



UNDERSTAND



# 7/7: MUSLIM PERSPECTIVES

Edited by  
MURTAZA SHIBLI

THE book “7/7: Muslims Perspectives” will shortly be available from bookshops and Amazon.co.uk. The purpose of this short leaflet is to introduce the book in advance of its formal launch at the House of Lords on 7 July 2010.

In this leaflet, you will find:

- The front cover design which you will already have seen on page I
- The copyright and British Library Cataloguing and Publication Data
- The endorsements received so far
- A profile of the editor Murtaza Shibli
- The dedication and acknowledgements
- A list of the contributors
- A poem “Open your eyes” by Ahmed Bashir
- One complete chapter from Mohammed Amin
- A profile and photograph of each other contributor along with a brief extract from their chapter

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## 7/7: MUSLIM PERSPECTIVES



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# 7/7: MUSLIM PERSPECTIVES

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# ENDORSEMENTS

“This book . . . tells how the lives of people who had no connection whatever with those events, were stained or scarred by them, and how they have made their accommodation with a country in which suddenly, one day in early summer, life suddenly changed, and they became aware of themselves, their sense of belonging, their place and their future in ways which they had never dreamed. These are powerful accounts from the heart.”

- Jeremy Seabrook, Author, ‘The Refuge and the Fortress’

“7/7: Muslim Perspectives is an important contribution that should be read by everyone who was affected by 7/7. While the collection highlights the heterogeneous nature of Muslims in Britain it does nevertheless highlight the extent to which populist accounts of the significance of the bombers’ Muslim identities has had the adverse consequence of stigmatising all Muslims as terrorists and extremists.”

- Robert Lambert MBE, University of Exeter  
Co-author, ‘Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate Crime: a London Case Study’

“Forgoing the anecdotal or statistical evidence that has until now dominated studies of how UK Muslims have adapted to the post-9/11 world, Murtaza Shibli’s book places the bombings within narratives that give them both a social context and intellectual depth. This is a work that will be of significance for journalists as well as academics, and those involved in politics and policing alike.”

- Faisal Devji, St. Antony’s College, Oxford University,  
Author, ‘Landscapes of Jihad’

“At first sight, what we note here are responses that the vast majority of us recall only too well from that fateful day: shock, anxiety about the safety of loved ones, the apparently absurd rupture to the normality of everyday life, the abiding fears about what lies ahead. On closer look, however, this volume also reveals the subtle but menacing ways in which a significant minority of innocent citizens have become insinuated through no fault of their own in global antagonisms to the

detriment of their dignity and peace of mind. Not only do British Muslims, like all British citizens, have to live with the trauma of 7/7: that alone is bad enough. They also must then live with the frame of 'terrorist,' potential if not definite, that has come to be placed on them."

- Parvati Nair, Director, Centre for the Study of Migration,  
Queen Mary, University of London

"Revealing a wide range of experiences and attitudes, the contributors provide insights into a cross-section of Muslim society in Britain today... However, the picture is not all rosy and many of the contributors question some of the actions and initiatives of the government following 7/7. Their concerns challenge both government and society."

- Dr. John Chesworth, The Centre for Muslim Christian Studies, Oxford

"With memories of 7/7 still very much vivid five years on, this collection of narratives offers a poignant reminder of the feelings of grief, shame, and bewilderment many British Muslims experienced that day – to a degree most non-Muslims never realised.... [T]he reader cannot but be impressed by the vigor and the determination to self-introspection displayed throughout the book in order to regain confidence and to challenge the fringe groups of extremists that hijacked existing grievances and violently politicised Islam. A clear message of genuine hope rings loud and clear: that one day all Britain might borrow from Pete Seeger and proudly hum: 'This Land was Made for You and Me'."

- Rik Coolsaet, Ghent University, Belgium,  
Member, European Commission Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation

## 7/7: MUSLIM PERSPECTIVES

This book explores and articulates insights, reactions and experiences of a wide range of Muslim men and women following the events of 7/7 – their feelings, anxieties and concerns. Also how they negotiated their own position with mainstream society and with each other in the aftermath. They reflect on the event and express their personal response, serving as a starting point for an exploration of the challenges and expectations which the future holds for them.

As the contributors come from diverse cultural and professional backgrounds, and a wide variety of spiritual practices, this project offers a rich mosaic of lived experience, subjective accounts of people's hopes, worries and fears. In doing so, it offers a deeper meaning and understanding of Muslim lives in this country. It serves equally to put into perspective Islamic extremist ideologies in fringe groups.

The book offers a compelling range of testimony to those with an interest in the lives of Muslims – students, journalists, politicians, policy makers, academics etc. It gives a voice to Muslims who are rarely heard, and an opportunity to disseminate those voices in such a way as to promote cross-cultural bonds and amity.

### MURTAZA SHIBLI

Murtaza Shibli is a trainer, writer and consultant on Muslim issues, security and conflict, and expert on South Asia. He has worked as a journalist, security consultant and aid worker. In his recent role, he worked for the Muslim Council of Britain as Public Affairs and Media Officer.

As a journalist in Kashmir, he has campaigned for minority Hindu rights and spent time with scores of guerrilla resistance leaders and interviewed them along with some Afghan jihad veterans. He has written a monograph on Hizbul Mujahideen, the largest guerilla resistance group in Kashmir which was added to European Union's terrorist organisations in December 2005.

He has an MA in Mass Communication and Journalism from the University of Kashmir and MSc. in Violence, Conflict and Development from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London.

He is also a poet and a song writer, and is currently working on his first music album in his mother tongue – Koshur.



TO LONDON  
& ITS SPIRIT

The greatest tribute that we can pay to the  
deceased is to overcome the hatred and division  
that the killers sought to foment.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I WOULD like to thank all of the contributors for sharing their experiences and thoughts on a subject that is very sensitive. My special thanks go to Jeremy Seabrook, author and commentator, and Mohammed Amin for their continuous support and instruction. I would also like to acknowledge the support from John Chesworth of the Centre for Muslim Christian Studies, Oxford; Amina Rawat and Hasan Ahmed for their generous and constructive comments. My thanks are due to Canon Guy Wilkinson, National Inter-Religious Affairs Advisor & Secretary for Inter-Religious Affairs to the Archbishop of Canterbury; Robert Lambert of the University of Exeter and Parvati Nair, Director, Centre for Migration Studies, Queen Mary University of London for their support. I am also grateful to Muhammad Amin for layout and cover design. My profound thanks go to my wife, Afiyah Rai, who has supported this project and believed in its value. Since my previous employment at the Muslim Council of Britain, I have been totally devoted to this project, not bringing any money home; something my wife understood and patiently endured. I am also thankful to my parents-in-law, Savinder and Jaspal Rai, who looked after my one year old son, Sulaiman, while I worked on this book.

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# OPEN YOUR EYES

The time is here, stand tall and be counted  
Shield young minds and stop them from being clouded  
We must face these so called martyrs falling  
To protect the innocent there is no time for stalling  
The struggle is here together as one we must be  
We cannot falter in the face of this new enemy  
Don't be fooled, the most trusted are ever so tricky and wise  
They will take your liberties and disappear in to the dark skies  
Take your loved ones and forever break with you their ties  
Be warned, the enemy is among us, now open your eyes.

**AHMED BASHIR**

## 7/7 & ME

### MOHAMMED AMIN



Mohammed Amin retired as a Tax Partner in PricewaterhouseCoopers to concentrate full time on his voluntary sector activities, all of which focus on the integration of Muslims within British society. In this regard, he has a number of roles, including being a member of the Central Working Committee of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) and chairman of the MCB's Business & Economics Committee, Vice-Chairman of the Conservative Muslim Forum, Treasurer of the Muslim Jewish Forum of Greater Manchester, serving on the advisory panel of Good Business Practice, (a charity which promotes better ethical standards in business life) and being a member of the advisory council of the Three Faiths Forum. He is writing in a personal capacity and his views should not be attributed to any organisation.

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**W**HEN I was asked what 7 July 2005 means to me, my first reaction was to step back and ask myself the question “Who am I?”

I was born in Pakistan but have lived in Manchester since I was less than two years old. I have no memories of Pakistan and have never set foot there since my migration. When President Bhutto pulled Pakistan out of the Commonwealth, I chose to become a British citizen rather than having my status in Britain change to ‘alien’. However, somewhere in my personal files I still have an expired Pakistani passport (never used for actual travel anywhere) which I obtained when I was about 18, and I have never found any reason to renounce my Pakistani citizenship. By religion I am a Muslim and professionally a chartered accountant and a chartered tax adviser. On 7/7 I was a tax partner based at the Manchester office of PricewaterhouseCoopers but made regular business trips to London.

The day before, 6 July 2005, was a memorable day in its own right. That was the day that London was awarded the right to host the 2012 Olympic Games following outstanding lobbying by the British Olympic bid organising team aided by Prime Minister Tony Blair. I personally felt a massive sense of exultation at getting

the Olympics, which was shared by most of the country. Sadly the excitement was to be shattered the following day.

On Thursday 7 July, I was working in my office in Manchester. After wandering around the building to see another tax partner, I was casually chatting with his secretary. She mentioned a mutual colleague who at times is somewhat accident prone! He was down in London and the secretary mentioned with some levity that our accident prone colleague had been unable to get to his meeting due to a power failure on the Underground!

Over the next hour or so the news gradually emerged that there had been a bomb and that some people had been killed. Then gradually the full enormity of the attacks emerged. My wife's family are from the London area and many of them work in central London, some near the area of the bombings. My elder daughter was a student at University College London. Accordingly for several hours my wife and my brothers and sisters in law were making frantic telephone calls to make contact with and account for all of our relatives. The task was made harder as the mobile phone system was jammed by hundreds of thousands of other people trying to do the same thing. Fortunately nobody in our family was injured or killed. However as I write this, tears fill my eyes thinking about the many other people who were similarly trying to call their loved ones only to be met initially by silence, followed by the dreadful horror of learning that their relatives and friends had been seriously injured or killed.

Our standard office hours ended at 1730 but I almost always worked later than that. However I had full discretion when I wanted to come and go, especially as I was a partner in the firm. I recall that I did not rush home from work immediately but worked quite late before going home to face the 24-hour television news channels. Exactly the same thing had happened on 11 September 2001, when by early evening the office was deserted but I was still working; subconsciously I preferred the comfortable environment of the office rather than watching the continuous horror on the television. I knew that once I got home I would be glued to the television screen.

My next memory is of the following Monday, 11 July, when I was due to attend an all-day PricewaterhouseCoopers training event in London. As always, I

took the train from Manchester to London Euston. At London Euston the taxi queue seemed to be a mile long, stretching all the way back into the main station concourse, far longer than I have ever seen it. That didn't matter to me as I was already determined to take the Underground. My attitude was the very simple British one "I'll be damned before I let those bastards frighten me away from continuing my normal life by taking the Underground." Despite this being the rush hour, the underground train was pretty empty, although not completely deserted. Obviously, many regular passengers had decided to avoid the risk of underground travel, evidenced also by the length of the taxi queue. I got to the training event on time. About an hour and a half later another partner from Manchester arrived, very late, despite having travelled from Manchester on time. He explained that his wife had only allowed him to attend the London training event on the express promise that he would not use the Underground; he had given up on the taxi queue and had walked all the way from Euston to the hotel where the training event was taking place.

The evening of the following day, 12 July, was bright and sunny and I was in Heaton Park in Manchester, the largest municipal park in the city. I was attending an event called 'Saudi Arabian Days' organised by the Saudi Embassy to showcase Saudi business and culture. It was a glittering occasion with no effort spared, including transporting camels to Manchester. At the event I had a long conversation with a Muslim member of the House of Lords and other leading members of the Muslim community. I think that very day the identity of the suicide bombers had finally been established and it was clear that they were not terrorists sent from abroad but home-grown British Muslims who wished to kill their countrymen. All of us recognised how terrible this was and the potential for a backlash against the British Muslim community.

Enormous praise is due to the Mayor of London at that time, Ken Livingstone, for the way that he pulled Londoners together to prevent the divisions that the killers obviously hoped to foment. Londoners of all religions came together to recognise their common humanity and great credit is due to Ken and to our national politicians of all parties who recognised the need for Britons to unite.

There is a saying that history repeats itself, the first time as tragedy and then as farce. Two weeks later on Thursday 21 July I was driving between meetings in Bradford and Blackburn. I stopped at the motorway services for lunch and as I

did so was listening to the BBC Radio 4 news at 1300. This reported the failed bombings in London that day. While greatly relieved that nobody had been hurt, I had to smile at the ineptness of this particular gang of terrorists. Sadly the following day tragedy struck again with the catastrophe of the mistaken killing by the police of Jean Charles de Menezes.

Since then, there have been many other terrorist plots by Muslims. Fortunately, all have been successfully prevented by our security services, or like the attack on Glasgow airport, have failed. The consequences for the British Muslim community if these attacks had succeeded would have been terrible, as we would have seen an anti-Muslim backlash. Sadly that is one of the key goals of these terrorists, to divide British Muslims from other British citizens, and to cause us to tear our country apart, the way that some other countries have been nearly destroyed by internal strife. I do not want to see British Muslims being interned like the Japanese residents of the United States during World War II or being expelled. However nothing would please the terrorists more.

Stepping back and reflecting over the last five years, the following points come to mind. Some Muslims are in complete denial. They simply do not accept that the 7/7 bombings were carried out by Muslims. Instead they believe in conspiracy theories such as pinning the blame on the British government (to provide an excuse for government anti-Muslim policies) or pinning the blame on outfits like Mossad (since Mossad would like to blacken the image of Muslims). Sadly, people are always ready to believe in conspiracies. They never go through the logical thought process of asking how many people inside the British security services and government would need to know about an official government plot to murder its own citizens, and the likelihood that every one of these people would remain silent.

Another sector of the community accept that the bombings were carried out by the individuals named, Mohammad Sidique Khan and others, but somehow don't regard them as Muslims. It is true that setting off bombs on the Underground is a very un-Islamic thing to do. However, if you had been able to observe the lifestyle of these individuals prior to 7 July 2005 you would have seen them reading the Qur'an regularly, praying regularly, fasting and doing everything else that you see Muslims do. Accordingly, in my view you have to accept that these people were Muslims by any objective measure. This applies



even if your view theologically is that once they formed the intention to commit mass murder they had distanced themselves from God and turned away from everything that Islam stands for.

The most common thing I hear from the Muslim community is that the bombers did it because of our country's foreign policy, especially Britain's unbalanced support for Israel and our country's invasion of Iraq, which almost all British citizens now recognise to have been utterly misconceived. It is clearly true that those were the reasons why these people chose to kill, since they have told us that in their suicide videos. However, stopping the analysis at that point is seriously incomplete. There are hundreds of thousands if not millions of Britons who feel equally strongly about issues such as Palestine and Iraq who do not become suicide bombers. Almost all of the British Muslim community feels strongly about Palestine and Iraq but apart from a tiny minority of terrorists, British Muslims confine themselves to lawful opposition and political protest. What was different about the bombers?

Looking at the suicide videos, the bombers clearly believed that the bombings they were about to carry out would be a good deed in the eyes of God. It is clear to me that these individuals did not expect to go to hell as a consequence of their actions but instead expected to go to heaven. If they had believed that they were going to hell, they would not have carried out their actions. Many brave people are willing to give up their lives for their religious beliefs in order to serve God with the hope of entering paradise. However I cannot conceive of anyone who is religious wanting to promote a political cause on earth, if this means consciously defying God and consciously choosing to be cast into hell for all eternity.

I have laboured this point because many in the British Muslim community deny that the religious beliefs of the killers matter. I suspect that the people with this position think that if they accept that the killers were influenced by their religious beliefs, somehow this will reflect badly on Islam. Such a view is completely wrong; God's true religion cannot be tarnished by the crimes committed by a few (or even by many) Muslims. Islam's truth cannot be tainted by human misconduct.

However, while there is no problem with Islam, there is a problem with some Muslims which we need to face up to. While I believe that if I were to kill a random collection of Londoners God would sentence me to hell for all eternity, there are

some Muslims who think that such conduct would be a passport to heaven. Such people are dangerous because once they believe that God has given them permission to kill British citizens they will try to do it unless our country subordinates its policies to their view of the world. Today it is our foreign policy in any one of a number of places; tomorrow it will be our country's policy of allowing people to drink alcohol or to wear miniskirts.

What we need is a clear and consistent message from all Muslim leaders, repeated regularly, that killing other people – except in self-defence or in a legally declared war – is a crime against the law of God which will result in you being sent to hell. Only when this is accepted by all British Muslims will we be free from the threat of terrorist acts being committed by misguided Muslims.

As citizens, we also face dangers from other would-be terrorists such as homophobes, anti-Muslim bigots, Irish republicans and others. However, as I was asked to reflect upon 7/7, I have focused on the danger from those Muslims who are seriously misguided about Islam.

I occasionally think about how I might feel after discovering that one of my sons or daughters had become a terrorist. Apart from the shock, I think the overwhelming reaction would be one of guilt, to ask “Where did I go wrong; what did I fail to teach him or her?” Fortunately, my own children have been brought up in an atmosphere where they were encouraged to think independently, and show no signs of religious extremism. Nor have they encountered the problems I hear about from other Muslims such as repeated stop and search which can cause people to become less supportive of the police. The key vaccines against becoming a religiously motivated terrorist are a true understanding of one's religion and real appreciation for our society and the way that it governs itself.

# MAKING THE CONNECTION

LAURA STOUT



Laura Stout is currently a Masters student at Birkbeck University, studying Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict, having graduated with a degree in Anthropology from University College London (UCL) in 2006. While studying, she also works at the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) as PA to the Secretary General. Having only reverted in 2008, Laura enjoys spending as much time as possible learning about Islam and the diverse Muslim community. She is aware this is a long journey on which she is just embarking on and hopes to make a positive contribution – inshaAllah (God willing). Laura is married and lives in London.

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**M**Y understanding of Islam is a million miles away from the pictures I hear and see painted around me. It is a religion that encourages love, forgiveness and compassion for the world and those around us. It teaches us to live together side by side in peace, regardless of religion, colour, nationality, class and culture. It speaks of a deeply held respect for women, family values and equality – with an appreciation for the different attributes we’ve all been given, and giving charity to the poor, orphaned, widowed and destitute. It provides guidance on how to become a better version of who you are, how to build and strengthen a relationship with our Creator who is so loving, most forgiving and just, and how to make a positive contribution during our short time on this earth.

# LONG NIGHT, LONGER DAY

RUHUL TARAFDER



Ruhul Tarafder is the Communications Manager with IF charity based in East London. Previously he has worked on various national campaigns for Muslims including anti-racism and human rights. He has been on the management committee of the Youth Action Scheme, a primarily Bangladeshi Muslim youth project based in Tower Hamlets. One of the highlights of this was to take several football teams over to Denmark each year to participate in the Dana Cup, the second largest youth football tournament in the world. He has also participated in conflict resolution and mediation work between gangs in London.

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EVERY day I would hear on the radio or read in the papers about the radicalisation of Muslims. The government would blame the mosques and the imams and suggest that the problem was inherent within the Muslim community and that we needed to do something about it, but I knew it wasn't that at all. Yes, people were becoming more radical. I had seen and been involved with the anti-war movement myself, and observed how from the earlier rallies at Trafalgar Square, where there had been a handful of Muslims, as the war drew closer, these handfults had turned into tens of thousands. We had all become radical, and I was one of them, but whereas the vast majority of people were angry but completely peaceful, it only needed a few psycho individuals to take things to another level and do some crazy shit.

## UNPACKING SUITCASES

### BRITISH MUSLIM IDENTITY

### BEFORE AND AFTER 7/7

### SADIA HABIB



Sadia Habib has taught at 6th form level in Bury, Lancashire, and at secondary school and 6th form in South East London. Her undergraduate studies and PGCE training were completed at the University of Leicester. She obtained her MA in Education at Goldsmiths, University of London where she developed her interest in issues of identity, diaspora, masculinities and femininities, multilingualism and literacy, children's literature and diversity. In her spare time, she enjoys writing theatre reviews for Manchester Mouth (an online minority news and community affairs site). Currently, she is working towards her doctorate in Educational Studies at Goldsmiths College.

7/7 damaged our sense of being part of the 'imagined community', raising urgent questions about who belonged, and who felt they did not and why. The atrocious acts raised questions about loyalties to Britain. 7/7 gave me cause to be concerned about the small group of young Muslim males who were involved in this tragedy. As an educationalist, I wanted to learn more about their experience of the school system. As a social researcher, I wanted to know about their experiences of family, work and wider society at large. How had institutions such as the media and polity affected their perspectives of social justice? Why did these boys feel this desperate need to cause such a tragedy? In my view, it is crucial to give these issues due consideration. At the same time, we must always point to how this is a minority mindset. 7/7 was painful for our national psyche, especially so for my parents' generation who are grateful for the opportunities and privileges they have had living here, and would never wish any harm to their adoptive home. The British Muslims I know; my friends and my peers, their friends and peers, condemned these acts of 7/7 as atrocious. My friends and peers are able to be British and be Muslim with ease, for multiple identities is the norm. Diverse identifications are real and lived.

## UNDER SIEGE

RAIHAN AKHTAR



Raihan Akhtar is originally from Birmingham and moved to London in 2004 to work as a strategy consultant. He is involved in support and counselling work within the Muslim community.

THE thing that struck me was how the public perception of the incident swiftly changed simply because of the victim's race and nationality. The picture immediately being painted of a would-be suicide bomber suddenly began to look implausible, since of course terrorists can't come from Brazil. But what if it was discovered that he was from Morocco or Yemen or Pakistan? Would the media reports have changed and the questions been raised against the police so

quickly? How long would the picture-painting and police methods have been allowed to continue before any objections were heard? There would still certainly have been some investigation into any killing, but without the sudden shift in public opinion and media spotlight, I think that the immediate responses and longer term consequences could have been very different.

## BIN LADEN'S RELATIVE?

ANJUM ANWAR



Anjum Anwar has a unique job as a Muslim on the staff of an Anglican cathedral. She was appointed as a Dialogue Development Officer in April 2007, to create dialogue in Blackburn, a town that has been labelled as the most segregated in the UK. Previously she served as an Education Officer at the Lancashire Council of Mosques, spearheading the 'Understanding Islam,' project in partnership with Lancashire County Council. She was awarded an MBE in 2005 for her services to the community of Lancashire. She is also Chair of Woman's Voice – a grass roots organisation for women.

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**W**ALKING into a Roman Catholic school, I was bombarded with questions about my headscarf. However, I noticed a statuette of Madonna (not the singer, thank goodness!), but that of Lady Mary, mother of Jesus (peace and blessings of Allah be upon them), looking serene and peaceful and wearing a blue head scarf. I pointed to the statuette and asked the children who she was? All hands went up to tell me that that is, “our Lady, mother of Jesus.” I simply asked them “What is she wearing on her head?” The children went quiet for a few seconds and pointed to my head scarf, “She is wearing a headscarf.” By bringing commonalities into the conversation, I had made a point, Mary mother of Jesus (peace and blessings of Allah be upon her) was my role model, and I was trying to live up to the high standards that she advocated, just as some of the school children probably followed David Beckham, as their role-model. Two days later I received a letter from a young pupil from this particular Roman Catholic School, with two similar drawings of two women wearing a head scarf, one said Mary and the other Anjum.



## RELIVING THE PAST

MURTAZA SHIBLI

Murtaza Shibli is a trainer, writer and consultant on Muslim issues, security and conflict, and an expert on South Asia. He has worked as a journalist and security consultant. In his recent role, he worked for the Muslim Council of Britain as Public Affairs and Media Officer. As a journalist in Kashmir, he has campaigned for minority Hindu rights and spent time with scores of guerrilla resistance leaders and interviewed them along with some Afghan jihad veterans. He has an MA in Mass Communication and Journalism from the University of Kashmir and an MSc. in Violence, Conflict and Development from the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. He is also a poet and song writer, and is currently working on his first music album in his mother tongue – Koshur.

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THE events of 7/7 changed everything in Britain. Reluctantly and slowly Muslims acknowledged the deep roots of extremism that pervaded every sphere of our life. Although banished from popular Islam, the extremists were very small in number; a miniscule proportion of the British Muslim population. However, they had become well organized and thrived in the back alleys of council estates and universities, because they had remained unchallenged for such a long time. 7/7 offered a chance to mainstream Islam, the vast majority of British Muslims, to pluck up courage and challenge Muslim extremists, not only by confronting their theology but also by creating a unique British Muslim or European Muslim discourse that constructs Muslim life in the reality of the European continent.



## BEING A TALIBAN

ANISA ABOUELHASSAN

## 7/7: MUSLIM PERSPECTIVES

Anisa Abouelhassan is the CEO of Muslim Comms, an independent engagement, project management and communications consultancy. She is a volunteer on the London board of the Crimestoppers Trust, formerly working as the Asian-Muslim Communities Manager for the organization. Anisa is a qualified development worker whose interests are in tackling the injustices of all kinds of criminality that harm communities. She is an English revert to Islam and lives in Surrey with two young children.

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I remember thinking to myself, “Please God don’t let this have any Muslim involvement”. I also remember thinking “I’m glad I no longer wear the veil”. Post 9/11 and pre 7/7, whilst veiled I had encountered a number of Islamophobic incidents. Having a train carriage full of drunken football fans, serenade me with a chorus of “Taliban, Taliban, Taliban” was one of the lighter experiences....

... Even so, it was then still beyond my own contemplation that British Muslims could play any part in causing events such as 7/7. On finding out it was British Muslims, I thought it must have been some kind of conspiracy. It took a lot of inward contemplation and research to admit to myself that it was British Muslims who had carried out 7/7. Worse still it was British Muslims and a revert to Islam who had caused so much pain.

## FROM COVERT TO CONVERT

‘WHO, WHAT & WHY

I WAS LED TO BELIEVE.’

MUHAMMAD AMIN



Muhammad Amin was born in 1976 in Dublin, Ireland. Showing a predilection for drawing and writing as a young boy, he went on to be educated in Visual Communications in the midlands of his home country. He then spent ten years in Edinburgh, where he developed his interest in Arts – performance poetry, theatre and graphic art – being employed mostly in a community work context. He spent some time with a Christian community group there, before seeking to confirm his belief in Islam. He now resides in Norwich, Norfolk, with his wife, and they are expecting their first child. He continues to explore his interests in creative writing and graphic arts.



I READ that the ‘torpedo attack’ on the US warship in the Gulf of Tonkin, the incident which allowed America to go to war with Vietnam, did not happen. That the Belgrano was in hostile waters. That the Guildford Four were released because the police had withheld evidence from the defence, and that people who said they had in fact committed the crime were dismissed. I read that the Man on the Moon was done on stage for the papers. That Secret Societies are running the country (but what is a Secret Society in a society of secrecy?). I read that Sunnis never liked Shia, that the Taliban are mad, that the neo-cons are fascist, that Jesus never lived, but he had a son. I read it all, and I don’t know what to believe. I know it’s not true. It’s not true because I wasn’t there. It’s history.

## FIGHTING STEREOTYPES

SAIYYIDAH ZAIDI



Saiyyidah Zaidi is the eldest of four girls who were born and raised by her mother in North London. She is a qualified architect and a Fellow of the Association of Project Management, currently working in local government as an Assistant Director. She is also Chair of Governors of a comprehensive secondary school in East London, as well as a governor of an independent primary school. Saiyyidah is married with two children and lives in London.

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My passengers were white British and I still wonder how they felt about the journey – did they accept my offer of the lift because it was the only choice, or would they rather have not travelled with a Muslim in a hijab on a day when it was the Muslims that were being blamed for creating all this chaos as they detonated bombs in the heart of London?

My husband chose to become Muslim about one year before we met. A white British man, he was stopped during the period of IRA bombings as he looked Irish; now he is stopped as he fits the profile of a Muslim – because of his clothing and his beard. I bet if he shaved off his beard and wore a suit and tie he would no longer be stopped, but perhaps I am just being superficial.

## A DAY OF SORROW

IMAM MOHAMED RAWAT



Imam Mohamed Rawat is a second generation Gujarati Muslim born in Nuneaton, Warwickshire, in the late 60s. He moved to Hackney, London, at the age of 12, where he attended secondary education. In 1984 he went to study at an Islamic institute in Lancashire where he completed his studies in various Islamic subjects including theology and jurisprudence. Since his graduation he has been an active religious leader for the community in North Hackney in various capacities. These include working voluntarily in roles such as a public school governor, mentoring young boys in football, as well as promoting peace and community cohesion with the Metropolitan Police and other local religious leaders of different faiths.

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ON the whole Muslims will be treated differently, particularly if they see themselves as different. It is expected that people will have prejudices or stereotypes about a certain class or group of people, especially if they have been associated with certain atrocious events. But I do not think events such as 7/7 or 9/11 are principally responsible for these prejudices developing. It is more about how we as Muslims live and conduct ourselves as citizens of the United Kingdom. Often, when I start speaking to the general public, who may have certain misperceptions about me, they have responded with the comment “He’s one of us”.

## THE 7/7 EFFECT

FATIMA KHAN



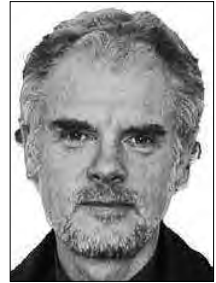
Fatima Khan is a freelance consultant with a wide range of experience engaging with communities on issues of safety and crime reduction. She is the Vice Chair of the Muslim Safety Forum (MSF), a charity focusing on issues of security and safety affecting the Muslim community; she also co-leads the MSF's Islamophobia work strand.

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**G**ROWING up in London, I never really experienced the racism my elder siblings and parents had faced in the seventies and eighties as I was very young at the time. Apart from being called 'Paki' the odd few times here and there, I can honestly say that I only really became aware of my colour and what my faith meant to others after 7/7. Things had changed and the changes had a direct impact on the day to day lives of Muslims, however subtle. I needed to understand what this meant for me, my friends and family and how I can engage in the process, but better still work to change policies and processes that I felt were not working and were not in the interest of the community as a whole. At this moment in time I am still working towards that end.

## THE TERROR OF THE DESERTS

IBRAHIM LAWSON



Ibrahim Lawson spent several years as a young man travelling and studying esoteric spiritual traditions before settling in Norfolk and accepting Islam under the guidance of a teaching Shaykh. Following a degree in Philosophy, he trained as a teacher of religious studies at Cambridge University and spent 10 years working in state education. During this time he studied for a Masters course in Phenomenological Research and, later, in Theology. He set up his first school in 1999 and three years later was seconded to the National College for School Leadership while beginning a PhD in Radical Hermeneutics. He is currently the Head Teacher of an Islamic secondary school in London.

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**S**O we are nearly there. Meanwhile, I am sitting on a crowded train rattling through the countryside north to London on a summer's morning in 2005 and there's a young Muslim male, cropped hair, long beard, shalwar kameez... am I the only one who's suddenly very nervous? Is he carrying a rucksack? Am I

worrying about the forgetting of the question of the meaning of being? Or getting my legs blown off at the knees?

## THE ALARM BELL

ASRA FAREED



Asra Fareed was born in India. She works as a Corporate Communications Manager at a cable company in Amsterdam where she has lived with her husband since December 2006. Previously she worked in London as a PR Manager at an advertising agency working in multicultural marketing communications.

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AS I managed to wean myself off the suspicion, I started taking note of how the media covered the bombings and the political reaction to the incidents. While the BBC was being accused of being overtly conscious of British Muslim sentiments and of ‘sanitizing’ its coverage, by not referring to the London bombers as ‘terrorists’ but simply as ‘bombers’, the tabloids’ headlines and articles smacked of Islamophobic, unwarranted and negative portrayals of Muslims. In 2001, during my Master’s studies in London, I had analyzed the role of the local vernacular press in the 2002 anti-Muslim pogroms in Gujarat, India, and the conclusions recorded that the Gujarati vernacular press was guilty of aggravating tensions, inciting violence and reprisal attacks through inflammatory coverage. I could now draw clear parallels.

## US, THEM, & ‘THEM’

MOHAMMAD SARTAWI



Mohammad Sartawi is a Palestinian-Kuwaiti. He is a doctoral candidate in Social Psychology at the London School of Economics. His thesis is concerned with the everyday experience and practice of Islam in London's Muslim communities. More specifically he is interested in the relationship between beliefs, identity, and different forms of practice in different Islamic groups in a Western context. His interests include social identity theory, social representations, phenomenological epistemologies, and social/collective action. He is the Coordinator of the LSE Social Representations Group and a member of the Social Psychological Research into Racism and Multiculturalism group at the LSE Institute of Social Psychology.

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**I** WAS only to understand the extent of the suspicion and distrust that now defines the Muslim community when I became part of it. 'Brothers' would not give me the time of day, and if they did I would wonder what they were after. We were almost afraid to help people if they asked us to. Many Muslims seemed to even fear their own beliefs which the media represented as 'extremist', 'fundamentalist' or, by those more inclined towards political correctness, as 'controversial'. They were weary of Muslims who saw them through the lens of the media, and those who wore the lens of the media were weary of them. They did not want to be associated with each other lest one community or the other may reject them. The mosques were no longer full of Muslims, but of this, that, or the other Muslim. Newcomers to London would often complain to me about the absence of our glorified brotherhood. "Where is our Ummah?" they would ask. I was often cautioned by the people I worked for not to trust so easily, to be suspicious, and to constantly question.

## ON 'BECOMING' MUSLIM

SERENE KASIM



Serene Kasim works as Research Fellow with the Centre for the Study of Culture and Society (CSCS), Bangalore, India. She is part of an international project funded by Hivos in the Netherlands. It is a part of their Knowledge Programme and is called Promoting Pluralism in India. The project aims to study religious pluralism in multicultural societies and move towards an understanding of fundamentalisms. Serene has an MA in South Asian Area Studies from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

**I**NCREASINGLY I have begun to feel that perhaps the victims of the terrorists are not simply the many that they have maimed and killed (and continue to do so). Muslim populations the world over have become the biggest victims of their tactics. Islam today feels like a religion under siege as much from within as from without. For better or worse it is up to the people of my generation to stand up and face up to the facts and begin working toward resolving this. Like it or not, it has become almost morally incumbent upon us to do so.

## FLIGHT FROM PAKISTAN

AMMAR ALI QURESHI



Ammar Ali Qureshi is a London-based finance professional who has worked in areas such as investment banking, private equity, energy consulting and carbon trading. He did his Masters in Finance at Imperial College London as a Chevening Scholar. He has an MBA from Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), Pakistan's most prestigious business school. He frequently contributes to different English newspapers and magazines in Pakistan such as Dawn, Daily Times and The Friday Times – mostly on subjects such as history, international relations and cultural issues.

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**O**N a personal level, I must state that my apprehensions of discrimination against Muslims and Pakistanis turned out to be wrong. During my stay in the UK, I cannot even recall one instance of discrimination or racial abuse. No one has blamed me or my country or religion for 7/7 as far as my personal interaction with other communities is concerned. In this respect, all my apprehensions in the initial few days of my settling down in the UK turned out to be misplaced. One of the reasons can be that I belong to that class of society which has advantage of higher education in this country. Most of my social circle consists of highly educated professionals, and the work place also has a wide variety of people from different backgrounds.

## BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

SEJA MAJEED



Seja Majeed is British Iraqi law graduate living in North London. She recently won an award by V-inspired the National Volunteer's Service, for being the most inspirational volunteer for Greater London. Seja is one of the first young Muslim women to be chosen in a national advertising campaign for V-inspired, the leading volunteer charity for young people.

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What made matters worse was the visual images that haunted our TV screens. The majority of Muslims within the United Kingdom are moderates, with an overwhelming proportion of Muslims condemning the violence, and yet the British Media had invited speakers like Abu Hamza, or Captain Hook, to express what Muslims were thinking. Every time he spoke I instinctively changed the channel unable to listen to the man who preached violence as if it was something commendable.

## FROM TYRANNY TO TERROR

HASSAN ALKATIB



Born to Iraqi parents, Hassan moved to London at the age of three. At 17, he went on to study Media at West Herts College. Many of his works include a documentary about his trip to Iraq during Christmas 2005, and a short, creative video which was screened at the Young Co-operative Film Festival in Yorkshire, 2006. He made his documentary 'The British Muslim Struggle' in his spare time during the final two years of his course at university. Hassan now works as a video editor and documentary filmmaker at Press TV.

A FEW months after the 7/7 bombings, I was stopped by a middle-aged man as I was on my way back from college. He asked me if I had a gun in my bag. I replied “No I don’t”; he then asked me if I was carrying a bomb. I said “No” again, at which point he looked over his shoulder to a couple of men standing close by, and said to them “It’s alright”. That was probably the first time I had been stereotyped in such a manner. In some ways I actually consider myself lucky that it did not turn out worse. Nevertheless, I tried not to take it too personally and put it behind me. Part of this witch-hunt against British Muslims emanated from certain sections of the mainstream media, particularly the right-wing press.

## REFLECTIONS OF A STUDENT

NADA MANSY



Nada Mansy is British-Egyptian and a recent graduate of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) where she read Sociology. Born in the ancient coastal town of Alexandria in Egypt, she moved to the UK at the age of seven with her parents and elder sister. Her father’s occupation in the NHS led to a peripatetic upbringing with homes across the South of England before her family settled in East Sussex. Alongside her studies Nada became engaged in local youth-politics. She later further immersed herself in this during her undergraduate studies at the LSE. There she received an award for her student activism and her work in the LSE Students Union Islamic Society (ISoc). Nada currently works in a voluntary capacity for the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS) and has a long term interest in teaching and community work.

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IN the days and weeks that followed, going out as a brown-skinned hijabi in my small home-counties town was not exactly devoid of unease which I had also experienced in the aftermath of 9/11. Except this time it was different – this time, it had happened on British soil. I wondered if people would act differently. And I wondered, what’s the worst that could happen; horrible remarks, abuse? But rationally, that seemed surreal. What about my old friends? Two months were left until I would start my second year of the sixth form, would they behave differently?



## AN ACT OF HUMILIATION

FARHAT AMIN



Farhat Amin has a wide range of skills in project management, facilitation and networking within the voluntary sector. As a Youth Development Worker he is currently delivering a mentoring project specifically for young Muslims in order to enhance the skills of a community that is continually striving for recognition. He also enjoys performing poetry and is always looking for new ways to entertain audiences in different settings.

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**A**LTHOUGH 7/7 was a disastrous day and should be remembered, we have to move on and really ask the question whether Muslims are being treated fairly, or are we as a people doing ourselves any favours. These questions have already been asked and will continually be asked but the point is how we actively pass on the message that British Muslims can offer practicability, vigour and optimism to many of the problems society is facing.

## SUMMER OF SIRENS & SLEEPLESSNESS

SAADEYA SHAMSUDDIN



Saadeya Shamsuddin is a journalist, broadcaster and writer. She read the Ancient World at University College London and later gained an MA in Journalism from City University London on a scholarship awarded by the National Union of Journalists' George Viner Memorial Fund. Her postgraduate dissertation examined the portrayal of Muslim women in the British media with an accompanying series of modern portraits documenting their experiences. Saadeya trained in both print and broadcast and has worked for the Kensington & Chelsea News, the Financial Times, Sunday Times, London Evening Standard and BBC London. She was recipient of the Royal Shakespeare

Company's Arts Journalist Bursary Scheme in 2009/10 and is a member of the UK Governments' Young Muslims Advisory Group (YMAG).

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THE first few days after the bombings, armed police stood guard at tube stations across the capital. When news broke that the explosions had been caused by Muslim suicide bombers from the UK, I could almost envisage a collective sigh from Muslims across the country. Great. Just what we needed, another group of nutters carrying out appalling acts in the name of our beloved faith. Their action was not the Islam I knew.

## THE RAGE & THE FEAR

YASER IQBAL



Yaser Iqbal is a barrister living and practicing law in Birmingham. He came to the UK in 1986 as young boy. He was a British national since birth but had never set foot on UK soil till then. He lived in Azad Kashmir in Pakistan where he spent his early childhood.

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WHAT is needed here is a deeper understanding of the modern world and its key players at a global level. I am not pointing towards some conspiracy theory but what I am presenting is my view that the explanation as to the real perpetrators of 7/7 is not as simple as most people are led to believe.

## IN SEARCH OF HORIZON

SHAHIDA AHMED



Shahida Ahmed is a teacher, artist and a presenter on Ummah TV, an Islamic television station based in Blackburn. As a local Councillor, she is involved in various community initiatives. She is also the CEO of the Qur'an Project, a UK based initiative that aims to complete a hand written Qur'an in the United Kingdom. She is a single mother, bringing up three teenage children.

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**T**HE first big 'Muslim' event that I recall was the first Gulf War. In all the hostels the students were glued to what was happening. Words like bombing, war, Iraq, oil, Saddam, invasion, Kuwait and Baghdad were perpetually echoing in the corridors of university hostels. Amid these unfamiliar words, my peers started to say "You're Muslim." I was already asking myself question about my belonging and now I was wondering what 'Muslim' meant? All of a sudden I was 'Muslim' more than before, but I wasn't about war, greed for oil and blood. So where in Islam was all this and why were Muslims fighting?

## ACTIONS, REACTIONS & NEW DIRECTIONS

**AHMED BASHIR**



Ahmed Bashir is a Policy Adviser at Her Majesty's Treasury, where he has worked for a number of years. He is a Chartered Management Accountant and sits on the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants Central Government Committee. Ahmed has previously worked at the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Work and Pensions and is currently Chair of the Civil Service Islamic Society a non-political, voluntary society, representative of mainstream Islamic opinion in Central Government.

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That year, July 7th changed things for everyone in the UK, but in particular for Muslims. My friend was attacked in the street whilst pushing her baby in a pram, racist language was used and the innocent baby was punched, all because my friend wore a head scarf. I had flashbacks of when I was younger, of times long gone, when petrol was poured through letterboxes because we were different. There was now a great sense that people did not understand that Islam was a peaceful religion and the media portrayed the ideology of a few as if it was that of the majority.



In bringing together these reflections from a range of Muslim voices in this country, Murtaza Shibli has contributed signally to enabling a wide audience to gain insights into how the terrible events of 5 years ago are being assimilated and reflected on within the Muslim community. This collection of reflections should also enable non Muslims to consider whether there have been and still are imbalances in the public treatment of those events in which 52 people, including four innocent Muslims were murdered. Those responsible, we need to be reminded, were respecters neither of humanity nor of religion. If this book enables more people to be respecters of both, then it will have contributed to the wellbeing of British society.

Canon Guy Wilkinson, National Inter Religious Affairs Adviser & Secretary  
for Inter Religious Affairs to the Archbishop of Canterbury

This important work makes a huge contribution towards our national understanding of the appalling events which took place on July 7th 2005.

Peter Osborne, writer and broadcaster; Author, *Muslims Under Siege*

7/7 Muslim Perspectives offers a rare chance to discover the everyday voices of British Muslims, which are all too often lost in the media hype and dominant narratives.

Tariq Modood, MBE, University of Bristol

The full register of emotions is expressed: anger, anguish, perplexity, much soul-searching, compassion and the occasional paranoia. Few of the narratives are more poignant than those who sought in Britain pre-7/7 a quiet, unobserved life away from the violence and oppression of Iraq or Indian Kashmir.

Philip Lewis, Author, *Young, British and Muslim*

If you want an insight into how diverse British Muslims are navigating a post-7/7 landscape, written in their own words, then this book is a good place to start.

Asim Siddiqui, Chairman, The City Circle

THIS BOOK explores and articulates insights, reactions and experiences of a wide range of Muslim men and women following the events of 7/7 – their feelings, anxieties and concerns. Also how they negotiated their own position with mainstream society and with each other in the aftermath. They reflect on the event and express their personal response, serving as a starting point for an exploration of the challenges and expectations which the future holds for them.



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