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Muslim Families and the Teaching of Islam in an English Context: An Ethnographic Account of Crisis, Challenge and Change

Nader Sudqy Al-Refai[1]

Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to explore the role of the Muslim family in a region of Northern England as a model for teaching Islamic Education to children and adolescents, and as a potentially important agency for preparing youth for successful religious and social participation in a challenging multi-faith society.

Design: The study is qualitative and uses both extended interviews, and an autoethnographic research approach. Part of the research sample of interviewed parents was selected from those who attended the same mosque as the father of "The Manchester Arena bomber", for whom a religious upbringing and socialization had manifestly failed. Evidence for this research report was gathered through semi-participant observations, whilst working in different educational institutions in Greater Manchester, including schools and Islamic centres; and as a private tutor in Islam in Muslim homes for ten years. Evidence was also collected from ten in-depth semi-structured interviews with parents.

Findings: Qualitative analysis identified two high-order themes: the Muslim family's contribution to the teaching of Islamic education, including their performance of duties as Islamic citizens; and the Muslim family's key contribution to the religious upbringing of their children. Four middle-order themes emerged: the media used in transferring knowledge to children; the content of the transferred knowledge; the significance of the Muslim family in the process of religious upbringing; and the challenges limiting the role of the Muslim family's effective socialization of their children. These findings have informed a set of recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, parents, and researchers.

Originality: This study offers unique, qualitative insights into how Muslim families in Northern England endeavour to provide children with a good foundation in Islamic principles, enabling them to be both Good Muslims, and Good Citizens.

Research Limitations: Reflecting an autoethnographic methodology, findings may be confined to a region of Northern England, and to the individual value commitments of an Islamic studies teacher. The research could not adequately explain why a small proportion of Muslim youth commit themselves to acts of violence which are contrary to Islamic principles.

Practical Implications: The study demonstrates the strengths of the Muslim family in the diaspora, but also points to alienating forces which may create (or build on) psychological instability and mental illness in a small section of Islamic youth. The issue of Muslim mental health must be addressed by Mosque institutions.

[1] Associate Professor of Islamic Education and Curriculum Design, Islamic Studies Department, Yarmouk University, Jordan, Refai@yu.edu.jo

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1. Introduction

On 22nd May, 2017 at the Manchester Arena in northern England, Salman Abedi, a 22-year old British Muslim exploded a bomb, thereby killing himself amidst a crowd leaving a concert, and leaving 22 people killed (many of them children and adolescents), and 139 injured, many maimed for life. This event was deeply traumatic for Manchester citizens, non-Muslims and Muslims alike (Ben-Ezra et al., 2017; Craigie et al., 2020). Knowing the bomber in person when he was a child aged 13-14 years old, and knowing his father as an Imam of a local mosque, left me in shock, and I raised new research questions (which remain largely unanswered) about the way Muslim families raise their children to live in a multicultural, multifaith society. This concern has been developed into a qualitative, ethnographically-focussed study of Muslim parents who attended this and other mosques in Greater Manchester.

Islam is the second-largest faith group in the United Kingdom. The total Muslim population in the UK, according to the National Statistics Census (2011), was 2.7 million, which represented 4.8% of the total population, living mainly in larger urban centres. In 2018, the Muslim population of the ten cities of Greater Manchester, in northern England, was estimated to be 24.7% of the total population of 2.813 million (ONS, 2018).

Religious and ethnic diversity has been a characteristic of British society and its educational system for at least two centuries. British Muslims themselves are part of this complex, multicultural pluralism, and belong to different cultures, ethnicities, language groups, and religious traditions within Islam. The diversity within the British Muslim community has informed their multi-cultural identities (Modood, 2002; Rattansi, 2002). Factors such as dress, marriage, and schooling are important for all Muslim migrants (and their children) in Britain; however, the foremost elements shaping self and group identities of British Muslims are language and religion (Modood, 1997; Werbner, 2002). Indeed, the literature shows that language and religion are two of the most important elements in the process of enabling young people to shape their identities (Giddens, 2006; Meer & Modood, 2011). Most Muslim parents are deeply committed to their children's future, ensuring that they receive an education in accordance with their faith, as well as enabling them to become successful citizens in a multicultural society (Al-Refai & Adam-Bagley, 2008).

The observer of human history, in general, cannot overlook the contributions of the Muslim Ummah (the brotherhood and sisterhood of Islam), over a thousand years of effort in education and enlightenment, in building humane educational systems that produced a coherent and homogeneous educational system that bore fruit and illuminated many European and Asian cultures which were still culturally clouded in 'the Dark Ages' (Zaimeche, 2002). According to my interviews (detailed below, and cultural experience in this northern English city) most Muslims, taking advantage of their powerful Islamic educational heritage, have given high priority to Islamic education, because they believe it to be a powerful tool for preserving the moral and cultural identity of young British Muslims (Iqbal, 1977; Nielsen, 1981). Today British Muslim minorities are making every effort to bridge any gaps in their children's Islamic knowledge through supporting educational initiatives at the family or the community level (Al-Refai, 2017).

For most British Muslim families, Islamic education has a vital role in achieving the major goals of the Muslim community in England, such as facilitating positive integration into the surrounding society by building the character of the next Muslim generation, while acknowledging, in a spirit of mutual tolerance, the cultural and religious diversity

of the society in which the Muslim minorities now live (Halstead & McLaughlin, 2005). Islamic education (IE) is, ideally, a comprehensive concept that covers all the areas of development in the spiritual, social, and mental development of humans. In the same vein, Abbud and Abdulla (1990) argued that IE means building up the complete character of the individual, including the physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social aspects. This Islamic view of education clearly focuses on wholeness in the sense that it covers all aspects of a human's life, and prepares him/her not only for this world, but also for the hereafter.

The Muslim family has a vital role in raising and educating their children, taking into account different areas of growth and development (Hassan et al, 2010). Shaping children's faith and building their religious identities from the early stages is a duty assigned to parents in Islam (Boyatzis et al, 2006). This duty is governed by the Holy Qur'an since children are expected to follow the footsteps of their believing parents (Qur'an, 66:6; Qur'an, 31: 17). The Prophetic tradition also affirms this in many contexts (Al-Bukhari, Hadith of the Blessed Prophet Muhammad, No. 1385).

The family occupies a prominent place in Islamic consciousness as a leading educational institution (Abood & Al-Sharify, 2018). Despite the major developments made in the way people live in modern cultures, the family has maintained its position as the oldest educational institution of Islam, and it continues to fulfil this role so well that it is impossible to replace this institution or to expect others to take its place (Qutb, 1980; Nur, 2004). From the educational standpoint, the family is considered the most important teaching medium in Muslim children's lives, since the parents are the first to interact with the child during his or her formative years (Helou, 2011).

The family, in Muslim ideals, is the foundation of the construction of all stable and productive human societies (Dhami & Sheikh, 2000), and it is, therefore, crucial to preserve and consolidate its foundations to achieve social stability and ensure an individual's psychological balance throughout life (Daneshpour, 1998). It is crucial, in the British environment, that the Muslim family should assume a major role, especially since it does not usually find support for its role among the educational and cultural institutions of the surrounding society; but rather encounters challenges from the social environment (including the highly prevalent ideologies of Islamophobia) which challenge the very existence of Muslim minorities in Western societies (Al-Saeid, 2017).

Muslims are among the most successful faith group in Britain in transmitting religious values and practices to the next generation (Scourfield et al, 2015). Islam has repeatedly stressed parental responsibility in the nurturing and educational process of the whole child, including his or her religious identity (Driessen et al, 2005). This complex process has been assigned in Islam to parents because parenthood involves deep emotional ties which promote strong motives for carrying out religious education, which includes daily group prayer in the home (and the learning of the words and ritual of prayer) from the third year of life onwards. The child will learn from parents the importance of being grateful to Allah for Allah's bountiful gifts and mercy and forgiveness for sins in those who believe. From earliest childhood, the Muslim child is immersed in a family which is a believing and practising unit, aiming to emulate the example of a beloved Prophet, whose good deeds are exemplified in the Sunnah (accounts of the Prophet's life).

While mothers are the first teachers inside the family, other members of the extended family take part in this nurturing process, including the practices of group worship, fasting during Ramadan, and learning and reciting the Qur'an, the Message revealed to Muhammad by Allah. On many occasions, grandparents and other relatives from the close social network of the family make strong inputs in the religious nurturing of the grandchildren (Scourfield et al, 2015). Usually, Muslim families introduce their children to formal aspects of religious education beginning in the child's fifth year, either by arranging for home tutors in Islamic Education, or by sending the children to local

educational institutions e.g.. mosques or supplementary schools (Scourfield et al, 2015). All of the families studied in the current research continued this practice of family-based religious education, which is reinforced by the five-times daily prayer involving the whole family, usually led by a senior male family member.

According to Kabir (2010), two main factors influence identity construction: Internal factors based on family nurturing; and external factors such as schools, institutions and workplaces, law and government. Recent research on the British Muslim family system suggests that Islamic education can contribute and guide this process of identity formation. According to Scourfield et al (2015), if the religion is central to children's daily routines, and they spend their time in Islamic places (including the home), then their faith is likely to become central to their identity. Therefore, for the typical Muslim family (in the UK and other countries of the Islamic diaspora) religion becomes the most salient source of personal and social identity, and a powerful basis for a strong personal identity which leads to the individual making a positive contribution to society, as a Muslim citizen (Peek, 2005; Al-Refai & Adam-Bagley, 2008; Adam-Bagley & Refai, 2019). There is a strong belief among the British Muslim community that the family plays a crucially important role in the process of religious upbringing, through teaching young Muslims Islamic education at home, from an early age (Ahmed, 2012).

Since the beginning of their settlement in Britain, Muslims have had to face the challenges concerning new social, linguistic, cultural and economic environments, and also the challenges of responding to the opportunities provided by these new environments. A particularly contentious challenge facing Muslim communities in Britain is within the field of education (Yousif, 2000). Many Muslim parents have become increasingly concerned about the level of their children's Islamic education and are recognize the implications of the secular education given to their children (Parker-Jenkins, 1995; Hewer, 2001; Walford, 2001; Abbas, 2007).

British Muslim families are obliged to adopt the 'British values' or the 'British way of life' through official social programmes and measures put forward by government (Stanley et al, 2017). For some commentators, the insistence upon instilling 'British values' through different governmental social programmes is a form of neo-colonial technique of repression (O'Toole et al., 2016; Stanley et al, 2017). Despite the constructive work on 'good' and 'bad' Muslim citizens (Al-Refai & Bagley, 2008; Bettiza, 2015), the predominant image of Muslim families in Britain held by large sectors of the general population (refected in the official "Prevent Islam" policy) is that of 'terrorists', and those who are allegedly sympathetic to acts of terror (Adam-Bagley & Al-Refai, 2019; Adam-Bagley, 2019). Sections of the British media and some government policies portray Muslims as a 'security threat' or as 'an enemy within', and this, inevitably creates (or reflects) stereotypes of Muslim youth as 'anti-citizens' (Qureshi et al, 2013). Given the strength of these Islamophobic ideologies in many sectors of British society, the dignity with which the large majority of young Muslims conduct themselves is impressive. This leads to the hypothesis that the firmly-rooted religious tradition of being 'good citizens' insulates most young British Muslims from acts of rebellion against an oppressive society (Adam-Bagley & Refai, 2019), ideas explored in the research reported later in this article.

In addition to the challenges facing the Muslim family unit, there is the issue of the status of women both within the Muslim community, and in the wider society (since Muslim women are particularly likely to experience Islamophobic hostility). Muslim women have a key role in imparting religious knowledge to children (Stanley et al, 2017), but they also have to negotiate roles within mosques, some of which prevent women from benefiting from any capacity-building programmes held in these institutions (Kabir, 2010).

Most Muslim parents prefer sending their children to schools with a good mix of ethnicities and religions, and with some Muslim intake. Some State primary schools have

a strong Christian religious content or ethos, and this presents challenges for Muslim parents (Scourfield et al, 2015). There are indications however that some Church of England primary schools (at least a quarter of UK schools carry this religious identity) modify teaching and religious practices in order to accommodate Muslim children, who in some areas are the majority of children in the school (Wilson, 2015). Where local schools are less accommodating to Islamic aspirations (e.g. in the case of Birmingham (Holmwood & O'Toole, 2018) the educational aspirations of the Islamic community in Britain have to be most strongly met from within the Islamic community itself, in the form of family-led education, and various kinds of supplementary and private education (Al-Azmeh & Fokas, 2007).

More than half of British Muslims were born in the UK to immigrant parents from a variety of cultural backgrounds; and about eight per cent of British Muslims are converts from other religions, mainly Christianity. The Muslim family in Britain today is in a transitional stage, evolving a new cultural identity and a set of religious beliefs and practices that is nevertheless faithful to the origins of Islam, the revelations of the Qur'an, and the life and teachings of Mohammed. The modern Muslim family has to meet many challenges in caring for, educating and nurturing the religious identity of young people (Jenkins, 2006). These problems and challenges are those faced by a minority religious and ethnic group that has little 'social capital' in the wider society (Gilliat-Ray, 1998). Added to this, according to Stanley et al (2017), the counter-terrorism measures introduced since 2001 mean that there is often hostile monitoring of certain families, their activities, home lives and education by State systems. According to these policies, being an outspoken Muslim is sufficient reason for an individual and their family to be labelled as 'dangerous' and 'risky'. This climate of government hostility also increases the likelihood that the English Muslim community encounters discrimination through various forms of Islamophobia (Adam-Bagley & Al-Refai, 2017 & 2019). Such pressures pose a threat to the communities themselves, perhaps reflected in the retreatist subcultures of youth involving deviant behaviours, such as drug abuse, alcohol addiction, and sexual deviance, all of which undermine the confidence of the younger generation of Muslims in their search for a stable, multicultural identity (Meer, 2010; Choudhury & Fenwick, 2011).

In contrast to the second and third generation, the first generation that arrived in Britain, although used to colonial rule, was generally ignorant of, or naively subservient to, the culture of the host nation. This generation included factory workers and miners who had limited education and cultural knowledge (Peach, & Glebe, 1995; Nielsen, 1999). The existence of this gap created some dissonance between the values of parents and children and sometimes led to a rift in relations between the two generations (Fitzsimon, 2011). At one extreme, the second generation neglected their Islamic identity; at the other extreme, younger generations, born in Britain and facing various persecutions in a racist and Islamophobic environment, searched out more radical or revolutionary forms of Islam (Wilkinson, 2018).

A further challenge facing the Muslim family is the fact that there are some dysfunctional Muslim families within this community. For example, there are families where one of the parents is absent, with Muslim-origin children who are living in state-run foster houses, rather than being cared for within their extended family, the traditional model for Islamic communities. As Scourfield et al (2015) point out, this is considered to be an untraditional family system for a Muslim community, in which "kinship adoption" is available for children whose parent(s) are either deceased or unable to care for them.

2. Methodology

The present study follows the qualitative paradigm, including the ethnographic research approach, and is exploratory rather than hypothesis-testing. This approach allows the

researcher to be in contact with participants in their natural setting and offers an intimate (but value-committed) understanding of how participants make sense of their lives (Ormston et al, 2014; Gray, 2018). Furthermore, it provides an understanding of the phenomena from the participants' perspectives, about how to create and develop a culturally relevant Islamic identity for children (Spradley, 2016).

The researcher is an Arabic-speaking male, who was resident in North West England for 14 years before returning to his home country of Jordan (where he had originally trained as a teacher of Islamic Studies). He taught Islamic Studies in schools in Manchester for 12 years, so might be recognized by respondents as "a figure of authority". Evidence has been analysed and presented following participant observation, in the process of "autoethnography" (Pillay et al., 2016; Gray, 2018), based opon personal interactions and acquaintance with individuals, and the norms, values and social relationships within the Islamic community of Manchester within which the researcher was "psychologically embedded"; and through the researcher's professional participation in working in different educational institutions in Greater Manchester, including schools, Islamic centres, and as a private tutor of Islamic Studies in Muslim homes for nearly ten years. Evidence was also collected (after the Arena bombing incident) from ten extended, semi-structured interviews with British Muslim parents in Manchester, who were interviewed via phone, skype, and WhatsApp conversations. Besides the interview data transcripts, hand-written field notes were accumulated over the years, during the researcher's "cultural embedding" in the Islamic community of Manchester. All of these pieces of evidence have been subjected to "thematic analysis", reported below.

The fieldwork over 10 years focused on understanding the challenges to Muslim parents, and their evolving practices towards teaching Islamic Education, in their efforts to ensure and enhance the religious socialisation of young British Muslims. This view inevitably reflects the researcher's personal and professional perspective as a researcher and ethnographer, as well as his value position as a Muslim migrant in a Western country. Throughout the research, Gray's methodological text (2004 to 2018) was followed in the collection and analysis of ethnographic and interview data collected through "participant observation" (Gray, 2018 pp. 433-457).

The research was conducted with Muslim families living in the North West of England, specifically within the area of Greater Manchester. This area was selected since (besides being the area of the researcher's residence over several years) it was in this city that the Manchester Arena bombing took place on 22nd May 2017. Most of the participating parents lived in this area and some of them had attended the same mosque the bomber had attended, alongside his father and siblings. Parents (selected at random) represented different language heritage and cultural backgrounds, including parents with Arabic, Asian and African cultural origins. All had been deeply affected by the Arena bombing incident.

This was a purposive, non-random sample of ten parents (from ten different families) who might have shared many fundamental Islamic values with the bomber's parents, and who lived under similar circumstances. Some of these shared values involved a strong dedication to classical Islamic traditions concerning children's religious upbringing and religious knowledge transfer. These included encouraging their children to memorize long parts of the Qur'an by heart, even if they (parents and children) did not understand the general meaning (for non-Arabic speakers), or the moral and metaphysical implications of the Arabic text. Recorded interviews, often lasting more than an hour, were non-directive but followed thematic guidelines (which may have determined the focus of some of the opinions expressed).

While the results of the current study are most relevant to northern England, they may have implications for the understanding of Islamic education issues in broader contexts, as do the London-based studies of Wilkinson (2011 & 2018).

Two main research themes were emerged from qualitative analysis of the research findings, from personal ethnography and the focused questioning of parents:

1. How Muslim families contribute to the process of teaching Islamic Education to their children?

2. How Muslim parents view the role of the family in the process of their children's religious upbringing?

The recorded data and notes from the interviews and the observations over a longer period were subjected to a systematic thematic analysis, following the data-driven, grounded-theory approach through the thematic analysis steps outlined by Attride-Stirling (2001). Coding the data according to this methodological guide revealed lower-order themes that were further organized into middle-order themes, and subsequently into two high-order themes. These two themes are The Nature and Process of Teaching of Islamic Education; and Challenges to Religious Upbringing.

3. Main Findings

Findings related to the first theme: How Muslim families contribute to the process of teaching Islamic Education to their children?

As migrants in an often hostile culture, Muslim families in England saw themselves as playing a crucial role in laying the basis for the successful religious education and support of young family members, in order to build their Islamic identity. This stage begins early in the individual's life and continues until he/she is capable of completing the journey within a wider range of Islamic institutions, with the support of Muslim peers and elders. In this regard, evidence from the fieldwork on the contribution of the Muslim family towards teaching their children Islamic education revealed many important insights. The evidence comes from both semi-participant observations over ten years, and the more recent semi-structured interviews. These findings, after qualitative data analysis, also led to the construction of two 'middle-order' themes: the media used to transfer Islamic knowledge to children; and the content of the transferred knowledge.

3.1 First: the media used to transfer Islamic knowledge to children

3.1.1 Early orientation and instruction

One form of passing Islamic knowledge to children is through the early orientation or tarbiyah activities carried out by parents. It had previously been well-established that Muslims believe in the responsibility of the family in delivering Islamic concepts from birth onwards (Boyatzis et al, 2006), and fieldwork and interviews bore this out. This begins with the father softly reciting the Athan (the call to prayer) into the ear of his newborn son or daughter, a ritual of great tenderness and metaphysical importance. Islam teaches that during the fetal life of each human being, an Angel (at Allah's bidding) places a soul into every human, so that the child is born seeking the light of divine goodness, being without 'original sin'. Both parents must nurture and mature the seed of goodness with which the child is born.

Participant parents emphasised (supporting the observations of Hassan et al., 2010) that it was their duty to embed in their children faith and spiritual values, as well as an understanding and acceptance of the family's and Islamic community's prevailing system of customs and social traditions, and its system of morals and ethics. Therefore, each day from infancy forwards parents gradually pass on concepts of worship to their children at various stages of their early development, such as accustoming them to performing prayer, fasting, and other acts of worship like giving in charity and doing good deeds

(Scourfield et al, 2015). Typically, one of the parents[2] interviewed, Brother Masoud (father of three children) observed that: "…I feel it is my duty to teach my children about Islam and our culture so they can be good Muslims and I think this should start from a very early stage, maybe from the birth…".

3.1.2 Private home tuition

A second medium of transferring Islamic knowledge to children is through private home tuition. Many Muslim families in England are keen to provide their children with knowledge in Islamic studies in order to fill the gaps in their Islamic education that inevitably occur when they attend secular or non-Muslim day schools. It as a common practice to arrange for Islamic education teachers to come to their houses to give private tuition, sometimes including children from an extended family living nearby. This type of education is also the resort of parents who are unable to afford the relatively high fees of private Islamic schools, or who are not convinced that these schools perform well or are keen to maximize their benefit by combining the two methods. Thus Brother Ahmad is a successful businessman who is financially able to send his four school-aged children to a full-time Islamic school. He and his wife were sure that their children needed further Islamic education. Sister Shazia, his wife, stated: "…we think what our children are learning in school is not enough and so we have arranged for private tutors to teach them Arabic, Qur'an and Islamic Studies, besides maths and science…"

3.1.3 Homeschooling and self-learning

The third medium is self-study, and schooling children at home. Many Muslim families in Greater Manchester go to considerable efforts to give their children access to religious education, and work tirelessly to overcome the challenges facing their children. The educational reality of the Muslim communities in England in which I lived, worked and participated, provides evidence of many successes in this regard, and perhaps what has helped Muslim families in England to make such advances in the secondary school system (Scourfield et al, 2015; Wilkinson, 2015). For example, the English education system allows families to teach their children at home instead of sending them to schools, under a system called 'home-schooling'. Here, some Muslim families provide their children with an Islamic and formal education at home while also benefiting from educational materials provided by the local educational system. Thus Brother Siddique stated that: "… I did not send my children to state schools… I home-schooled them using different learning resources, some of which are online resources... They also started Islamic education lessons with me and with their mother and they attended the local mosque classes. Al-hamdulliah, they have completed hifz [memorising Qur'an by heart] before they do their GCSEs [public examinations]…".

3.1.4 Distance learning

At the end of their primary school career, children continue on to secondary schools, and often then to further education in colleges and universities. At each of these transfers of educational venue, parents and students may decide that specialized Islamic learning is required, during which some students may discover (so their parents hope), the need to build upon or complete their vital religious knowledge as an everyday necessity, dictated by the nature of life as an individual living as a religious minority, amongst a secular (and sometimes hostile) majority. Thus, many seek out ways of improving their religious knowledge at home due to the lack of opportunities for regular study in schools and universities. Distance learning using online resources is frequently used to fulfil this goal.

With the advanced technology, and the ease of access for second-generation Muslims, many have chosen distance learning via the internet, and some state and private colleges offer a variety of options. I observed several scenarios which young Muslims followed in

[2] 'Names' of informants are not their actual names.

order to obtain further religious knowledge. Firstly, some opt to study towards a degree, such as a diploma or a Bachelor's degree in one of the disciplines in Islamic sciences and Arabic, through distance study. Others sought to obtain a qualification in a particular reading of the Holy Qur'an, by forming connections in some way with a qualified tutor or scholar in a Muslim country, or with some specialized institutions in Muslim countries. In addition, some choose lessons, courses, and training workshops on various social or educational concepts within Islamic jurisprudence, online or in weekend gatherings in mosques and local schools. A fourth choice is to follow one of the Islamic scholars or preachers by regularly listening to their lessons which are broadcast directly or are recorded in one form or another in various media.

3.2 Second: Content of the transferred knowledge

The second medium-order theme revealed from the data analysis concerns the content of the transferred religious knowledge. It was observed that the knowledge content varies depending on parents' wishes since they are keen that they cover the required knowledge and skills, from their point of view, in order to build their child's character in a manner which takes into consideration the parents' personal cultural and religious specificities. The following subject-matter issues came at the top of the list of concerns for the Muslim families participating in the study.

3.2.1 Islamic faith (Tawheed)

Very early in life, parents start inducting children into the Islamic faith and belief system. For example, as soon the child is born parents are recommended to perform the first part of 'the-call-for-prayer' (Athan) in his/her right ear and to perform the second part of 'the-call-for-prayer' (Iqamah) in his/her left ear. Gradually, parents start nurturing their children in the facts of faith and spiritual values, trying to instil the idea of the Oneness of Allah (Tawheed) in them. This is why some Muslim families in England celebrate the first occasion when their child pronounces, in Arabic, the 'statement or declaration of faith' known as (Shahadah or Kalimah). Thus respondent Sister Farzanah said that: "…we teach them about the meanings of kalimah and what it means to be a Muslim and about the biography of the Prophet (pbuh) …".

3.2.2 Qur'an

Across the Muslim community in Britain, the first point of focus in religious education is the Holy Qur'an, with lessons concentrating on learning the correct recitation skills, first learning the basic rules of Qur'anic recitation, followed by memorising the holy Arabic text by heart, and then trying to understand the Qur'anic text when reading it. Sister Shahnaz stated: "…the first thing I would like my children to learn is how to read and memorise Qur'an precisely. I have arranged for a 'Qari-Saab' (traditional Qur'an teacher) to teach Qasim and Fatimah (her children) Qur'an three times a week."

3.2.3 Islamic studies

The third point of focus is Islamic Studies, which was clearly of great importance to the Muslim families in this study. Islamic Studies (IS) covers a set of knowledge and skills thought necessary to build a Muslim character, including the Pillars of Islamic Faith, expanding, as the young Muslim grows, to the daily recitation of prayer, and the daily need of every Muslim to know the meanings of prayer. The exact focus reflects the Islamic school of thought adhered to by the particular community, such as the Hanafi School (the predominant school of theology in Sunni Islam), with smaller numbers practising other traditions, Sunni or Shia. The Hanafi School emphasises (as do other schools, sometimes in contrasting ways) teaching of the stories of the prophets, and the overall system of virtues and morals. Some teachers I encountered also covered ethical issues that are controversial among the host community, such as the rulings regarding social engagement with non-Muslims in their religious celebrations, and the exchange of gifts, etc. Brother Salaam suggested that: "… our children are in real need to study their

'Deen' (religion), they need to be equipped with sound knowledge of Islamic studies in order to protect themselves from different dangers in society…".

3.2.4 Arabic

A further point of focus is the Arabic language, the learning of which is of great importance since it is the language of the Holy Qur'an. All parents included in the study believed that a desire to understand the intrinsic meanings of the Holy Qur'an was a major impetus for learning Arabic, for themselves and their children. Therefore, most parents directed their children to learn a particular form of the Arabic language called 'Qur'anic Arabic', which differs from the learning of Arabic for non-Arabic speakers, and the methods for learning modern 'foreign' languages. Qur'anic Arabic is considered to be closer to the classical language, in terms of its eloquence, clarity, grammar, and syntax, than the spoken Arabic language heard today in Arabic-speaking countries. Across the communities and individuals I studied in northern England, families from different language backgrounds were in consensus regarding sending their children to learn Arabic either in the local mosque, the madrasah (a school affiliated with the mosque), or at home through private teachers.

Findings related to the second research question: How Muslim parents view the role of the family in the process of their children's religious upbringing?

The evidence for this question comes both from my ethnographic insights and observations and from the semi-structured interviews with selected sample parents living in Greater Manchester. The data analysis identified many lower-order themes which can be categorized under two middle-order themes: first was the Muslim family's significant role in the religious upbringing process; while the second was the main challenges limiting the role of the Muslim family in religious socialisation.

3.3 The Muslim family and the process of religious upbringing

All of the parents that I have met, and those whom I have interviewed in- focused detail, were unanimous in the firm belief that the family has a crucially important role in the process of the religious upbringing of their children, in order to make them Islamically-grounded 'good citizens' in their new culture. They believed that the family is the cornerstone in this process of the Islamic upbringing and Tarbiyah of their children, confirming the findings of Dhami & Sheikh (2000). For most parents it was evident that the family as a basic educational institution is crucially important to Muslims in Britain, giving them the strength and dignity to live as responsible citizens in a complex, plural and multi-faith society.

Evidence indicated also that the 'extended family' - including grandparents and close relatives -are all involved in the process of the religious upbringing of young British Muslims (Scourfield et al, 2015). As Brother Khan stated: "Yes, Muslims are a minority here and mainstream education needs additional input from parents at home". Sister Shazia believed that: "…indeed, the family plays a vital role in upbringing [of] our children in England. We consider the family the first education cycle where a child receives his/her first religious input as we believe that Tarbiyah (Islamic education) starts from birth if not before".

According to parents, taking part in teaching children Islamic education is a religious duty upon parents (reflecting Boyatzis et al, 2006). They have to provide a safe environment for their children to learn the basics of Islamic knowledge, in order to help them to practise the Islamic rituals of regular worship, and following the Prophet's example, daily "good deeds". Parents cited many Islamic study topics which they saw as their duty to introduce to their children. As Brother Salaam observed: "…the family has the duties to teach their children the basic knowledge of Allah, Prophet Mohammed, and all prophets, our obligations to Allah, praying, fasting and the five Islamic regulations, love of Allah, and the Prophet's respect for other religions".

In the same vein, other parents emphasized that the family was responsible for teaching children their traditional mother tongue (e.g. Urdu), the fundamental moral values of Islam, and Islamic principles on how to be a role model in society. Brother Ahmad stated that children: "…should learn their mother-tongue first, then Qur'an and Qur'anic Arabic too." Sister Farzanah added: "…at home, we should teach them the Islamic principles and values and how to be good examples of Islamic behaviour, and then watch them… ."

Further, it was suggested by parents that the family has a vital role in preparing children for life in British society. Through teaching tolerance and respect of other religions, and through maintaining a good understanding of Islamic issues, parents were looking forward to achieving a good understanding of both Muslim and British values. Brother Masoud declared that: "…we have to teach a good understanding of Islam along with tolerance and respect towards other religions…we have to accommodate both Muslim and British values."

Parents also recommended reviewing the methods which parents are using at home with children when delivering religious education. In this context, there should be, according to most parents, some efforts towards empowering parents and developing their capacities as educators. Great attention should be given to women in the Muslim community since they do most of the nurturing and teaching in their houses, especially when they are unable to attend mosques in some communities (cf Kabir, 2010). Several participants suggested that parents should begin to use more effective methods of nurturing such as including open discussions with children in a friendly environment, especially when dealing with socially and culturally contested ideals. As Brother Ahmad observed: "…it is our duty to engage our children in open discussions on what does it mean to be a British Muslim and how to achieve it."

3.4 Challenges limiting the Muslim family's role in religious upbringing

Parents identified some challenges that limit the role of the Muslim family in the process of religious upbringing. These challenges are classified into six lower-order themes: syllabus; secular values; clash with religious values; family disintegration; sex and relationship education; and the parent's own knowledge.

British Muslim families face the challenge that most 'formal' Islamic Studies syllabi in Britain are imported and not designed to suit the Muslim children living in a multicultural, multi-faith society. This was a continuous source of challenge, since children needed to know and learn about other religions and world views, in the general opinion of the group of parents interviewed. These parents believed that it was the responsibility of the Muslim family, as a social and educational institution, to teach children about other faiths in society. Thus Brother Fathi stated that: "… because of the challenges children face are from their friends in the English schools, they need a lot of effort from their parents to learn about different religions in the society."

The secular values of British society are yet another challenge for the Muslim family. Many Muslim parents believe that the wider, secular society has a strong (and often negative) impact on their children, with its dominant secular values which are manifest in the public schooling system. For some parents, attending the state school for most of the day and mingling with 'other' children and teachers was a challenge, since this influence pervaded many areas of life, including young people's behaviour at home. As Sister Farzanah observed: "… one of the most important factors of influence on my children is the society, and mainly state schools."

Parents elaborated on this issue, pointing out that 'individualism and selfishness' - non-Islamic values - were being transferred to their children, and were in conflict with the parental views of Islam as a religion promoting collaboration and teamwork (rather than individualism). In contrast, Islamic education promotes 'collectivity' through its group prayers and shared rituals. Brother Ahmad observed that: "…watching my children and

others in the community, I can say that this generation has developed a sense of individualism and selfishness in the way they live and deal with different issues…". Handling the feelings that result from the clash between secular and religious values in the lives of young British Muslims was a particular challenge facing parents when imparting religious education to their children. As Brother Fathi stated: "… among these challenges is how to resolve the clash between modern values and Muslim values."

Among the challenges limiting the role of the Muslim family in Britain is that of 'family disintegration'. For whatever reasons, families break down (parents separate, older children leave) and this can be a major cultural (and psychological) challenge for the remaining members of the family. This is reflected in uneven methods of instilling Islamic values and practices, through family-based educational practices. Thus Brother Masoud observed: "…we know about the family breakdown in [our] community, and this is a big challenge."

Further, many Muslim parents were very troubled about issues of "romantic" relationships, and school-based sex education, which was often seen as a way of preparing young people to have premarital sexual relationships or to tolerate 'partnerships' of a type forbidden by Islamic teaching. Sexual relationships between boys and girls outside of marriage are not permitted in Islamic religious law: parents consider this to be a major challenge facing their still immature children. Sister Shahnaz observed: " … the most difficult challenge is freedom when speaking about sex and relationships: boy and girlfriend… ."

The Muslim parents I encountered and interviewed pointed out that some Muslim family members did not have enough experience or knowledge about living in British society, often because of the burden of work, and the struggle for economic survival. Thus their experience of "ordinary" life in England was limited and partial, which prevented them from effectively engaging with wider societal issues on behalf of their children. There was, moreover, a tendency to retreat into traditional cultural values, when economic struggles and Islamophobia forced such a retreat. As Sister Shazia observed: "… parents might not have enough knowledge themselves. They might not understand British society or might not have the time to educate children because of work pressures."

A case of 'failed socialisation': the case of the Manchester Arena bomber

On 22nd May, 2017, at the Manchester Arena, Salman Abedi, a 22-year old British Muslim of Libyan cultural heritage exploded a bomb in the middle of a crowd leaving a concert, killing himself and leaving 22 people dead (many of them children and adolescents), and 139 injured. Knowing the bomber in person when he was a child aged 13-14 years old, and als knowing his father as a prayer-leader of my local mosque, left me (and many others) in a state of shock, and profound grief and sorrow, and was one of the reasons that I entered a fresh phase of my research, asking direct questions about the way Muslim families can, through fostering Islamic education, enable their children to live peaceably, and successfully, in British society. I asked no direct questions about the Manchester bomber in my interviews, and few parents raised this issue. Indeed, there was, amongst the Muslim parents who worshipped at the mosque attended by Abedi's parents and the youth himself, silent grief, a closure on discussion, and an implicit denial that someone undertaking the mass murder of innocent civilians could ever have been a Muslim. This same mindset of closure and denial affected the elders of the moque whom I spoke to after the Arena bombing.

None of the interviews yielded any clues as to why a youth offered the love and devotion of his parents, and an Islamic education within his family and community, could commit such a heinous act, so contrary to every principle of Qur'an and Sunnah. Perhaps some insight is offered by Adam-Bagley (2019), who attended the same mosque as Abedi, and briefly and unsuccessfully counselled him when Abedi was in his late 'teens. This researcher pointed to the unreasoning and savage hostility to Islam (and to Muslims in

Britain), an Islamophobia expressed by at least a third of the UK population. The result, when young Muslims aspire to achieve occupationally and socially but are thwarted by forces of discrimination, serves as a form of alienation through which the individual, implicitly or explicitly, is faced with a number of choices. The first choice is to work harder in school and college, to become qualified in a technical skilled profession which guarantees employment; to draw more deeply on the traditional spiritual and cultural resources of Islam; and to face persecution as did Prophet Muhammad during the early days of Islam, with dignity, courage and compassion.

As Wilkinson (2018) shows, this is the path chosen by the large majority of young Muslims today. Nevertheless, Bhui and his colleagues (2019) have shown that Muslim youth in England who are sympathetic to terrorist ideals (a number representing not more than 3 per cent of Muslim teenagers), tend to be depressed, socially isolated, and have fallen away from regular Islamic rituals of prayer, worship and conduct. Moreover, this state of extreme alienation, when associated with symptoms of psychosis, results in a disordered "moral cognition" which leads the individual to commit acts of violence (O'Reilly et al., 2019). Drawing on this literature, Adam-Bagley (2019) reports on his unsuccessful attempts to counsel Abedi who (in his opinion as a clinical psychologist) was suffering from paranoid psychosis. It was this vulnerable youth whom the evil forces of terror seized upon to become a 'suicide bomber'. There was virtually nothing which the average, devout and law-abiding Muslim family in Manchester could have done to prevent the alienation of youth like Abedi, once psychosis had taken hold.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

First of all, the limitations of the present research must be emphasised. It involves the representation of a system of social interactions, practices and values in a particular ethnoreligious community from the viewpoint of a single individual who was embedded for twelve years (as a teacher and researcher) in the Muslim community of an urban area in northern England. It is a challenge for further research and replication, using a variety of methodologies, to establish whether the writer's characterisation of values and practices in this community has validity. Furthermore, while the picture painted is one of a dedicated group of Muslim parents attempting to transmit the best ideals and practices of Islam in community relations, and in childhood socialisation and education, the research has failed to provide an answer to a crucially important question: why do some (albeit a very small minority) young Muslims engage in violent actions which take the lives of innocent civilians?

This research has nevertheless presented a model of the 'normal' or 'average' Muslim family in Greater Manchester, based both on the writer's personal, autoethnographic experience as a tutor and teacher of Islamic studies and on ten extended interviews with parents about their views and practices concerning religious education. A number of important themes have emerged from the qualitative analysis of these interviews and experiences.

Firstly, it is evident that the family is a vital teaching medium for Islamic education and preparing children to live in British society. Therefore, it is important to respect and to empower this family institution, in order to enable it to engage in the important role of creating "Islamic citizens", proud and confident in their Muslim identity, and capable of being integrated citizens in the plural, multicultural society of modern Britain.

Secondly, it is important that researchers and research centres give this field of enquiry and social action more attention in order to:

a) identify the challenges facing ethnoreligious families in a multi-faith society, in the process of providing programmes of community education which enable families and children of all faiths to live peaceably and co-operatively;

b) identify the core religious education needs of the British Muslim children when developing religious education and values curricula;

(c) explore how to have mosque-based support services in place (including specially-trained Muslim support workers) who can attend to the mental health needs of troubled Islamic youth;

(d) address the wider forces of Islamophobia and structural racism which prevent Muslims from reaching their potential as productive citizens; and to counter, in some cases, profound degrees of alienation in minority youth.

In conclusion, I present a crucially important set of research questions and hypotheses for future enquiry:

Why do so few Muslim youths turn to violent ideologies and solutions, in the face of the chronic and often extreme amounts of ethnic hostility and Islamophobia they experience in Western countries such as Britain? Our hypothesis (based on research with Muslim families in England) is that the protective and nurturing socialization involved in family-based Islamic education gives the large majority of young Muslims a core Islamic identity which, based on the example of Prophet Muhammad's lived example inspired by The Qur'anic message, enables them to cope, with a strong and confident dignity, within a hostile society in peaceable ways. However, those Muslim youth who do stray from this Straight Path of Islam are likely to be those who have some inherent tendency (such as that involved in psychosis) to commit extremely irrational acts. It follows that Islam should develop services, based on Muslim mental health models, for the treatment of these very disturbed youth – for example, the American initiatives described by Abu-Ras et al. (2008).

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