Muslims and leadership?.....</b>          | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>2. LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>                                      | <b>9</b>  |
| <b>The development of British Muslims .....</b>                        | <b>9</b>  |
| <b>The development of British Muslim leadership .....</b>              | <b>11</b> |
| <b>Muslim chaplaincy as a new model of religious leadership .....</b>  | <b>14</b> |
| <b>Muslim NGOs .....</b>   | <b>16</b> |
| <b>‘Elite’ Muslims .....</b>   | <b>17</b> |
| <b>The study of everyday lived religion .....</b>                      | <b>18</b> |
| <b>Research questions.....</b>   | <b>19</b> |
| <b>3. METHODOLOGY.....</b>   | <b>20</b> |
| <b>Secondary analysis as a research method .....</b>                   | <b>21</b> |
| <b>The sample.....</b>   | <b>23</b> |
| <b>Baroness Warsi’s speeches .....</b>                                 | <b>23</b> |
| <b>The ‘Cambridge Dataset’ .....</b>                                   | <b>23</b> |
| <b>Method of analysis .....</b>  | <b>25</b> |
| <b>Advantages of secondary analysis .....</b>                          | <b>26</b> |
| <b>Ethical considerations.....</b>                                     | <b>28</b> |
| <b>4. FINDINGS .....</b>   | <b>31</b> |
| <b>Human rights .....</b>  | <b>31</b> |
| <b>Seriousness.....</b>  | <b>32</b> |
| <b>Shift in focus to UK context.....</b>                               | <b>34</b> |
| <b>Absence .....</b>   | <b>35</b> |



|  |    |
|--|----|
| <b>Britain’s Christian heritage</b> .....                    | 38 |
| <b>Experiencing seriousness through discrimination</b> ..... | 42 |
| <b>A comfortable British-Muslim identity</b> .....           | 42 |
| <b>Education</b> .....                                       | 45 |
| <b>5. DISCUSSION</b> .....                                   | 48 |
| <b>Implications and significance of findings</b> .....       | 48 |
| <b>Reflections on secondary analysis</b> .....               | 49 |
| <b>6. CONCLUSION</b> .....                                   | 51 |
| <b>Ideas for further research</b> .....                      | 53 |
| <b>Bibliography</b> .....                                    | 54 |

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There is empirical evidence indicating that 90% of British Muslims report a strong sense of belonging to the UK and that Muslims (from various ethnicities) are more likely to report feeling British than Caribbean Christians, African Christians or Asian Christians (Karlsen and Nazroo 2015). This evidence is supported by other findings that show Muslims report high levels of being 'proud to be British' and are more likely to choose to identify as British than the general population (Wind-Cowie and Gregory 2011; CLG 2010).

Research consistently shows that Islam is highly important and relevant to Muslims. For example, 74% of Muslims respond that Islam plays a 'very important role in their lives' compared to 43% of Hindus and 46% of Sikhs (Modood and Berthoud 1997) and although Islam is expressed in diverse ways all Muslims seem to have in common an attitude that Islam is highly meaningful and relevant to their everyday lives (Ansari 2004).

Despite evidence that the majority of British Muslims feel a strong sense of belonging to the UK, a crisis narrative over British Muslim integration persists in media and government rhetoric. This has been evidenced especially by recent legislation, the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, now in force, that sees schools being placed under a duty of care to their pupils and staff to safeguard against "non-violent extremism". Studies on the political engagement of young Muslims tends to be dominated by radicalisation theory. This dissertation aims to test a new theory, Islamic critical realism (ICR) that claims to be capable of taking seriously the aspects of the Islamic faith that Muslims hold most dear but at the same time is rooted in a western Enlightenment tradition. It is hoped that such a theory could provide a useful 'lens' through which to better research Muslims in contemporary Britain because it is appreciative of the things Muslims hold most sacred and is accessible to western academia. It is also hoped that debates over Muslim faith-based activism can be moved beyond theories of radicalisation and therefore the drivers propelling Muslims to take an active part in British society can be better understood and appreciated.

It is important from the outset to stress that the category 'British Muslims' captures a hugely diverse range of people who cannot be generalised as a single uniform group or community. A study undertaken by the Open Society Institute (2005) notes that in the UK "it is claimed

that the Muslim community has 56 nationalities, speaks 70 languages and prays in more than 1,200 mosques” and further research suggests there are approximately 7,000 Muslim organisations in Britain (El-Hassan 2003; Khan 2004) meaning there is no such thing as ‘general Muslims’ (Lewis 2007).

### What is Islamic critical realism and why is it important?

To explain ICR first we will need to briefly look at the theory it is rooted in: critical realism. Critical realism is a philosophical approach that its proponents claim has the potential for bringing together researchers and theories from the usually considered rather separate fields of natural science, social science and religious studies. Usually most associated with the philosopher Roy Bhaskar (1944-2014) critical realism (Bhaskar 1975, 1978, 1989, 1993, 1998, 2008; Archer, Bhaskar, Collier, Lawson, & Norrie, 1998; Manicas, 2006; Sayer, 1992, 2000) has been employed in various ways in the study of religion primarily from a philosophical/theological perspective. The so-called ‘spiritual turn’ in critical realism occurred when Bhaskar started to use critical realism to study the ultimate truth claims of spiritual and religious beliefs (Bhaskar 2000; 2002). This ‘turn’ used critical realism in a similar, although separate, way to the Christian theologians who had used it in Christian theology since the 1950s under the terminology ‘theological critical realism’ (Wright 2013: 2). This tradition has been most recently contributed to by the publication *Christianity and Critical Realism: Ambiguity, Truth and Theological Literacy* (Wright 2013) using critical realism as a tool in RE education primarily from a Christian perspective and still rooted largely in theology.

A purely social constructionist framework is conceived of as unsatisfactory to many religious believers because it fails to acknowledge the deeply held belief of an ontologically true reality (realism). This is an ontological perspective that religious believers and natural scientists are likely to share. What religious believers may take issue with however is a purely positivist perspective that argues that all forces that underpin or effect the universe are observable through a natural scientific approach. It is on this point of difference where critical realism has offered a critique of traditional Enlightenment philosophy that can be insightful for both natural scientists and religious believers, known as the epistemic fallacy (Danemark et al 2002: 39). The epistemic fallacy (explained in further detail below) is a critique of positivist natural science that argues that the ontological *being* of something cannot be reduced to the

available knowledge about it. That is, ontology cannot be reduced to epistemology. The reduction of which, according to critical realists, has been the fundamental error commonly found in natural scientific discourse.

The epistemic fallacy occurs when questions of ontology are mistakenly answered through epistemological observations. If ontology relates to the fundamental nature of things, that is, their essential being; and epistemology relates to what we know about things, the epistemic fallacy occurs when we equate what we know about something with its essential being. This is clearly erroneous, claim critical realists, because we can never be certain that we know everything that there is to know about something. If we take for example a cow: We might know certain things about a cow, such as that it eats grass, it has four legs, and it has a tail. We can continue to discover new truths about cows, but at what point can we say we know everything about a cow? And how can we be sure we are discovering the most important things?

Following from this critique critical realism can be said to rest upon three foundational philosophical positions, which are as follows:

**1. Ontological realism:**

The assertion that an objective world exists independent of us knowing it

**2. Epistemological relativism:**

There are different ways of knowing the world. Therefore there is a degree of subjectivity to all knowledge. All knowledge is fallible, and therefore potentially false.

**3. Judgemental rationalism:**

Some ways of knowing the world are better than others. Although all knowledge is fallible, it is not all equally fallible. Human beliefs are potentially true and also there are ways of evaluating the credibility of their truthfulness. These include for example, processes of logic, discourses and debates within disciplines, research methods and design and reflexivity.

Critical realism has been able, with its acceptance of ontological reality, to accommodate concepts such as 'divinity', 'vice', 'virtue', 'spirituality' and 'worship' and allow for the

possibility that they have causal effects and are real independent of our knowledge of them. Critical realism also offers the possibility that scientific truth claims and criticisms of religious beliefs can be taken seriously and used by religious believers to advance their understanding and depth of their religious practice and belief.

Given these exciting prospects for critical realism for the study of religious and non-religious belief it is exciting also for the field of Islam in contemporary Britain that a theory has been developed that merges together critical realism with Islam. This has been undertaken by Wilkinson (2013; 2015) to establish what he has called Islamic critical realism.

### What is ICR?

ICR is a critical realist interpretation of Islam. This is possible because, as explained above, Islam and critical realism share the same ontological premises that a fundamental reality exists independently of us knowing it. For Muslims, for example, a Divine Creator is a fundamental truth, and a truth that exists whether or not people choose to believe it. Likewise, critical realists make a similar argument that the natural world exists whether or not we choose to study it. There are of course various schools of thought and interpretations of Islam, but to make his theory as applicable as possible, Wilkinson has used examples of how Islam can fit into a critical realist framework by using a broad interpretation of Islam and aspects of Islam that almost all Muslims understand to be part of the faith. This includes a critical realist interpretation of the Qur'an (which almost all Muslims hold as a sacred text), and the *Sunnah* (the Prophetic example). It also includes for example what the implications of a divine Creator might have on important aspects of Muslim worship such as *Hajj* (the pilgrimage to Mecca), *Salat* (the obligatory and customary prayer) and the belief in prophets and angels.

ICR is a broad theory designed to allow for a great diversity of research areas. Because of the space constraints of a masters dissertation only a limited number of key aspects and concepts from ICR will be extracted to form the basis of this dissertation. A key concept within the theory of ICR is 'seriousness'. *Seriousness* is a concept that links together belief and practice. It links belief and practice together by making the simple proposition that for a belief to be *serious*, it must (at least) be possible to act upon it. Likewise, for an action to be *serious*, the

actor must believe the action to be correct or 'true'. The following simple diagram illustrates the point:

$$\text{Belief} + \text{Behaviour/ Practice} = \text{Seriousness}$$

*Seriousness* plays an important role within critical realism because it has been used to criticise other philosophical traditions within the Enlightenment tradition that although theoretically are innovative make propositions that cannot be enacted in practice. The idea that belief must be consistent with practice is also a fundamentally important concept within Islam. This is because Islam demands of Muslims that they not only believe in its tenets, such as the irrefutable Oneness of God and that Muhammad (upon him may there be peace) is the Messenger of God, but also that they act in a proper and decent way as outlined by the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* (see Wilkinson 2015: 39 – 50 for a detailed explanation of *seriousness* and its application to Islam).

In addition to *seriousness* are the concepts of 'underlabouring' and 'absence'. These concepts will be explained in detail when they are used.

### Why use ICR?

Wilkinson sees ICR as providing Muslims with a much needed philosophy of Islam that is consistent and coherent to a western perspective. This is because ICR works within the tradition of dialectical European philosophy rooted in Georg W. F. Hegel which is very much familiar to western academia (Wilkinson 2015: 9-10). Wilkinson argues that the lack of a philosophical understanding of Islam from a western perspective has led many Muslims living in the west to two unsatisfactory positions:

- 1) Setting up false dichotomies between Islam and the British way of life because the philosophical theological framework identifies them as mutually exclusive or in opposition, or
- 2) The abandonment of faith, leading to feelings that something is missing, or feelings of guilt.

(Wilkinson 2015: 33-34)

This is exacerbated by what Wilkinson sees as a restricted interpretation that Islam has traditionally accommodated for Muslims living as minorities in non-Muslim countries that is reduced to either obscure legalistic interpretations or theological discourses that do not take religious practice seriously. What Muslims living as minorities in the west need then, according to Wilkinson, is a role that is more *serious*. If this is achievable, it will be beneficial not only for British Muslims, a group that are ostracised and discriminated against (Modood 2005), and Muslims living as minorities in western societies, but also to western societies that are looking for models that will better support minority faith groups. This is significant also because nearly a quarter of the global Muslim population now live as minorities (Pew Research 2011).

A distinguishing feature of western societies is that they are, although to highly varying degrees, predominantly governed according to secular norms but also reflect high degrees of religious diversity. This presents both challenges and opportunities for the religious expression of Muslims living as minorities within them. Wilkinson states that his book is:

intended to help the deep processes of personal and social integration that will enable young Muslims to fulfil themselves spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, civically and instrumentally in multi-faith contemporary contexts (Wilkinson 2015: 6)

Matthew Wilkinson's theory of ICR shows how the philosophy of critical realism can form an "interpretive intellectual and spiritual bridgehead between Islamic praxis and contemporary multi-faith educational and social contexts" (Wilkinson 2015: xvi). This dissertation looks to explore how useful ICR is in relation to British Muslim young people and British Muslim leadership primarily using three concepts extracted from the toolbox of ICR: absence, seriousness and underlabouring. Wilkinson shows how his theory can be used in a practical way by history, religious, education and citizenship teachers to create serious educational provision for young Muslims in multi-faith contexts. The aim of this dissertation is to test the interpretive power of this theory when applied to the aspirations and attitudes of young British Muslim 'elites' and a 'British Muslim leader'.

### Why research young Muslims?

Young Muslims are a particularly important group to focus on because not only are nearly half of the 2.7 million British Muslims (4.8%) under the age of 25 (UK Gov. 2012). But also younger

people are more likely to identify themselves as Muslim compared to older people, are no longer readily adopting the same attitudes towards religious practice as their parents (Mustafa 2015: 12) and are increasingly looking to the Qur'an and hadiths as religious authorities (DeHanas 2013). This is compounded by further evidence that:

As well as religion playing a role in the behavioural decisions of young Muslims, the views of youths are becoming more conservative in comparison with the views of their parents and grandparents. In a survey of 1,000 Muslims by Populus on behalf of Policy Exchange [...] 86% of the respondents surveyed felt that their religion was the 'most important thing' in their life (Mustafa 2015: 12)

DeHanas (2013) has provided a rich analytical and empirical qualitative account of the important role Islam is playing in the lives of young British Muslims in relation to belonging showing that a strong sense of belonging in relation to Islam is being facilitated by place through the Hajj pilgrimage. DeHanas found that for young British Bangladeshi Muslims travelling to Mecca was considered far more important than trips to Bangladesh, confirming research showing a relative decline of South Asian self-identification and an increase in Muslim identity politics (Modood 2005; Werbner 2002). For DeHanas, this demonstrates an example of deculturation where religion, especially for young British Muslims, is being favoured over competing cultural, national or ethnic ties (DeHanas 2013: 469).

### Why look at 'elite' young Muslims and leadership?

'Elite' young Muslims are interesting as a research focus for two reasons. Firstly, because of their status as 'elite' British Muslims it is important to analyse what factors are possibly leading them to becoming successful British Muslims so that this can help other British Muslims to achieve similar success and influence public policy debates. Secondly, they are a key group in relation to a so called 'authority gap' relating to Muslim leadership in the UK whereby traditional religious leaders are being perceived as irrelevant and unable to relate to Muslim youth (Dyke 2009: 13). Related to this is a notion that young European Muslims, often with high levels of education – particularly in technical subjects, are being assumed as being at higher risk of radicalisation (e.g. Kepel 2004). Leadership, although a broad concept, is a useful one to explore in relation to testing ICR because it will likely be the site of Muslim civil engagement in British society and will therefore be a topic centred on the interaction



between British Muslims and secular multi-faith environments which ICR purports to be most useful with respect to.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### The development of British Muslims

The historical development of British Muslim communities cannot be summarised in great detail within the space restrictions of this dissertation but a brief outline of some of the relevant developments in more recent history are worth discussing.

When explaining some of the history of British Muslims it is important to include reference to the fact that the relationship between Britain and Islam is not something new nor is it something that began with increasing levels of migration from former territories of the British Empire following the Second World War as is often assumed. Prior to WWII Britain was an empire ruling over vast and varied territories. This was especially true following the First World War and resulted in many opportunities for interaction between varied ethnic and religious groups including Muslims (Halliday 2010). People were migrating within the empire which was mostly caused by economic push and pull factors. For example, this is the reason why many people from South Asia migrated to the African continent. Interaction between Britain, Europe and Islam precedes this period. The Crusades, for example, alongside being a cause for violence and bloodshed, also resulted in huge amounts of exchange, including exchanges in trade, ideas, objects, spices, inter-marriage and religious conversion. This evidences the fact that Europe and the East has a long history of interaction based on both competition, and at times conflict; trade and conquest (Matar 1998).

Although it is important to look beyond this common myth that British and Muslim interaction is something new the migration of Muslims to the UK following WWII was a significant phase in the development of British Muslim communities because of the higher numbers of Muslims migrating to Britain. During periods of migration theorists have understood that there are push and pull factors involved. In the post-WWII era there was a labour shortage in the UK, especially in the transport, manufacturing and export industries as Britain was still a manufacturing giant during this time. This had a lasting effect on the dynamics of Muslims living in Britain today where there are still higher concentrations of Muslims living in former manufacturing areas such as in the midlands, in cities like Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton, which were previously a hub for car manufacturing (Ansari 2004). Migrant

workers tended to work together in the same industries and factories, sometimes working exclusively with their own linguistic/cultural group. Therefore, it was possible for them to socialise almost exclusively within distinct linguistic/cultural groups.

Recruiters from Britain went to Asia-India to hire workers, sometimes hundreds of people at a time – even whole villages. Many were recruited from low socio-economic backgrounds from rural areas, were often semi-literate or illiterate and predominantly men. They did not expect to stay long-term and they did not perceive a need to establish mosques, interact particularly with British culture, politics or people or think about a long-term strategy for settlement. Where mosques were created in the 1950s and 1960s they were mostly simple spaces in private houses (Insoll 2001; Marranci 2004). An early and valuable study of both mosques and mosque leadership is Stephen Barton's 'The Bengali Muslims of Bradford; A Study of their Observance of Islam with Special Reference to the Function of the Mosque and the Work of the Imam' (1986). The first mosque in Bradford was a 'house mosque' established in 1960 (Barton 1986). Barton's detailed analysis looks at various aspects of the day-to-day running of mosques, the worshippers who inhabit them and the imams who serve them.

The early mosques in Britain were not divided along ethnic nor religious denominational lines as Muslims at this time were simply happy to have any kind of space to offer the communal Friday prayer (Geaves 1996). There was no intention to stay in Britain and the economic barriers to buying land for mosques were too high. The aspirations of these Muslims were towards earning enough money to send to families in home countries to create a better life and to where they would eventually also return. Questions over leadership within British society were not given any attention and there was little attempts at organised resistance to racism from the wider population (Ansari 2004). Gradually however this began to change and the possibility of long-term settlement became an option although a strong sense of attachment to 'back-home' remained. From the early 1970s onwards economic wealth among migrant communities began to increase and a process of family re-settlement began whereby the wives and children of Muslim male workers came to join them in the UK as well as a degree of intermarriage with local British women. Legislation in the 1970s to prevent migration however reversed this trend and led to a rapid decline in the movement of people into the UK.

The 1980s marks a break from the previous period of the 1960s and 1970s. A different kind of settlement emerged with a shift towards refugees coming mostly from the Middle East as a result of political upheavals and conflicts such as the Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The significance of Britain's relationship with countries such as Iran (the ousted Shah of which had been a major ally of Britain in the region), Lebanon, Egypt and Tunisia played a part on Muslim migration. Following this period, as the numbers and wealth of British Muslims increased, there emerged a new phase of custom built mosques and established Islamic community life which has eventually led to the purpose built and custom made mosques we see across Britain today. These are usually self-funded by the communities themselves, contrary to popular belief that they receive high levels of foreign investment, although that is always the case, and which reflect the aspirations of Muslims to build a permanent home and future in the UK (Werbner 2006).

### The development of British Muslim leadership

It is also not possible to include at length the complex history and debates over the development of British Muslim leadership but again a very brief overview is beneficial to discuss. Many indications of the state of British Muslim leadership can be gleaned from the brief historical overview provided above. Up until relatively recently there has been little academic literature written on the subject of British Muslim leadership.

There are some recent publications that have researched archival material to explore historical examples of prominent British Muslim leaders often overlooked such as Geaves' biographical account of the enigmatic and influential 19<sup>th</sup> Century convert from Christianity to Islam Abdullah Henry Quilliam. Quilliam led a large congregation of (mostly) British Muslim converts in Liverpool from a mosque he founded that included a printing press from which Quilliam produced a weekly paper, *The Crescent* (Geaves 2010). Quilliam raised to such lofty stations as to be appointed 'Sheikh-ul-Islam' (Sheikh of Islam) in 1894 by the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II and therefore arguably occupying the most senior Muslim role in British history. Also notable is Lawless' (1994) look at Abdullah al-Hakimi, a religious leader active since before WWII whose influence can still be felt in Cardiff today.

In more contemporary times, as the issue has grown in significance, an increasing body of studies are emerging. Gilliat-Ray's *Muslims in Britain: An Introduction* contains a chapter on religious leadership, where Gilliat-Ray notes:

During the 1960s and 1970s the role of the imam was largely confined to leading prayers, presiding over rites of passage, perhaps giving the Friday sermon, and teaching Qur'anic recitation to children. As such, his role was mosque centred. He had little external profile or authority in wider society, and his lack of English often severely restricted his capacity to engage in civil society (Barton 1986). (Gilliat-Ray 2010: 162-163)

Little demands were made upon imams by their congregations beyond these restricted traditional functions. Likewise imams were also recruited from the Middle East to serve larger, longer standing mosques such as the London Central Mosque. There are a number of research papers that have looked at Muslim faith leadership in Britain. Joly (1987) is an early example looking at British Muslims establishing Islamic institutions in Birmingham showing that by 1987 a number of fully functioning mosques were in operation and links were beginning to be made with wider British institutions. Siddiqui's (1995) article identifies some of the difficulties faced by the early generation as well as the push and pull factors behind their migration to the UK.

Gilliat-Ray (2010) notes that beginning in the 1980s and 1990s both the Muslim communities of Britain and voices from outside began to look more critically at British Muslim religious leadership. This criticism was particularly directed at issues such as language barriers – particularly regarding communication and identification with British-born Muslim youth, accusations of 'sectarianism', lack of knowledge of the socio-political context of the UK (Raza 1991) and British culture. These criticisms were coming from both 'insider' and 'outsider' voices such as a report by the Muslim Council of Britain's *Voices from the Minaret* (Rahman *et al* 2006).

A study by Birt and Lewis (2010) looked at the most influential expression of Islam adopted by British Muslim faith leaders, the Deobandi school, that developed in India in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as well as modes of engagement with civil society. Lewis (1994) has commented on the very low pay and poor working conditions of British imams during the late 1980s and

onwards where imams have mostly been employed by mosque management boards on the basis of short-term informal and therefore precarious deals, often on salaries far below the minimum wage. Whereas much focus and indeed pressure over radicalisation and the difficulties British young Muslims face in the UK has been put on imams they clearly face huge challenges of their own establishing a secure base and livelihood for themselves. Birt's article *Good Imam, Bad Imam: civic religion and national integration in Britain post-9/11* (2006) explores how imams have been defined by the government by comparison to models of "civil religion" developed by the Church of England with reference to the ability of Islam as a "minority religion" to contribute to interfaith activities, inner city regeneration and community cohesion. This has developed a discourse that identifies 'good imams' and 'bad imams' whereby good imams:

embody civic virtues, interfaith tolerance, professional managerial and pastoral skills, possibly become involved in inner city regeneration, work as an agent of national integration (most importantly on behalf of his unruly flock) and wage jihad against extremism (Birt 2006: 687)

This contrasts with 'bad imams' who are agents of cultural and religious division whose presence should be deterred by UK governmental bureaucratic hurdles or further still: defamed, deported or imprisoned. Of all topics related to Muslim faith leadership a great deal of academic attention has been paid to the education and training of imams and their role within society.

For many years there have been discussions within and between Muslim communities in Britain, and amongst non-Muslim observers, about the roles, training and career development of Muslim faith leaders (Coleman 2009; Coles 2008; Lewis 2008; Mukadam and Scott-Baumann 2010; Mumisa and Kessler 2008; Commission on British Muslims 1997; Siddiqui 2007; Suleiman 2009). Geaves' (2008) article reports on the topic of imam training in Britain. Through a qualitative and quantitative analysis Geaves looks at the possibility of voluntary partnerships between Muslim educational institutes and UK higher education institutions as a way forward for educating and training the future generation of UK imams.

There have been a number of reports produced by non-academic organisations. Of particular significance has been the Muslim Council of Britain's *Voices from the Minaret* (Rahman *et al* 2006), The Quilliam Foundation's *Mosques Made in Britain* (Dyke 2009) and a report by the Department for Communities and Local Government (Mukadam and Scott-Baumann, 2010). These provide detailed and up-to-date reports on the state of British Muslim leadership and Muslim civil society engagement, however their academic credibility requires careful scrutiny as they are not directly endorsed by any UK university. Therefore the time-span and scale is lower than standards of academic institutional studies and the research has not undergone the same level of peer review before publishing.

### Muslim chaplaincy as a new model of religious leadership

Muslim chaplaincy represents an interesting development in the landscape of British Muslim religious leadership because of the diverse and specialised role Muslim chaplains carry out. The number has grown in recent decades quickly and in 2013 there is an estimated 425-450 chaplains in Britain (Gilliat-Ray, Ali and Pattison 2013: 16) working either on a full-time, part-time or voluntary basis in UK institutions such as hospitals, prisons, universities, airports, the armed forces and schools.

Muslim chaplains are often trained imams who in many cases have graduated from UK Deobandi seminaries (Gilliat-Ray, Ali and Pattison 2013). However their role as a chaplain involves them working under very different conditions and often unique environments compared to typical mosque based imams. This is because Muslim chaplains must often work in environments that are multi-faith; or secular; involve the extensive bureaucracy associated with UK public institutions or are responsible for managing non-Muslims or Muslims who follow a different traditional background. These situations will all require Muslim chaplains to quickly contextualise how a Muslim should act in environments that they traditionally have not encountered. A mosque based imam on the other hand can remain surrounded by the familiar setting of a mosque with believers of the same school of thought. Therefore, because of the nature of the work, and the embeddedness within secular institutions such as hospitals and prisons, Muslim chaplain imams are being exposed to all sorts of situations typical of British secular environments that they might not otherwise be exposed to. This has pushed

them into needing to quickly understand how Islamic teachings apply to such settings. Asim Hafiz, who was the first Muslim chaplain to the British Armed Forces has argued that Muslim chaplains represent a new modern imamate:

The community imam may be 'enclosed and secluded from the reality', while the Muslim chaplain will deal with real issues which the mosque-based imam will not encounter. As well as being exposed to the wider society, they are learning to provide an imamate in a very different context. [...] One imam commented that Muslim chaplains will have a more realistic and practical approach to dealing with issues whereas mosque-based imams 'may not have first-hand knowledge of the world outside' (Hafiz 2015: 96 – 97)

This can be evidenced by one Muslim chaplain from the United States who noted:

I no longer read the great works of people like Imam Al Ghazali and others, just theoretically. Now, whenever I read these great texts or any book I'm always thinking, okay, so how does that translate on the ground? How does that work in practice? Does it work? Maybe it doesn't work, maybe it shouldn't work, you know, maybe this is not the right thing – so I'm always thinking (interview, July 2011 cited in Gilliat-Ray, Ali and Pattison 2013: 174)

This need to quickly adapt Islam to British contexts means Muslim chaplains are having to evaluate the essential parts of their practice. This is quickly creating Muslim religious leaders who are both authoritative in their Islamic knowledge and within their communities and also highly embedded within mainstream British institutions, as noted by Gilliat-Ray, Ali and Pattison:

It is clear from our data that chaplains have often had to evaluate what is essential for the practice of Islam in their institution, as opposed to what is simply preferable. This process requires an ability to undertake informed negotiation with clients, managers, peers and colleagues of other faiths, against the background of Islamic texts and sources (such as the Qur'an and hadith), the truths of which are regarded by Muslims as non-negotiable. To undertake this process successfully requires a significant effort of 'translation' between different worldviews (Gilliat-Ray, Ali and Pattison 2013: 184)

Which also formed the basis of Hafiz's proposition that Muslim chaplains are forming a model for a new modern imamate:

one finding from my interviews, then, is that Muslim chaplains are generally seen to be better equipped than mosque-based imams to provide a competent imamate because they are exposed to the diversity and plurality of society and the real issues and challenges of the Muslim community and wider society, and are therefore able to contextualise their teaching and ministry. (Hafiz 2015: 96)



## Muslim NGOs

Since the 1980s there has been a gradual evolution in British Muslim civil society. In the 1980s and 1990s the most active NGO groups were influenced by revivalist movements from South Asia which have slowly dissolved to be replaced by more typical British civil society organisations. There are now Muslim NGOs involved in all spheres of activism such as environmentalism (Gilliat-Ray and Bryant 2011), social work (about which Roz Warden, PhD candidate at Cardiff University, is currently researching), prisoner rehabilitation, overseas development and political engagement such as encouraging voting among Muslims.

The most comprehensive study to date of British Muslim participation in governance has been conducted by a research team from the University of Bristol titled *Taking Part: Muslim Participation in Contemporary Governance Report* (O'Toole et al 2013) that showed Muslim participation in governance has been significant and increasing over the last few decades particularly as a result of Muslim activism. Muslim NGOs have gained in significance as active agents of democracies consistent with the findings of (Gale and O'Toole 2009; O'Toole and Gale 2010) that despite low levels of formal political engagement among young ethnic minority groups in the UK such as political membership and electoral voting (Marsh, O'Toole and Jones 2007) this does not signify political apathy but instead a shift towards non-formal forms of political engagement such as protest politics and lobbying.

A growing number of Muslim organisations emphasise a distinct British identity and demonstrate a new confidence in engagement with mainstream political institutions. Organisations of this type include the Islamic Society of Britain (ISB) established in 1990 for "British Muslims to promote Islamic values"; the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), founded in 1997 as an umbrella body for 500 mosques, schools and associations in Britain and the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) also founded in 1997.

In recent years a number of interesting new Muslim NGOs have emerged gaining popular support and claim to be mobilising young British Muslims to engage in faith-based activism. One such example is MEND – Muslim Engagement and Development (formally known as iENGAGE), launched in 2014, describing itself as "working towards enhancing the active engagement of British Muslim communities in our national life, particularly in the fields of

politics and the media” ([www.mend.org.uk](http://www.mend.org.uk)) which has quickly established itself with a strong social media presence. Another example is MADE in Europe, a faith-based, youth-led NGO describing itself as “a Muslim-led movement of young people who want to see our community leading the fight against global poverty and injustice” ([www.madeineurope.org.uk](http://www.madeineurope.org.uk)). At a Muslims in Britain Research Network (MBRN) conference, held 01 April 2015 in Preston, titled ‘Muslim Leadership in Britain: Developments, challenges and opportunities’ Davide Pettinato described how he has conducted an in-depth analysis for a PhD thesis on MADE in Europe (*forthcoming* 2016) looking specifically at its capability to nature leadership skills among young British Muslims and enable them to envision making a direct and positive contribution to British society. Pettinato described the potential for MADE to contribute towards addressing the ‘gap in authority’ (Dyke 2009: 13) of traditional forms of British Muslim leadership where a significant minority of young Muslims see both mainstream institutions, Muslim ‘traditional authorities’ and other forms of national and local representation as irrelevant. This ‘scarcity of leadership’ Pettinato proposed, can partly be addressed by MADE because it is sufficiently authoritative as a Muslim-based organisation and is genuinely inspiring and focuses on tackling real issues young Muslims face individually, locally and nationally.

Organisations like MEND and MADE in Europe may represent a separation that has developed between Muslim religious leadership and Muslim faith-based civil society engagement which is not led by traditional Islamic authorities or institutions such as mosques.

### ‘Elite’ Muslims

There have been a number of studies looking at ‘elite’ Muslims in Britain and elsewhere. Appleton (2005a; 2005b) has written a two part paper using empirical data in the form of a survey of 270 students about various political issues followed by interviews lasting between 15 - 80 minutes with 40 students and organisational representatives. Appleton found there were three strategies used by British Muslims to express their religio-political identities:

turning away from Islam by assimilating entirely into British society; subscribing to a transcendental form of Islam by arguing British cultural outputs are alien and threatening to Islam; and accepting that Islam is practiced differently in different context, and that British Muslims must understand their religion in light of their context (Appleton 2005a: 171)

Ahmad and Evergeti's (2010) article provides a useful insight into established 'elite' Muslims using interviews with 24 prominent Muslims – including political, policy and academic/intellectual 'elites'. They look particularly at notions of identity and representation of British Muslims primarily through the lens of racism. Therefore, their paper contributes largely to the literature on Islamophobia which will not be looked at in great detail in this dissertation as much work has already been conducted on this subject which has a growing corpus of literature of its own.

Allen and Lsakjee (2015) have written an article that draws on 10 in-depth interviews with British Muslim actors engaged in formal Muslim-governmental relations to look at Muslim reactions to the 'Innocence of Muslims' video and concluded that the emotional attachment Muslims feel towards their religion – as evidenced by reactions to a video depicting the Prophet Muhammad – is far deeper and more significant than is currently being acknowledged by government. This research is particularly relevant to literature about the governance of Muslims.

(2006; 2011) has written a short article analysing how progressive he understands certain "progressive forms of Islam" are. Pędziwiatr focuses on the topic of political theory and the compatibility between Islam and liberalism, a subject that has been much debated by Modood. For example Modood (2010b) focuses specifically on the compatibility between European Muslim assertiveness and universal liberal democratic citizenship but discussions can also be found in Modood (2010a) and Levy and Modood (2009). Pędziwiatr's second piece on the subject is a very brief (a one and a half page spread) documenting an informal social group of 'elite' London Muslims who meet as part of a network called "City Group".

### The study of everyday lived religion

A focus of the everyday lived experience of Muslims in Europe has been explored in a recent publication *Everyday Lived Islam in Europe* (Jeldtoft *et al* 2014) and argues among other things that historically the everyday lived experience of religion has been overlooked in favour of

the ‘hypervisable’ forms of institutional religion highlighting a more recent trend towards studying ‘lived religion’ that looks at how religion is “practiced, experienced and expressed by ordinary people” (McGuire 2008: 12). Religion and identity are important fields to study because

until relatively recently religion has received relatively little attention as a marker of identity, with race, class, gender and age being given precedence (Kong 2001) [...] it is only with developments made within the past two decades that geography and other social science disciplines have begun to examine closely the role that religion plays in debates surrounding [...] citizenship, integration and everyday interactions (Ahmad and Sardar [eds] 2012: 143).

### Research questions

From this introduction and literature review we can see that British Muslims show tendencies towards wanting to both take their religion of Islam seriously and that they exhibit a strong sense of belonging to Britain. It has been established that critical realism as a philosophical tradition demonstrates strong potential for being a useful theory for studying religions and that ICR represents an innovative contemporary adaptation of this theory that has been shown to provide a useful framework for facilitating productive educational environments for young Muslims in multi-faith contexts. It has also been demonstrated that young Muslims are an important demographic lack both leadership models and role models in the UK.

This thesis will explore the utility of ICR by focusing on these key areas of leadership and civil engagement by looking at the attitudes and experiences of young British Muslim ‘elites’ and an established ‘British Muslim leader’ by exploring the questions: How useful is ICR as a ‘lens’ for studying British Muslim leadership and civil engagement? Can ICR help illuminate how young British Muslims might achieve more success in the UK? What are the most important areas for Muslims to achieve more success in Britain and how can ICR help to identify and explain these areas? Does ICR have utility outside of the classroom settings where it has so far mainly been used?

### 3. METHODOLOGY

To answer these questions this thesis will focus on young British Muslim 'elites' and an example of a prominent and established 'British Muslim leader'. Muslim 'elite's will be chosen because they are likely to be actively involved or interested in engagement with British politics and civil society. A 'Muslim leader' will be taken as a case study to gain insights and understanding of an example of a 'successful Muslim leader' who has experience of leadership and engagement with British politics. Focusing on these groups should ensure that data is obtained that can help answer the research questions outlined above because 'elites' and leaders have experience of or interest in leadership and civil society engagement and should therefore offer examples of British Muslim civil engagement.

Despite the number of British Muslims being over 2.5 million (Census 2011) there are relatively low numbers represented in leading positions of politics, business, academia, media and other spheres of influence - although this is beginning to change. There are now a number of examples of prominent Muslims in the UK that could be taken as an example of a 'British Muslim leader'. For example, Sadiq Khan MP has been a member of parliament for over 10 years, has served as a government minister under Gordon Brown's Labour government and is currently running for the position of Mayor of London (Guardian 2015). For the purposes of this dissertation the leading Muslim figure Baroness Sayeeda Warsi will be selected to act as an example case study of a 'British Muslim leader'. This is because Baroness Warsi is particularly involved in religious affairs in the UK having been Minister of State for Faith and Communities between September 2012 and August 2014. This has resulted in her making a number of high profile speeches relating to religion, integration, British identity and the role that British Muslims can take in British life. All of Baroness Warsi's speeches are available transcribed online on her website ([www.sayedawarsi.com](http://www.sayedawarsi.com)).

The Data Archive at Essex University stores an increasing amount of qualitative and quantitative data for use in the social sciences. This source was searched for data relevant to the research questions of this dissertation and although there are only a small number of datasets based on qualitative research related to the field of Muslim in contemporary Britain (approximately 5), a dataset from research into political participation among young British

Muslim 'elites' was found, probably due to the salience of this topic. Because the dataset included data from nearly 40 in-depth interviews with young British Muslims relating to political engagement it was considered a good source of data upon which to conduct secondary analysis to test the theory of ICR with respect to British Muslim civil engagement. This decision was made because it was thought that 40 in-depth interviews on the topic of political engagement conducted by a post-doctoral researcher would provide enough data to adequately address the research questions and would be more substantial than data that could be collected personally within the time constraints of a master dissertation. Secondary analysis of the Data Archive dataset and analysis of the speeches by Baroness Warsi were therefore selected as a research method.

### Secondary analysis as a research method

Secondary analysis involves the re-analysis of existing data to research new questions not examined in the original study for which the data was collected. It can incorporate a variety of techniques and has most commonly been used to re-examine quantitative data for which it is a well established research method with an extensive academic literature discussing various methodological implications. Secondary analysis of qualitative data however is far less widely utilised and therefore less developed. However since the mid-1990s there has been a growing interest in the potential for conducting secondary analysis on qualitative data due the increasing possibilities available for doing so (Heaton 2008: 33).

There have been a number of examinations of secondary analysis as a research method (including Heaton 1998, Hinds, Vogel and Clarke-Steffen 1997, Thorne 1994). In a detailed review of the literature on secondary analysis of qualitative data, Janet Heaton (2000) identified 55 studies using secondary analysis of qualitative data mostly conducted in the USA. These largely involved researchers re-examining their own datasets. The biggest issue raised over the use of secondary analysis was over epistemological concerns regarding the importance of researchers' being aware of the context in which data is obtained such as the rapport between the researcher and the researched.

In my experience of conducting secondary analysis, if one is familiar with the subject matter, it is surprising how much one can discern about what sort of rapport seems to exist between

the researcher and their interviewees and the atmosphere of the interview. The level by which this is possible will depend on the skill of the primary researcher in accurately capturing the atmosphere and other “external” or non-explicit aspects of the interview. After all, it is also an epistemological issue whether the researcher analysing their own data is firstly aware of any rapport issues, and secondly if adequate documentation of these are included in the write-up of their study. If a researcher is not adequately reflexive then this epistemological issue is going to be just as evident in their research analysing the data they collected and presented themselves. If they are, on the other hand, skilled at thinking reflexively about their own positionality, researcher effect, rapport with research participants and sensitive enough to pick up non-verbal communication such as discomfort or amusement at speaking about particular topics this can be used by the secondary researcher and utilised to overcome epistemological barriers.

This is still the case with conventional research where the research study, analysis and write-up are done by the same individual and where the same limitations surrounding rapport apply. Heaton (1998) identifies that making contact with the primary researcher before and during secondary analysis is preferable. This was attempted via email but was unsuccessful. However, in an era where there is an ever increasing presence of our profiles and interests available publically online, it is easy to gain a basic biography of most experienced academics. Profiles of academics often include a picture (in this case a picture was available), from which gender can be discerned and some indication of ethnicity, age and even some impression of cultural preferences and class might be hinted at. Previous studies by the primary researcher can be examined to understand their interests and experience in the relevant field. YouTube videos of them discussing the topic of interest might even be available. It is worthwhile looking at such material to gain a better understanding of the likely context in which the research took place.

## The sample

### Baroness Warsi's speeches

A sample of 5 speeches from Baroness Warsi's wide range of speeches were selected purposively based on their focus on British Muslims/Islam/religion. The 5 speeches were: Ebor Lecture speech delivered in 2012; Huddersfield University speech to mark inter-faith week in 2013; Georgetown University speech titled 'An international response to a global crisis in 2013; Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy Speech made at Vatican City in 2012 and Baroness Warsi's Sir Sternberg Lecture speech delivered at the University of Leicester in 2011

### The 'Cambridge Dataset'

The dataset was requested and approval was granted by the Data Archive. Shortly after the dataset was available for download under certain restrictions of ethical use and storage. The dataset was downloaded and stored on a password protected PC. It has already been anonymised by the primary researcher before being stored at the Data Archive.

The dataset comes from an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded project conducted by Dr June Edmunds (Principle Investigator) and Dr Rana Jawad (Post-doctoral Research Fellow) that examined the nature of political participation, national and transnational, among 'elite' young British Muslims. The dataset comprises data from in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion comprising a total sample of 36 young British Muslim students. 26 of these interviews were undertaken with students from 3 universities: the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), the University of Bradford and the University of Cambridge. 10 students from the University of Bradford participated in a focus group and interviews were also conducted with staff members of the Muslim youth organisation Young Muslims UK, the Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations (FEMYSO) and the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS). Young Muslims UK is an organisation that empowers young people and founded the OAK (Oldham's Adults and Kids) Project following the Oldham riots to improve social issues of deprivation. FEMYSO is a European network of Muslim youth organisations and FOSIS is an umbrella organisation for university Islamic societies in the UK. The dataset comprised:

- 14 (7 women and 7 men) students from Cambridge



- 7 (5 women and 2 men) from LSE
- 5 (1 woman and 4 men) students from Bradford
- A focus group with 5 male and 5 female students from Bradford
- The interviews with organisational representatives involved 1 woman and 4 men

The 26 university student interviews included encompassed a variety of national backgrounds: Pakistan (10), Bangladesh (4), India (4), Iraq (2), Kenya (2), Nigeria (2), Egypt (1) and Tanzania (1). The age range was 19 to 32 with the students predominantly falling between the ages of 19 to 22. The interviews and focus group was carried out in 2007-8 and all except one participant were British identifying as 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> generation.

These university locations were selected to obtain a broad demographic range reflecting UK populations of young Muslim 'elites'. Bradford has a higher than average number of Muslim students, frequently drawn from the surrounding region. LSE and the University of Cambridge attract greater proportions of international students.

During the original study a number of recruitment difficulties were reported possibly due to the research taking place during the release of guidelines issued by the government to UK university staff requesting that staff monitor students for signs of extremism. Dr Edmunds suggests this could account for the higher proportion of women obtainable in her sample of LSE students because students were alarmed that they were being put under surveillance by university staff which could have led to suspicion about research proposals into Muslim political engagement, particularly among male Muslim students. The participants in this original study were fully anonymised, about which they were made fully aware of before beginning the interviews and they were able to withdraw at any time and appropriate ethical measures were taken such as obtaining informed consent.

The sample was obtained by inviting the participants to take part in the study by emailing a large number of student organisations such as student unions and Isocs and then through a process of snowball sampling once contact and agreement had been established. Regarding the Muslim youth organisations they were contacted via telephone and whoever was available and willing to take part were followed up with interviews. The interviews were semi-structured and covered the following topics: national/educational background; formative

events; political participation and inter-generational differences (Edmunds 2010: 220). Because of the semi-structured and open format of the interviews respondents could add their own comments and input during the interview. This meant the resulting dataset contained elements of information outside of these constraints which were useful for the secondary analysis conducted for this dissertation.

The aims of Dr Edmund's original project were to:

- a) Document the impact of formative events (global, national, local or personal) on political participation or views of a sample of future 'opinion-forming' young Muslims.
- b) Gauge the involvement of this generational cohort in national political activities.
- c) Assess the cohorts' involvement in transnational activities.
- d) Document their involvement in global politics.
- e) Document their use of the Internet as a news/politics source.
- f) Investigate inter-generational similarities or differences in relation to national, local and global politics.
- g) Document intra-generational similarities or differences (i.e. between genders) in relation to national, local and global politics.

(Edmunds 2008b: 14)

Secondary analysis was conducted on the entire Cambridge Dataset. This was so that as much data as possible could be analysed: a total sample of 29 female and 15 male interviewees. The overrepresentation of women in the sample is not considered problematic because the purpose of this study is not to make broad generalisable conclusions but instead to provide rich qualitative insights into the lives of young British Muslims and to produce a small-scale practical test of ICR as a lens for studying British Muslims.

### Method of analysis

The data from the Cambridge Dataset and Baroness Warsi's speeches was analysed to extract key themes which were coded and stored using NVivo10 (licence obtained from Cardiff University) on a password protected PC. NVivo10 is a software programme designed for storing and analysing qualitative data. NVivo 10 is useful because it is easy-to-use, can store high volumes of data and neatly stores data after it has been coded and analysed in a

systematic way that can be returned to quickly and effectively and also shared with other researchers if necessary (and approved). All data was analysed focusing on 3 prominent concepts from ICR: *absence*, *seriousness* and *underlabouring*. This was to provide an analysis of the attitudes and opinions of 'elite' young British Muslims and the output from a 'British Muslim leader' through the lens of ICR. Despite the variation in the two sources of data (speeches from a leading politician and in-depth interview data) they were easily comparable because they related closely to similar themes: political engagement and leadership.

### Advantages of secondary analysis

One of the greatest strengths in using secondary analysis as a research method has been that high quality data from an experienced post-doctorate researcher gathered over a lengthy time-span (taking over 1 year to gather) can be utilised that would have been impossible to obtain during the limited time and resources available for masters level research. It would not have been possible to conduct and transcribe data relating to interviews and a focus group from a sample of nearly 40 participants. Having the dataset already transcribed creates an opportunity to spend more time doing analysis.

Social science relies on good quality social data and there are exciting developments taking place in the availability of good quality social data. This is possible due to advances in internet storage and distribution capacity which has led to the establishment of ESDS Qualidata. This is a service jointly funded by the Economic and Social Science Research Council (ESRC) and set up in 2012 in cooperation with the Data Archive housed at the University of Essex ([www.ukdataservice.ac.uk](http://www.ukdataservice.ac.uk)) that offers a number of services for social science researchers. The most significant of these is an ever-expanding archive of quantitative and (more limited although growing) qualitative data. The online platform provides a user-friendly service with quick and easy access to quality data for academic researchers. Also available are a range of materials for using data including case study examples of previously carried out secondary analysis and video tutorials. It is therefore important for social scientists to be aware of this growing service and how best to contribute and utilise it. This is especially true because of the growing potential of secondary analysis of qualitative data and mixed methods.

In the post-9/11 era there has been an intense interest in British Muslims that has of course been reflected in a large quantity of academic research studies taking place over a short period of time. The field of study of British Muslims, although a relatively new field, has undergone a rapid growth. This high volume of studies can result in what is known as respondent fatigue where British Muslims become disinterested, and unwilling to take part in, research studies into their lives (Clark 2008). This can result in difficulties in recruiting participants and lower quality data being gathered. Secondary analysis can overcome this issue because the data has already been gathered previously, ensuring firstly that data will be obtained and secondly the quality can be checked beforehand.

### Limitations and challenges of secondary analysis

There were a number of difficulties encountered associated with using secondary analysis. Because any dataset used for secondary analysis is unlikely to be directly focused on the aims of the secondary study, the researcher will most likely have to go through data that is not directly relevant to their research question; a process that is time consuming. There is also the possibility that the data available directly relating to the new research aims will be limited. This was the case during this study. This means the researcher must “squeeze out” all the possible relevant material from data available. This can however, be an unexpected positive experience because it encourages the researcher to look especially closely at the data. This can create a more rigorous analysis of the data and improve the researcher’s analytical skills - a useful quality to develop for both field work and research analysis.

During secondary analysis of interview data the researcher will feel at times that they would like to ask more direct questions to the participants related to their new research aims and ask follow-on questions or for further explanation of certain points. This is of course not possible at the secondary analysis stage and can at times be frustrating.

When using secondary analysis the research questions of the new study need to be closely aligned with those of the original research. If the original study is not closely aligned then difficulties in obtaining enough data might be encountered and the research is likely to need to go through high volumes of data that is irrelevant. This is probably why to date, most

studies using secondary analysis are conducted by the same researcher who undertook the original study, because they are acutely aware of the possible questions that can be answered from the original dataset. However, if the data is too closely aligned to the secondary analyst's new questions then this can create other problems for the researcher - most significantly the issue of overlapping too much with the original study's findings and therefore reducing the originality and contribution to the field of the new study. As more data is archived however there will be more possibilities to overcome these limitations.

It is also always worth while recognising the limitations of interview data. Although directed at research and with a specific purpose, an interview is ultimately a conversation, although a conversation with a purpose and one using rigorous methods of inquiry, it can still encounter all the issues of a conversation. There is no guarantee your respondents will be able to accurately portray the reality of their lives or be entirely honest. Responses in interviews are to some degree stories, and stories tend to become embellished over time. Things of interest perhaps get exaggerated and things may get purposely forgotten. It is also likely that people who have stories to tell will be the ones who come forward to offer an interview to a budding researcher and the results will therefore be more like an exaggerated representation of the real life situation.

### Ethical considerations

The main ethical concern with respect to secondary analysis regards informed consent. This issue arises because the participants will not have been directly informed about the exact type of analysis being done during the secondary stage. Not only will the respondents not have met the secondary researcher but also the research aims are likely to be different. Heaton (1998) notes that the aims of the secondary analysis should at least bear some resemblance to the original study in order for proper informed consent to be established. In the case of my research my aims were indeed similar to the objectives of the original research which looked at civic engagement and political attitudes of young 'elite' Muslims. Of course the participants should be made aware during the original research that the data being gathered will be made available for potential secondary analysis which could involve researchers with any number of possible interests. This is essential for prior to undertaking secondary analysis informed consent should be obtained. It should not be assumed based on

vague consent forms. In the case of datasets stored at the Data Archive this is standard practice and no data is available without appropriate consent, anonymity and ethical procedures being adhered to. Prior to commencing this research the appropriate forms outlining how the data should and should not be used were signed and adhered to throughout the research process.

One aspect of the ethical implications of secondary analysis that is not particularly alluded to in great detail in the literature on the methodology of secondary analysis is anonymity (Thomson, *et al* 2005). Because a great deal more information about each participant is made available in complete datasets available on the Data Archive, there is a greater possibility for a person's anonymity to be compromised. During a full interview many details are often made known about an interviewee and a more complete picture emerges compared to information provided in published articles after analysis has been conducted. It is therefore of even greater importance that data is thoroughly anonymised before it is archived or made available to other researchers. It may well be the case that researchers working in a particular field are aware of many of the individuals from the group they are studying – for example a researcher studying British Muslims for a number of years will likely meet and get to know many British Muslims, especially those in prominent positions, such as representatives of NGOs. During the process of secondary analysis, I felt the identity of some of the respondents could be compromised were I to have been living in greater proximity to the interview locations or been in contact with the organisations involved. This is a possibility during any research which is not archived for further analysis but upon conducting secondary analysis for this study I can recommend that researchers are especially cautious when anonymising data that will be made available for secondary analysis. It is of course an unwritten code of ethics among social researchers to protect participant anonymity and it is part of the procedure a researcher must agree to in writing before data from the Archive is made available to them, however, such informal codes cannot be relied upon because it is not possible to know precisely who can gain access to data stored at the Archive. This is especially true when data could be sensitive such as personal information about attitudes towards religion in terms of marriage practices or political affiliation. Protecting participants in social research should of course be a top

priority. In the case of this research the aims of the original study and the secondary analysis did not include the investigation of any controversial issues.

In order to overcome some of the epistemological weaknesses of secondary analysis it is important to be as transparent as possible throughout the research process and this relates especially to the primary dataset. Any potential weaknesses should be disclosed and explained because these become a weakness of the secondary study. Transparency is an important element in science and the process of making datasets available for other researcher to observe makes research more transparent and therefore more open to improving through closer scrutiny. The ability to replicate the research is also an important feature of scientific exploration and the increased transparency made available through making datasets available on the Data Archive provides an interesting contribution to this.

## 4. FINDINGS

Dr Edmund's research highlights a shift towards greater civic engagement on behalf of young British Muslims compared to previous generations (notably their parent's generation). In her study (Edmunds 2010: 221), she showed how young Muslim 'elite' students are heavily active in mainstream political and civic engagement in the UK such as voting, campaigning and protest politics. They identify themselves as a 'new' generation with distinctly different attitudes and forms of engagement compared to the generations before them. This assertiveness was an indication of the students' confident identity as British Muslims, confirming quantitative research that demonstrates British Muslims overwhelmingly hold a strong sense of belonging to Britain (Karlsen and Nazroo 2015) and qualitative research (O'Toole *et al* 2013) that showed Muslim participation in governance has been significant and increasing over the last few decades particularly as a result of Muslim activism. As this was a significant aspect of the findings from the Cambridge Dataset this will first be looked at to see how ICR might be able to provide a lens through which to gain a deeper understanding of the significance of this shift. This will be done primarily through the three prominent concepts of ICR: *seriousness*, *underlabouring* and *absence*. A general analysis will then be undertaken of the Cambridge Dataset and Baroness Warsi's 5 speeches using ICR.

### Human rights

Human rights featured as one of the most important political issues in the student interviews. As part of the interviews students were asked to rank the political issues they were most concerned with in order of priority. Of the 26 individual interviews, 19 (73%) put human rights at the top of the list. Typical answers included:

Human rights is one the most important, 5/5 [for importance] [...] I am very sympathetic with the human rights cause, so anything to do with human rights, I feel strongly for.

[Female, 21, studying BA Anthropology and law at LSE, identifying herself as British Pakistani]

According to my understanding of what human rights would be, I would put that at the top of the list as having most importance.

[Male, 19, LSE student studying government, identifies as originating from Tanzania]



With human rights being a mainstream political issue in Britain and Europe, this can be identified from an ICR perspective as a potential site where British Muslims can practice Islam *seriously* through mainstream participation in British society and politics.

### Seriousness

'*Seriousness*' is a concept used in critical realism to describe the partnership between action and belief. For *seriousness* to be present action must be consistent with belief or one's beliefs must be consistent with one's actions. For a belief to be serious then it must at least be possible for that belief to be enacted. The concept of seriousness was born out of a critique of the philosophy of David Hume which was understood to be *unserious* because of its denial of deep ontological structure which led Hume to a position where he could not argue that to leave a building from the ground floor door was any better than leaving from the first floor window (Wilkinson 2015: 42-43). Hence there was an obvious inconsistency between his theory and the practicalities of the real world.

Dr Matthew Wilkinson (2015) has convincingly argued that Islam shares the same commitment to *seriousness* as critical realism. Within the Qur'an one of the most repeated phrases is that the believers (Muslims) are those who both "believe *and* do good deeds" (e.g. Qur'an 29: 58). Likewise upon accepting the religion of Islam to be true and becoming a Muslim, Islamic theology understands that one is then required to practice certain actions such as prayer 5 times a day (*Salat*), fasting the month of Ramadan and performing the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca (Wilkinson 2015: 43-44).

In this sense to be a Muslim it is a prerequisite to be *serious*. From a ICR perspective therefore it is important that Muslims in Britain are given the opportunity to practice the religion of Islam with *seriousness* if they are to achieve satisfaction and fulfilment as British Muslims (or what Wilkinson refers to as, borrowing a Hegelian concept, a 'Happy Muslim Consciousness').

When discussing human rights and humanitarian causes in more detail however, respondents most commonly framed their engagement in human rights as specifically not relating to religion. A number of examples illustrate this point:

we had a weekend intensive on the history and religious [aspects of] the Middle East and Palestine in particular, it was quite educational, there was a live video link with civilians and people there, [an eyewitness via video link] told us in his own words, translated what the

situation was on the ground for him – again from the humanitarian aspect, *I would have gone on that even if I wasn't a Muslim.*

[Bradford Focus Group Male 4, emphasis added]

Human rights, when I look at the world, I don't look at the world like a Muslim, I look at it as a human being. If someone is suffering in Timbuktu and someone is suffering in Iraq, it is still a person suffering. That's the really important point. And I think that's something not many Muslims take on, so it is a human rights issue. My Muslim identity is what gives me these human concerns. In Islam, all men and women are considered brothers and sisters, regardless of religion. We are taught that the human nation is one body; if any part hurts we should all hurt. These two traditions make me more interested in human issues.

[Cambridge University, female, 20, studying medicine, self describes as British but originally from Iraq and Lebanon]

These civilians are dying and my question is this, when you hear about that you don't have to be from a religious background, you just have to be a member of humanity to try and feel that pain.

[Bradford Focus Group Male 4]

With regard to non-political organizations, I am a really active member of Amnesty, because I really really agree with what their policy and everything is, which is basically we are not controversial, we don't have a stance on anything, we just don't want human rights abused which I think is really important.

[Bradford Focus Group Female 4]

When you hear about that [the conflict in Palestine] you don't have to be from a religious background, you just have to be a member of humanity

The language the participants used to describe their engagement with human rights indicated that they actually wanted to distance the idea that they were concerned about human rights because they are Muslim or because it is any sort of active duty in Islam placed upon Muslims. One possible explanation for this is that at the time of these interviews there was a heightened sensitivity around Islam faith-based political engagement because of new regulations requiring staff in universities to monitor any signs of extremism among the student body. However, from an ICR perspective, one might want to look at it as an *absence* in the participants potential 'totality' of Islamic practice within a UK context.

All respondents felt that engagement with British civil society was a worthwhile endeavour. The fact that Britain is not a Muslim-majority was not highlighted as an issue regarding engaging as a Muslim. This was evidenced further by the fact that there was no support for the institutionalisation of Shari'a within the UK. Respondents believed Muslims should be free to practice Shari'a Law in their own private capacity within the acceptable boundaries of UK

law but did not see it as an important issue. When the question was posed ‘What about Shari’a Law generally?’ the answer from the FEMYSO representative was “only applicable in its entirety and certainly not in the UK”. Which was reiterated by the member of FOSIS interviewed:

Shari’a Law is great. History testifies to the prosperity and peace it brought upon nations. It’s widely misjudged and misunderstood though, unfortunately. However, it’s no one’s right to come and live in the west and seek to establish it here.

The students and representatives of Muslim organisations clearly felt that politically pursuing the implementation Shari’a Law in the UK was not a task that needed to be pursued by British Muslims and that their faith could be practiced with *seriousness* without the need for the institutionalisation of Shari’a Law.

### Shift in focus to UK context

The representatives of FOSIS and FEMYSO both expressed a view that removing the direct ties with countries of parental origin (transnational ties and concerns being primarily related to countries that parents had migrated from) and focusing attention rather on positive social change in the UK was seen as an important step in achieving progress for Muslims in the UK. This indicates that practicing Islam *seriously* does not depend on focusing on what might be construed as ‘Muslim countries’ but rather Islam can be practiced seriously through secular institutions and in secular societies.

The FOSIS representative mentioned that FOSIS had no attachment to Muslim organisations abroad except in Europe such as the Federation of Islamic Organisations Europe (FIOE) and that this was important:

I don’t believe these groups [from countries abroad outside of Europe] possess the knowledge and understanding to propose real solutions for issues affecting our society in Britain. Their time is gone: they have expired. They were founded reactionary to certain events and environments, and by all means brought about their fruit in that context, but the world changes rapidly while they remain confined to ancient cultural traditions and power hunger of the elderly generation. They are a barrier to progress, as opposed to facilitators.

Here direct reference to “barriers to progress” were identified and understood to be the over-attachment to the politics and interests of countries abroad. Cultural traditions were mentioned as potential barriers as well a belief that the knowledge and understanding was not transferable from one context from countries outside of Europe to the situation in the

UK. From an ICR perspective it can be seen as an example of *underlabouring* for Islam in UK contexts. *Underlabouring* (explained in further detail below) is an attempt to remove the barriers that stand in the way to knowledge and human emancipation. The importance of positively engaging with UK society was a reoccurring theme in the interviews, as the FOSIS representative also noted:

Muslims must look objectively at the life of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH and learn from his legacy that loyalty to the land in which you reside – in terms of building and contributing positively to it, is a religious obligation – as long as that doesn't violate the laws of Islam

(FOSIS interview)

### Absence

Critical realists have argued that to understand things common to science such as change (for example in physics the study of water changing to ice or in sociology why societies change from agrarian to urban) we need to take a closer look at ontology. This is because ontology has been neglected in western philosophy, as a result of the epistemic fallacy, reducing it to epistemology. For critical realists, *being* (or ontology) is not simply a positive state. It is a state of both presence and absence at the same time (Norrie 2010). Absence is a necessary part of being. For example, silence is a necessary part of speech. Without silence comprehensive speech would not be possible, speech would only take the form of jumbled and continuous sounds that are unrecognisable and another example is that empty space is also a necessary part of solid objects (Wilkinson 2015: 66). With regard to individual self-hood, a sense/understanding that 'I am this' involves at the same time a sense/understanding that 'I am *not* this' (Mahmutcehajic 2011 cited in Wilkinson 2015: 66).

This is important because critical realists claim that absence can effect things, and make them change for example, as much as presence can. *Absence* can have just as real consequences as presence. It is therefore crucial that social scientists look not only at what is present, but also at what is absent, when they try to understand a phenomena. For a fuller understanding social scientists must look at what is *absent* as well as what is present. For this reason *absence* is a key concept in both critical realism and ICR.

With respect to Islam, this can be nicely demonstrated with the example of taking verses of the Qur'an out of their context. For example, when one verse of the Qur'an is taken as the

entirety of the Qur'an, this leaves other verses *absent*. It is true therefore that one is referring to the Qur'an, but not the 'totality' of the Qur'an. According to Islamic belief, the Qur'an was revealed as a whole book to be taken in its entirety. One cannot reduce the whole book to one verse. If one wishes to understand a verse from the Qur'an one must understand it in light of all other verses. This has led to Islamic scholars developing a process of understanding the Qur'an called *tafsir* whereby the meaning of any one verse must be understood in relation to other relevant verses. As the Islamic scholars of the Qur'an might ask the question of what is missing as well as what is present, social scientists should ask the same question: what is missing? Or *Absent*?

The sample of students demonstrated a strong commitment to political engagement. The importance of exercising their democratic right to vote or protest was continually a feature of the interviews. However, this was almost always linked to the expectations concerning rights and obligations of living within a democratic society, and not directly linked to the teachings of Islam. It might well be that if directly asked whether Islamic teachings encourage one to vote respondents would answer in the affirmative but this would require further research to ascertain. But without such a prompt asking if respondents thought voting was an important part of being a *serious* Muslim it is interesting to note that it was not mentioned as such. This was an *absent* feature of their discussions when talking about engagement with British politics, human rights, and Islam.

To look at possibilities of how this issue might be overcome an analysis of how human rights and humanitarian causes feature in the speeches of Baroness Warsi can now be examined.

Inter-religious cooperation is a discernible theme in Baroness Warsi's speeches. For British society to move forward Baroness Warsi believes inter-faith cooperation to be key to achieving a more harmonious multi-faith Britain

And this cross-faith approach, [...] is vital if we are to tackle the persecution of religious minorities abroad. I used that speech to highlight the plight of Christians. In various parts of the world they are discriminated against, driven out, or even murdered simply because of their faith. [...] it shouldn't just be Christians speaking up for Christians. Muslims for Muslims. Or any faith for its co-religionists. It requires everyone to speak out against intolerance and injustice. And to speak up for those who come under attack [...] We should be inspired by the teachings of Islam, which tell us your fellow man is your brother – either your brother in faith, or your brother in humanity. And we should be guided by the example of the Good Samaritan, who wouldn't have stopped to question the faith of the robbed, beaten man before he helped him.

(Huddersfield University Speech, Yorkshire)

Here Baroness Warsi argues for a humanitarian approach (through inter-religious cooperation) to the pressing cause of religious oppression in the world. Humanitarian in the sense that concern for oppression of religious minorities need not be a concern simply for members who share the same religion, but rather faith communities should assist members of all faith communities. However, the distinctive way in which this is framed is that it is directly linked to the teachings of Islam. It is because a Muslim is *both* human *and* because Islam requires concern for humanitarian causes. In this way engaging in human rights activism and humanitarian causes can be at once fulfilling for British Muslims as it is understood as an act of *seriously* practice Islam and it also demonstrates active engagement with mainstream British society. This approach is also beneficial as it incorporates the possibility for inter-faith cooperation which there is plenty of opportunity to participate in within Britain:

This cross-faith stance will be crucial in tackling religious persecution. After all, we have only defeated intolerance in the past when we have all come together, whatever the cause. Apartheid was defeated when the whole world realised the terrible injustice that was taking place in South Africa. The American Civil Rights movement received the boost it needed when the international community, black, white and brown, got behind the cause.

(Georgetown University Speech, Washington DC)

The approach that Baroness Warsi takes to global humanitarian issues might further be analysed from an ICR perspective through the concept of *underlabouring*.

### Underlabouring

*Underlabouring* is described by Bhaskar (2013) as:

Most characteristically what critical realist philosophy does. The metaphor of ‘under labouring’ comes from John Locke who said, ‘the commonwealth of learning is not at this time without master builders [...] but everyone must not hope to be a Boyle or a Sydenham; and in an age that produced such masters as the great Huygenius and the incomparable Mr Newton, with some others of that strain, it is ambitious enough to be employed as an under labourer in clearing the ground a little, and removing some of the rubbish that lies in the way to knowledge’ (An Essay concerning Human Understanding, ‘Epistle to the Reader’ in Bhaskar 2013 cited in Wilkinson 2015: 39-40)

The aim of *underlabouring* is to bring conceptual clarity to human practices such as cultures and religions by clearing away erroneous and redundant philosophical ideas - especially within the fields of science, academic disciplines and human projects orientated towards human wellbeing and emancipation (Wilkinson 2015: 39). Appleton identifies three strategies

of British Muslims to express their religio-political identities, two of which are: turning away from Islam by assimilating entirely into British society, or, subscribing to a transcendental form of Islam by arguing British cultural outputs are alien and threatening to Islam (Appleton 2005a: 171). These positions are both undesirable to a Muslim who wishes to practice their faith seriously because they either lead to feelings of guilt at turning away from Islam or because they will entail living within surroundings perceived to be alien and hostile. Baroness Warsi's approach to interpreting British Muslim humanitarian and human rights activism can be understood in ICR terms as *underlabouring* for Islam in British multi-faith contexts so as to remove *absences* and lead to a liberated position of enabling British Muslims to *seriously* practice their faith with distinctly British contexts. The position might be summarised as holding that human rights activism within a British context is *serious* Islamic worship.

An interesting question to emerge from this is whether this interpretation of how best to contextualise practicing Islam within Britain has helped Baroness Warsi to achieve her status as a leading British Muslim, and therefore, would this approach be beneficial to young British Muslims? Either way ICR provides a useful lens through which to more deeply understand how human rights activism within a British context relates to young British Muslims; Islamic belief and practice; and leadership.

### Britain's Christian heritage

A major reoccurring theme in Baroness Warsi's speeches has been to highlight that Britain has a strong Christian heritage, that is often ignored, but which it is important for both Muslims and non-Muslims in Britain to recognise:

there were those who took issue with my claim that Britain was a Christian country and Europe a Christian continent. This was a central plank of my argument last month. The argument that a millennium and a half of the teachings of Jesus have permeated every corner of society. Shining through our politics, our public life, our culture, our economics, our language and our architecture.

(Ebor Lecture Speech, Yorkshire)

Baroness Warsi argues that rather than recognising the deep Christian roots that underlie much of British institutional and cultural life today, an atmosphere of ridicule towards religion has developed into a dominant discourse in many quarters of British society:

there were those who said faith was not under attack in the UK, in Europe or further afield. I see it different. In the UK, in [the] words of the Archbishop of Canterbury, faith is looked down on as the hobby of 'oddities, foreigners and minorities' [...] This is a view put forward by the well-intentioned liberal elite. Who think that by marginalising faith in society they are creating a space for all faiths. These people think that I, as a Muslim, would feel more welcome in society if there were no religious symbols, no Established Church. But they are wrong.

(Ebor Lecture Speech, Yorkshire)

Through a lens of ICR, Baroness Warsi is arguing that there is a distinct *absence* in Britain of recognition towards the important part faith plays in both British history and contemporary British life. She addresses this problem not only in general terms but also from the perspective of a Muslim by suggesting that the marginalisation of faith, rather than creating a level playing field for people of all faiths and none, creates an atmosphere of ridicule and discrimination towards the presence of religion in public life. As a Muslim therefore, it is in her interests that Britain as a whole recognises its Christian heritage. This is especially true because it was the presence of Christianity in public life that made her feel more confident as a Muslim.

As I have said, it is the predominance of Christianity in Britain which I believe has created the space for minority faiths. [...] I felt that I could be both British and Muslim, and it was the Established Church in this country which reassured me of my identity. My father explained this very well. Telling me to see my religious identity, my faith, as a river that changes its appearance according to the bed on which it flows. The river reflecting the colour and the texture of the bed. Like the river, my faith reflects the nation I belong to. So what made me feel even more confident as a British Muslim. What truly enabled me to learn about my faith and to practice it. Was that my country – the bed over which the river of my faith flowed – had a strong Christian identity. This defined, shaped and gave me confidence in my own faith. Which, combined with the confidence of my country's principles and values. Made me feel free to believe, free to practice, and free to be me.

(Ebor Lecture Speech, Yorkshire)

Here Baroness Warsi includes two main points, not only that she sees her faith of Islam as being easily able to sit comfortably alongside her British identity and British culture, but also that the key to her ability to feel comfortable expressing her faith in a British context was the Christian heritage and presence. Something she confirmed in a speech in Washington:

As I mentioned earlier, the fact that I grew up in a majority Christian country actually made me feel stronger in my own faith.

(Georgetown University Speech, Washington DC)

From this it is discernible that Baroness Warsi recommends that British Muslims, in order to improve their standing within British society, both recognise the opportunity that the



Christian presence and heritage of Britain can have in benefiting their own faith of Islam and play an active role in ensuring the debt Britain owes to its Christian roots is widely acknowledged. This would bring with it the potential for another area where Muslims could *seriously* practice their faith in a British context alongside improving the social environment of Britain as a favourable place to live as a Muslim citizen.

The recognition of Britain's Christian heritage among the students in the Cambridge Dataset was distinctly *absent*. It was not recognised at all; neither as a potential source invigorating their own experiences of practicing Islam nor as an opportunity for improved political and civil engagement. Christianity was rarely mentioned in the interviews and never as an opportunity for political engagement.

When asked about socialising with non-Muslims in Britain the Bradford focus group did not identify growing up in a Christian society or a multi-faith society as strengthening their identity as a Muslim. It was unfortunate that a question about interacting with other faiths was not included in the interviews or what the thoughts were of the students on the benefits and drawbacks of living in a society with a state church and other institutionalised faith-based positions such as the Archbishop of Canterbury playing a prominent role in society. Growing up in a society where faith has a public role to play did not seem to strike the participants as an opportunity to gain a more *serious* understanding of their own faith.

non-Muslims [I] tend to associate with [them at] my work, I get on with them perfectly fine, I don't have any issue with them.

[Bradford Focus Group]

One can detect from this statement that interaction with non-Muslims was not seen as a potential environment for exciting religious developments. But utilising the theory of ICR one might ask the question if this is partly because of the distinct *absence* in the recognition among the young Cambridge Dataset cohort of the potential that the Christian presence in Britain might play. Baroness Warsi clearly sees it as a vital component in improving life for British Muslims and claims that it was highly important in her achievements as a successful British Muslim who reached the top levels of leadership in British public life. The emphasis she places on this point is reiterated by the presence as a primary focus in her speech to the Vatican in February 2012:

So today I want to make one simple argument. That in order to ensure faith has a proper space in the public sphere. In order to encourage social harmony. People need to feel stronger in their religious identities, [...] In practice this means individuals not diluting their faith. And nations not denying their religious heritage. If you take this thought to its conclusion then the idea you're left with is this: Europe needs to become more confident in its Christianity.

(Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy Speech, Vatican City)

Recognising Britain's Christian past should help turn back the prevailing, overly secularist view in Baroness Warsi's opinion, that faith should be kept out of public life. Acknowledging its presence is an important step towards ensuring a healthy integration of Islam into the British public sphere.

there are many people who said that faith in society is tantamount to theocracy. But what I am calling for is simply for faith to have a seat at the table in public life. Not the only seat, not a privileged position, but that of an informer of our public debate. So we are not afraid to acknowledge when the debate derives from a religious basis. So that we are as confident in taking on board – and taking on – the solutions offered up by religion as we are in rejecting them.

(Ebor Lecture Speech, Yorkshire)

Alongside this, Baroness Warsi has commented on established traditions in Britain such as the House of Lords quota ensuring representation of Christian and faith-based lords to reside over parliament. This is a opportunity for British Muslims to engage in mainstream British politics and help shape the present and future of Britain and protect their own rights as a faith minority. Nor was the potential of the established state church with prominent figureheads such as the Archbishop of Canterbury feature or the potential this has for engagement as it has historically been a site of interfaith dialogue and cooperation. It was also *absent* from the respondents' answers.

What is at stake therefore for Warsi is the very ability for Muslims to actively engage in British mainstream politics, or in ICR language, not an insignificant *absence*. Accepting a trend towards an increasingly narrowly secular state and marginalisation of faith in public life runs the risk of further ostracising British Muslims.

Although the identification of 'Christian Britain' as an opportunity for faith based *seriousness* was *absent* from the cohort of respondents from the Cambridge Dataset, they did identify perhaps an unexpected opportunity to experience a *serious* expression of their

faith. This opportunity was located within the, although negative of course, experience of prejudice towards Islamic practices.

### Experiencing seriousness through discrimination

Negative experiences such as prejudism, heavy media coverage of Muslims caste in a negative light and the ban on the hijab in France were identified as the biggest prompts in encouraging the respondents to further investigate their own faith:

[talking about the headscarf ban in France] it prompts you as a Muslim to go away and try and find out, OK why is my religion up in the air so much, why is it in the media, why is it being attacked. When you start researching things, you see there is an inherent beauty in this religion.

[Bradford Focus Group, Male]

In this regard, the negative stereotypes and at times intrusive attention on Islam, and especially high levels of negative media coverage was seen as having positive side-effects, in that it would encourage some of the respondents to investigate their faith more, and get closer to Islam themselves.

Despite these observations the respondents nearly all expressed having a comfortable British identity.

### A comfortable British-Muslim identity

Respondents believed it was erroneous to be asked to choose between a Muslim or British identity. The two were considered perfectly compatible with one another:

Because I think a lot of Muslims feel they are being kind of put on a podium and asked, are you Muslim or are you British, as though the two can't exist.

[Bradford Focus Group]

One person described how strange they thought it was to be asked to choose whether you are British or Muslim

As if you ask somebody, are you a woman or are you pregnant, you've got to be both haven't you [...] I thought that was quite apt because I'm British and I'm Muslim, I respect and thoroughly enjoy British values and I love what my religion teaches me as well.

Most respondents felt comfortable identifying as British or with a hyphenated British identity supporting empirical evidence indicating that overwhelmingly British Muslims report a strong

sense of belonging to the UK and Muslims (from various ethnicities) are more likely to report feeling British than Caribbean Christians, African Christians or Asian Christians suggesting it is racism and not religion that is most likely to reduce the level of feelings of belonging to Britain (Karlsen and Nazroo 2015). Only one respondent said she did not feel comfortable to identify with being British (or Bangladeshi).

Respondent: I really didn't know. I have been thinking about it a lot recently. Sometimes it feels like I am both, and sometimes like I am nothing. I am not completely British and I am not completely Bangladeshi, it's really hard.

Interviewer: Does feel like a problem to you or are you comfortable with that ambiguous identity?

Respondent: No, it's not a problem for me but it is something that I have been thinking about more.

[Female, 18, Theology student, Cambridge University]

This ambiguous identity was not seen as a problem however it was seen more as something that needed to be understood more thoroughly. What could be detected however was a sense that perhaps life in a Muslim majority country would be easier. One could detect a sense of 'nostalgia' towards the 'Muslim world' where things would be better for Muslims to practice their faith. One participant, a female LSE final year student studying a BA Anthropology and law, identifying herself as British Pakistani commented:

Even though I appreciate a lot of the freedom I have in this country and the standard of living, I do think I would feel more comfortable living in a Muslim country. Just because you don't have to explain everything all the time.

Another participant, aged 21, male, studying medicine at Cambridge shared a similar sentiment:

I feel more comfortable with people of my own background although that might change with new generation.

It is interesting to note therefore that the apparent disinterest in Baroness Warsi's key theme of a 'Christian Britain' was not a barrier towards feeling British. In Baroness Warsi's speeches she talks in detail about how important a stable identity is and that one of the main attributes contributing to a stable identity is confidence in one's faith. She has explored a theme concerning multi-faith Britain, arguing that being comfortable within multi-faith environments is an important marker of a person's confidence in their own faith:

Why did the Nazis want to exterminate Jews? In part because they feared they polluted their purity, their Aryan identity. Why did the communist regimes crack down on religion? Because they wanted to eliminate all competing loyalties and remove all ideological opposition. And why, today, do we see, in some Muslim-majority countries, extremists turning on their minorities? Because they think it makes them stronger and more powerful in their Islamic identity to reject the other. So once again, we need to show that acceptance of the 'other' proves not that you are weak, but that you are unshakeable in your identity.

(Georgetown University Speech, Washington DC).

Baroness Warsi makes the point that it is not an over-confidence in one's religion that causes problems with identity but instead a lack of confidence. She goes on to state:

in fact, accepting and co-existing with another faith doesn't make you less of a Muslim, a Christian, a Jew, a Hindu – it makes you more of one

(Georgetown University speech, Washington DC)

ICR was developed by Wilkinson partly as a tool to help facilitate better educational environments for Muslims living within multi-faith contexts. ICR is useful in such environments because it is open to exploring different beliefs with *seriousness*. The idea that living in a multi-faith environment, that includes a high number of different religious minorities, such as the UK, could provide an exciting environment to more deeply (and *seriously*) explore and develop one's own religious beliefs was again *absent* from the Cambridge Dataset cohort's responses. ICR provides an excellent framework for facilitating more stimulating multi-faith environments because it invites students and teachers to explore one another's faiths in a *serious* way, exploring religions *seriously* on their own terms by looking closely at the most important aspects which they hold sacred as opposed to typical RE classes based on the British national curriculum that concentrate mainly on the shallow superficial aspects of religion such as dress codes at weddings or musical instruments used at certain ceremonies rather than the core beliefs such as the meaning behind central tenets, such as a belief in a single all-powerful Creator, for example, which is important for many Muslims.

Only one participant mentioned this as an opportunity for seriousness. She was older than the average age at 26 and volunteers for the European Jewish organisation that works in Jewish-Muslim dialogue in Europe:

What's more exciting in Cambridge is the Mojew group [a Muslim-Jewish dialogue university society] [...] they are a really exciting group of young women.

[Female, English postgrad student, 26, Cambridge University]

One might identify here a gulf between Warsi's optimism and the students' excitement about multi-faith Britain or Christian Britain. An area in which there was an obvious overlap in agreement was over the issue of education, with both Baroness Warsi and the Cambridge Dataset cohort agreeing that education was a top priority to improve the condition of Muslims in Britain.

### Education

Wilkinson (2015) argues that Muslims in multi-faith contexts are in need of a philosophy that can provide a language to communicate between Islamic praxis and context so that traditional Islam can thrive in multi-faith environments (Wilkinson 2015: 35). For Wilkinson's study (2015) this philosophy is used as a framework to facilitate a more productive and meaningful basis for multi-faith educational settings leading to better coexistence of people of different faiths and of none and to create the conditions for young Muslims living as minorities to be successful. ICR is able to do this because it provides a framework that successfully accommodates theist and atheist perspectives and a multitude of other spiritual, religious and non-religious beliefs. Baroness Warsi looks at education in a number of her speeches. She particularly makes a point of the importance of a careful look back over the history of Britain and to be better educated on this topic:

If you look back at our history, you see that we have had particular trouble when it comes to this issue [multi-faith Britain]. Again and again, we found it hard to believe that non-Protestants could be loyal to our country. The debates on Catholic Emancipation in the 1820s are a fantastic case study. Yes, a big part of the argument against letting Catholics into Parliament was old-fashioned anti-Catholic bigotry. Up and down the country, the mob cried: "No Papacy".

(Sir Sternberg Lecture Speech at Leicester University)

By drawing on the history of multi-faith Britain Baroness Warsi is able to show that the turbulence associated with the adaption phase of different religions entering British politics and public life is nothing new. As with British Catholics before, it was also the case with British Jews whose loyalty was likewise put under scrutiny as it became widely assumed that their ultimate loyalty lay not with Britain but with a pan-national ethnicity of Jews:

But the interesting thing was the intellectual argument which lies behind the rioting. Deep down, it all boiled down to this: Whether a Catholic, whose ultimate allegiance was thought to be to the Papacy, could still be a loyal servant of the British Monarchy. The problem with

Catholicism, as the Protestant establishment saw it, was that it transcended British sovereignty. Ultimate loyalty wasn't to the King of Britain but to the Papacy. Which meant being Catholic and British were two irreconcilable identities.

(Sir Sternberg Lecture Speech at Leicester University)

Arguments over the loyalty and acceptability of Catholics and Jews being elected to the British parliament are now considered completely redundant and indeed an indication of a prejudiced, simplistic and mistaken phase in British history. Baroness Warsi's argument is however, that history is now repeating itself and this same suspicion is now directed at British Muslims. The idea that history is an important tool in countering such sentiment was something strongly shared by various interviewees. For example the representative from FEMYSO agreed that education leading to more interaction were important for the future integration of British Muslims suggesting that:

respect for each other and more education and interaction [are needed]

A sentiment shared by one respondent from the Cambridge Dataset who stated:

It has to do with educating Muslims [...] just to get an idea of what is going on in the world.

(Male, aged 21, studying medicine at Cambridge)

For the majority of young British Muslims in the Cambridge dataset education was a theme picked up on by several other respondents, however the type of education differed. The respondents believed that Muslims needed to become better educated in their own faith rather than the history of multi-faith Britain:

I: What should they do [British Muslims]?

Respondent: I'm from Leeds and the Muslim community in Leeds, you have the minority who are educated, law-abiding, everything like that, but the main problems, the drug problems, crime problems, are in Muslim areas. If you understand and follow your religion properly then that shouldn't be the case at all.

(LSE male undergraduate humanities student, age 22)

This is something Baroness Warsi also alluded to in a speech at Leicester University:

But being religious means making choices and understanding the central values of your faith. It also means considering the context in which that faith was formed. To be an adherent, one must also be a historian.

(Sir Sternberg Lecture Speech at Leicester University)

The idea that British Muslims could benefit from a greater understanding of the multi-faith history of British could be a positive contribution to better enabling British Muslims to achieve greater *seriousness* in their engagement with British society. ICR offers useful framework for facilitating such an endeavour because it accommodates well the potential for dialogue across different faiths and none.



## 5. DISCUSSION

### Implications and significance of findings

My findings show that ICR is useful for understanding and analysing British Muslim civil engagement and aspects of British Muslim leadership. ICR can do this effectively because it takes seriously some of the most important aspects and desires in the lives of Muslims. It is also because ICR explains the most important elements of Islamic practice to Muslims within a western Enlightenment philosophical tradition: critical realism.

Extracting only a limited number of concepts from ICR is clearly a limitation but given the timeframe available it was necessary. It would not have been possible to explore all aspects of the broad and detailed theory of ICR and the aim of this study was to offer limited exploration into the potential of ICR for the purposes of informing potential future use of this theory. To my knowledge there are no other studies using ICR except Wilkinson's publication looking at the effectiveness of ICR to create vibrant teaching environments in schools (Wilkinson 2015). Therefore this study provides a useful insight into the utility of ICR for studying British Muslims in broader social contexts, outside of classroom environments, that can be useful to researchers in the field of Islam in contemporary Britain and for the human flourishing of British Muslims which critical realism actively aspires to achieve.

This study has contributed to the development of a theory, ICR, that can help inform public policy debates, particularly regarding the integration of minority faith groups into wider British society because it offers a framework that better understands the most important elements of how believers prefer to engage actively within British society. This can improve public policy measures by informing public policy debates on the best places to develop to accommodate the most important issues for British Muslims. By developing those areas that minority faith group members see as important, from the perspective of their respective faiths, and help make such areas more accommodating to faith minorities, could improve the social conditions for minority faith-groups. For example, the areas of human rights, education and Christian-Muslim relations were identified as key areas where young British Muslims, who demonstrate an active interest in practicing their faith seriously (which empirical evidence shows most do), are likely to be interested in engaging in. By particularly focusing

on making these fields more accessible to British Muslims, for example by insuring institutions like universities and courts have facilities that accommodate the needs of Muslims, such as prayer rooms, or by strengthening institutions that are engaged in interfaith work, could help improve Muslim engagement in these areas and therefore improve the lives of Muslims in Britain.

The concepts extracted from ICR: seriousness, underlabouring and absence were highly useful for understanding and framing the attitudes towards, and the methods used, by young British Muslims to engage in British society. Seriousness as an ICR concept is useful in exploring the deep attachment Muslims place on certain activities and moral values. The potential that certain mainstay arenas in British life offer to British Muslims to seriously practice their faith alongside positively engaging in British society were highlighted, such as the potential for dialogue and working with British Christians. Seriousness has the ability to tease out interesting experiences British Muslims encounter living in contemporary Britain. Even experiences that might seem entirely negative (and indeed certainly do have very negative consequences) such as discrimination were conceived of as potential opportunities to practice Islam more seriously. For example, when discussing the hijab ban in France, young Muslims found this pushed them to learn more about their own faith such as trying to understand more deeply the hijab within Islam. This has implications for all young British Muslims, as well as the millions of Muslims living as minorities around the world, because ICR was shown to provide a framework that helps illuminate the opportunities for Muslims to get more from their faith when living as a minority in a non-Muslim majority country by taking advantage of the already existing opportunities within western societies to both engage in society and at the same time seriously practice Islam.

### Reflections on secondary analysis

At present there is a relatively limited amount of data at the Data Archive related to Muslims in contemporary Britain, which made this study more difficult. This may change in the future however, so this study provides a useful early example of secondary analysis in the field and highlights some of the strengths and challenges in doing so. The study of Islam in contemporary Britain is a quickly expanding field and if all data relating to this field was archived at the Data Archive it would have been possible to substantially expand the findings

of this dissertation and explore far more comprehensibly the theory of ICR. There are a number of researchers now studying British Muslim civil society leadership and civil engagement so access to their data in the future would be highly beneficial to exploring further the question of how useful ICR is and how can it help researchers gain a deeper understanding of British Muslims. The data available in the Cambridge Dataset, although for masters level investigation was fairly substantial, was ultimately too limited to explore the ICR concepts chosen in great detail.

## 6. CONCLUSION

By using secondary analysis of qualitative interview data with 'elite' young British Muslims alongside an analysis of speeches made by a 'British Muslim leader' (Baroness Sayeeda Warsi) this dissertation has explored the themes of leadership and political engagement through the 'lens' of Islamic critical realism and found that ICR provides a useful theory to study the experiences and attitudes of young British Muslims. This is because ICR takes seriously the core beliefs of the faith these young people hold dear: Islam and can analysis the most significant elements of these young people's lives using a framework that is rooted in the western Enlightenment philosophical tradition. The concepts of ICR were easily applicable to the experiences and attitudes of both the young British Muslims and Baroness Warsi and to the most important points both expressed such as relating to human rights, education and Christianity.

By focusing on both young British Muslim 'elites' and by taking an example of a 'British Muslim leader' I was able to successfully explore British Muslim leadership and civil engagement. Young British Muslim 'elites' were chosen because they were likely both to be already to some degree publically engaged in society or at least aspiring to be and have some experience or aspirations towards leadership positions in society. This was successful because the dataset I used included much discussion on the topic of civil engagement and leadership. Using an example of a 'British Muslim leader' also ensured a comparison would be made between the experiences and attitudes of a highly experienced leader in British public life. This meant a range of key areas for the future of British Muslims were covered, such as leadership, civil engagement and young Muslims. It also meant that any possible gulf between the attitudes of aspiring young Muslim leaders and the experiences of a seasoned and established British Muslim leader could be identified.

ICR holds as a core tenet a commitment to taking a variety of different faith-based perspectives seriously and facilitate critical dialogue between different religious beliefs. Baroness Warsi, a leading Muslim British public figure, believes that the success and failure of British Muslims in the future will largely depend on their ability to engage with other faiths in Britain and especially with the faith of Christianity. ICR is therefore particularly well placed

to undertake this challenge as an analytical framework for gaining insights into the successes and failures of various approaches adopted by young British Muslims to understand and engage constructively within British mainstream politics and society.

This dissertation confirmed the findings of studies that show British Muslims have a strong sense of belonging to Britain (CLG 2010; Wind-Cowie and Gregory 2011; Karlsen and Nazroo 2015) and are actively engaged in civil society organisations, charities (Gale and O'Toole 2009; O'Toole and Gale 2010) and politics (O'Toole *et al* 2013). However, a gap was identified between the methods thought useful for effective civil engagement by the young Muslims researched and the experienced 'Muslim leader' Baroness Warsi. The ICR concept of *absence* was used to analysis this gap which could potentially be developed further with a more holistic use of ICR with future research.

Absence was used to show how some ideas expressed by Baroness Sayeeda Warsi about how to engagement with British society as a Muslim were missing from the young British Muslims understanding and how removing these absences could help young British Muslims achieve more success in British society both (and importantly) spiritually and in terms of positive engagement. For example, the opportunity that Britain's Christian heritage can offer British Muslims to seriously develop and engage with their own faith was absent from the viewpoints of the young British Muslims studied.

Neither the young Muslims nor Baroness Warsi discussed a so-called 'gap in authority' between traditional Muslim religious authority and young British Muslims (Dyke 2009: 13) but they did discuss, at length, their engagement with mainstream secular civil society organisations such as Amnesty International. Faith-based NGOs were not identified as a possible means for Islam-inspired civil engagement as discussed by Pettinato at an MBRN conference 2015 with a case study MADE in Europe. This could however have been a result of the datedness of the available Cambridge Dataset, the research for which was carried out in 2007-8, although they were not alluded to by Baroness Warsi's speeches (2012 – 2013). Muslim organisations based on a distinctly British identity such as ISB or MAB were described as useful and 'doing a good job' although not particularly relevant.

This thesis contributes to the field of leadership among British Muslims and has implications for debates around the lack of religiously authoritative leadership (Dyke 2009: 13) available to young British Muslims by developing theoretically grounded analysis of a prominent 'British Muslim leader', Baroness Warsi, and by exploring the aspirations and experiences of young Muslims 'elites'. This study helps highlight areas where young British Muslims might be lacking with regard to achieving success in British contemporary society, especially with reference to the opportunities a multi-faith and to some extent Christian country such as Britain might offer British Muslims to better engage in British society.

Analysis into the effects of sociological concepts such as class, age and gender were not explored in this research because the aim was to gain an indication as to the relevance and use of ICR for understanding and interpreting the experiences of young British Muslims in Britain in relation to leadership and engagement with British society.

### Ideas for further research

This study could be built upon by conducting primary research into the experiences of British Muslims in leadership positions or who have the potential to occupy leadership positions to further flesh out with substantive examples that explore the theory of ICR. Using secondary analysis resulted in a limited capacity to explore ICR in great depth and to explore the many other concepts and insights ICR provides the researcher of contemporary British Muslims. Both qualitative and quantitative research would help develop this analysis to a more complete level. This could be done for example by researching British Muslims who occupy prominent positions ('elites') and mid-level positions in British society in a range of different areas such as business, politics, civil society, sport, culture or the arts. ICR could also be used to study British imams, for example by looking at the ways in which they are underlabouring (or not) within a British context. British Muslims chaplains could also be a particularly interesting group to study through the 'lens' of ICR.

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