

Muslim charity in the United Kingdom: Between counter-terror and social integration

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Abstract

Writing ahead of the next ‘Independent Review’ of the United Kingdom’s counter-terror strategy, this article presents two inter-related arguments. First, that the current counter-terror legislation is counter-productive, according to its own logic, in achieving social integration. Second, that Islamic practices and conceptualisations associated with charitable giving hold potentials to offer a more inclusive understanding of social integration than that currently utilised in the United Kingdom. The actions of Muslim charities and practitioners within Britain (exemplified by service provisions during Covid restrictions) serve as an important tool for social integration. Thus, by exploring the potentials of Muslim charitable giving, an alternative solution to social integration in the United Kingdom is presented. Drawing from participant interviews with a range of Muslim charitable practitioners, this article argues that supporting British Muslim charities would assist social integration and the construction of ‘shared values’ assumed by UK counter-terror strategies to be a tool in combating ‘extremist’ narratives.

Keywords

counter-terror, Muslim charity, shared values, social integration

Introduction

Islamophobic notions of Islam being intrinsically linked to ‘terrorism’ have facilitated the securitisation of Muslim charity within the United Kingdom (May, 2021). Yet, the actions of Muslim charitable practitioners as individuals and as organisations throughout Britain, especially during the height of the Covid crisis, grants an opportunity to shift the narrative on Muslim charity from a factor contributing to terrorism to *an important tool in countering ‘terrorist’ narratives*. The ways in which Muslim charitable practitioners understand their charitable obligations to wider society can facilitate a rethinking of mainstream counter-terror narratives that offers the potential of less discriminatory and more inclusive frameworks. If, as current UK counter-terror policy suggests, ‘social integration’ and ‘shared values’ are crucial for negating ‘terrorist’ ideology, then the practice of Muslim

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charitable giving provides an example of ‘shared values’ which, in turn, can lead to social integration.

There is no universal definition of ‘terrorism’. Debates about what ‘terrorism’ is, have been complicated and confused by the insertion of new terms such as ‘extremism’ and ‘radicalisation’ (Faure Walker, 2021; Kundnani, 2014). Saliiently, terms such as ‘terrorism’, ‘radicalisation’ and ‘extremism’ are relational concepts which convey little in isolation. Thus, we are reliant on understanding ‘radical’/‘extreme’ in terms of its relation to what we actually mean to be ‘normal’ (whatever this is). As Dudenhoefer (2018: 181) elaborates, ‘the definition of “radical” varies according to the shared norms of the majority of the populations’. Whatever these terms mean, when such categories are applied, they signal ‘illegitimate’ and, as Faure Walker (2019) suggests, assist in the construction of the ‘Other’.

Counter-terror legislation has severely impacted charities with a disproportionate burden on the Muslim charitable sector (Imtiaz, 2019: 11). While the UK government has systematically denied the targeting of Muslim charities, growing literature and institutional reports provide evidence that Muslim charitable operations have been unduly hampered (ACLU, 2009; CFG, 2018; May, 2021). This article moves on from the author’s previously published work (May, 2021) by exploring the potentials of social integration offered by Muslim charitable practitioners in the post-Covid environment and the counter-productive effects of counter-terror assemblages on the processes of social integration. Utilising semi-structured qualitative interviews from a range of Muslim charitable practitioners, the arguments presented are that the current counter-terror policy assemblage is counter-productive in its stated aim of achieving social integration as a bulwark against ‘extremist’ or ‘terrorist’ narratives. Second, that Muslim charitable practices offer the potential of a more inclusive conceptualisation of social integration than that currently espoused in British governmental policy, potentially contributing to theoretical understandings of social integration.

Acknowledgement across the charitable sector that counter-terror measures have overly impacted specifically Muslim charities can be exemplified by the decision of 17 major organisations (including *Amnesty International* and *Liberty*) to boycott the long delayed Independent Review of the *Prevent* Strategy. A spokesperson for the Runnymede Trust stated that ‘our decision to boycott the independent Prevent review stems from more than 15 years of a system that has disproportionately targeted Muslim communities’ (cited in Hargrave, 2021). Beset with delays, the upcoming review of the counter-terror strand *Prevent* has gained additional controversy by the Home Office’s appointment of William Shawcross to head the review process (Hooper, 2021). It was under Shawcross’ previous chairmanship of the *Charity Commission* that most allegations of targeting Muslim charities arose. Given Shawcross’ public negative statements about Islam, Osborne (2021) has stated that his appointment to review the *Prevent* strategy should be seen as ‘structural hostility to Islam’. Shawcross’ appointment has led to a boycott of the *Prevent* review by over 450 Islamic organisations (Grierson, 2021), leading to fear that important stakeholders and critical voices may be excluded from the review process.

The standard narrative deriving from politicians, policy makers, and media is that Muslim humanitarian organisations and charities are a cover for terrorist financing (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan, 2009: 1). The arguments presented here do not deny the possibility that charities and humanitarian organisations *could* disperse charitable funds for violent activities. For instance, during the Afghan/Soviet war in the 1980s, substantial evidence exists to demonstrate that charitable organisations and states (including the United States and Saudi Arabia) contributed funds to the Afghan resistance (Benthall,

2007: 6). I am merely arguing that Muslim charities are no more susceptible than any other to the diversion of funds and that little evidence suggests that Muslim charities (or any other) within the United Kingdom are currently active in financing violent activities. As such, the positive aspects of Muslim charitable giving, not least its civil function and the possibility for social integration, are being lost in the mire of false accusations and media headlines.

Looking to the positive contributions Islamic charitable giving offers, the focus of this article is how Islamic charity *when put into practice* can serve an important role in civil society and assist in the process of social integration. These positive attributes, identified in UK counter-terror policy as important tools against ‘extremism’ and ‘radicalization’, are consistently being thwarted by the practice of counter-terror legislation. This then calls into question the internal logic of UK counter-terror strategies and the conceptualisation of social integration as dominantly understood within the United Kingdom.

The argument will first situate Muslim charitable practice within British civil society broadly before explaining the research methodology. Then, the article will question counter-productive elements of the current counter-terror policy assemblage in the United Kingdom which undermine and challenge social integration efforts. The second half of the article will explore Muslim charitable practice in the United Kingdom to uncover the potential for a more plural and inclusive understanding of social integration than that currently espoused in UK policy. Muslim charitable practitioners have emphasised that charity in Islam ensures societal participation, cooperation, the spirit of good will to others, a common humanity, and the transcending of the individual to selflessly provide for the needs of others in society, thus potentially providing a conceptual basis for alternative understandings of social integration.

Muslim charity and civil society

Muslim charitable organisations and practitioners make up part of British civil society. Many definitions of civil society distinctly separate it from the state and market which together account for what Tandem (2004) refers to as the ‘trinity’. Strictly separating, civil society from both state and market is a misnomer as all three aspects of the ‘trinity’ resist, accommodate, affect, and are affected by the actions of the other (Jorgensen, 2004: 39). By ‘touching the authority of the state’ (Jorgensen, 2004: 39) civil society can at times be viewed as competition to, rather than mutually supporting of, the state. The state may attempt to encourage sections of civil society that are in alignment with its broader agenda while seeking to curtail activities it views as in competition or harmful to wider state initiatives. ‘This creates two prototypical possibilities: either the interests of the state and society converge, or they are in conflict’ (Buchauski, 1996: 80).

In many ways, the work of charities falls within the British state’s current interests. *Ex-Prime minister* David Cameron’s declaration that multiculturalism had failed ushered in the Conservative party’s notion of ‘Big Society’. ‘Big Society’ coincided with austerity measures and cuts to public spending. With the withdrawal of the state from social provisioning, civil society was encouraged to fill the vacuum by providing charitable and welfare services to populations at a more localised level (Pettinato, 2021). Faith-based initiatives responded to this opening and, thus, became increasingly visible despite the secularism of mainstream society (Pettinato, 2021: 371).

As many definitions of civil society assume a modern centralised nation-state and a liberal market economy, often non-Western modes of community organisation are overlooked, deemed inimical to civil society, or simply not ‘seen’. Certain aspects of informal

faith-based charity, which are derived from a conception of ‘moral economy’ rather than the self-interested (neo)liberal individual, can be placed within this perception of being inimical to civil society or simply not ‘seen’. Scott (1998) convincingly argues that state modes of organisation and structuring render illegible modes of action and practice that do not fall within its own logic. Similarly, Fowler argues that ‘the international aid system does not see or cannot value informal expressions of civic association and because it does not appreciate them it thinks that they either do not exist or are up to no good’ (Fowler, 2004: 14–15). This ensures that alternative frames of understanding are silenced, marginalised, or deemed inimitable to modern civil society.

While Muslims will donate through various charitable institutions and organisations (both specifically ‘Muslim’ and secular) certain forms of charitable giving, exemplified in *zakat* (obligatory alms), are still largely given on a personal informal basis that precedes the logic of the nation-state. For decades, the giving of *zakat* was merely ‘illegible’ (Scott, 1998) and, if counted at all, subsumed under remittances. However, since the official *9/11 Commission Report* (2004), the giving of *zakat* has been viewed with increasing suspicion on the assumption that both the donors and the recipients are ‘up to no good’ (Fowler, 2014:15). The *Commission* report states that the 9/11 hijackers ‘moved, stored, and spent their money in ordinary ways . . . The origin of the funds remains unknown’ (The 9/11 Commission Report, 2004: 169). Yet this did not prevent the authors from speculating stating that ‘Al Qaeda . . . took advantage of Islam’s strong calls for charitable giving, *zakat*’ (The 9/11 Commission Report, 2004: 170–171).

Accepting that civil society does not work as a homogeneous whole with one single interest (Fowler, 2004: 14–15), then it stands that certain groups within civil society may not always work to the benefit of the whole. Suspicions of ‘incivility’ are currently lurking in the background concerning the Muslim charitable sector. With high profile politicians stating that multiculturalism has failed, and Muslim communities remain isolated from mainstream society, one area of exploration will be to explore whether Muslim charity crosses religious boundaries to interact positively with other sectors of society. Importantly all participants told the author of donating charitable funds to non-Muslim charities and working with non-Muslim charities (both secular and faith-based). Partnerships between Muslim and ‘mainstream’ charities have expanded rapidly during the Covid and post-Covid environment (Uddin, 2020). This would suggest that claims of British Muslim communities as ‘isolationist’ are exaggerated at best, and the alternative conceptualisations of social integrations operationalised through Muslim charitable practice are not visible to mainstream society.

An ongoing tension is apparent between Islamic charitable practices that foster a theological understanding of social integration and the United Kingdom’s current mainstream scepticism of Muslim charities. Muslim charitable practitioners are currently attempting to negotiate a societal terrain dominated by secular (neo)liberal understandings of social integration that expects Muslims to conform to Western secular notions. Dominant stances perceive Muslim practices as isolationist and ‘suspicious’ without exploring Islamic notions of social integration which can offer an alternative and more inclusive framework.

The securitisation of British Muslims and methodological considerations

As Strindberg and Warn (2011: 170) have argued, ‘the “Muslim question” in the public square has come to be framed primarily in terms of cultural incompatibility and

terrorism'. This discourse in popular and media rhetoric intertwines political violence with debates concerning societal integration. Muslims in the United Kingdom are viewed as having failed to fully integrate with mainstream society, thus requiring both integrating with 'fundamental British values' and surveillance (Githens-Mazer, 2012: 561). As will be demonstrated, the assemblage of counter-terror policies can undermine and contradict one another. Rather than current counter-terror policies being about social integration, da Silva et al. (2022: 276) posit the counter-terror assemblage is 'a technique of power' in which 'populations are understood and managed' rather than a sincere effort of social integration.

Part of this discourse assumes that Muslims within the United Kingdom form a singular 'Muslim' community that remains isolated within itself. The author sought to steer away from 'exceptionalising' Muslim practice by interviewing a large array of Muslim peoples, institutions, mosques, and charity organisations irrespective of Islamic school (*madhab*), traditions or sects. Over 30 in-depth open-ended interviews were conducted between 2013 and 2017 with over a hundred informal interviews and discussions in addition to participant observation from London to Inverness. What is indicative of the current political and social climate is that most participants willing to assist this research have done so based on the assurance of anonymity.

Emphasis should also be granted to the fact that many within the charitable sector dislike the sub-categorisation of 'Muslim' charity, arguing this creates a false distinction between them and their mainstream counterparts. Yet, 'the political reality that governments, media, and development practitioners in fact already categorise practitioners and subject them, whether intentionally or not, to a particular set of practices and presumptions' (Barzegar and El Karhili, 2017: 11) justifies the use of the term 'Muslim charity' while acknowledging that distinction can be unwarranted and even at times harmful. As a charity that self-ascribes as 'Muslim' commented:

While we call ourselves Muslim charities and the Muslim sector . . . we are a humanitarian organisations . . . in a way the Islamic charity label works against us because of the way things are. People see the word 'Islamic' or 'Muslim' and it becomes a negative – 'they must have links to terrorism'. (Interview with author 2017)

This coincides with research by Faure (2020) who articulated that Muslim charities 'suffer from a lack of recognition and occasionally from the mistrust of government, humanitarian organisations and European public opinion . . . and the permanent debate on radicalisation have tarnished their image towards a broader audience', hence the reluctance of some charities to embrace the categorisation of 'Muslim charity'.

Counter-terror or counter-productive?

The United Kingdom's overarching counter-terror policy known as CONTEST (HM Government, 2018) has faced several criticisms since its conception. Specifically, the *Prevent Strategy* (HM Government, 2011) has undergone fierce debate from across disciplines, professions, and political orientations (Dudenhoefer, 2018; Heath-Kelly, 2013; Kundnani, 2009; Qurashi, 2018). Important to charities are the lesser-known financial counter-terror policies. Financial counter-terror strategies expanded rapidly and globally just 2 weeks after 9/11, instigated by the United States' 'Terrorist Financing Executive Order' of 24 September 2001 (Keatinge, 2014). Particularly pertinent to the United

Kingdom are the special recommendations offered by the Paris-based, Financial Action Task Force (FATF). The new FATF regulations instructed all countries to criminalise the financing of terrorism, freeze and confiscate terrorist assets, and impose strict controls and surveillance on banks and non-traditional finance systems (Warde, 2007: 48). The UK's Terrorist Asset Freezing Act 2010 is entirely consistent with FATF recommendations. Given the array of financial counter-terror policies both globally and domestically, De Goede (2012: 28) has referred to the various strategies as an 'assemblage'. De Goede (2012: 28) explains that 'the transnational landscape of laws, institutions, treaties, and private initiatives that play a role in fighting terrorism financing is complex, not necessarily transparent, and at times contradictory'. The counter-terror 'assemblage' thus connotes an array of overlapping and intertwining policies. The opaque, 'complex', and 'at times contradictory' nature of the counter-terror assemblage ensures difficulty in pinpointing exactly which policies are having negative effects – it is the cumulative nature of 'at times contradictory' policies which are causing counter-productive and unintended consequences.

According to the latest version of CONTEST, 'actively supporting mainstream voices especially in our faith communities and civil society' (HM Government, 2018: 78) is crucial to 'counter radicalisation and extremist narratives' (HM Government, 2018: 34). Conversely, the assumption is that 'communities which do not or cannot participate in civic society are more likely to be vulnerable to radicalisation. A successful integration strategy is therefore important to counter-terrorism' (HM Government, 2018: 23). Therefore, civic and societal integration is deemed (rightly or wrongly) as a cornerstone of preventing 'radicalisation' and 'extremism'.

The assumption that certain individuals and communities 'do not or cannot' (HM Government, 2018: 23) integrate into mainstream society has fed into the perception of Muslim communities specifically as a 'problem' to be solved for their assumed isolationism. Previous *Prime Minister* David Cameron made the 'problem' of Muslim isolationism specific in 2011 when he stated that:

Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream . . . and this leaves some young Muslims feeling rootless and the search for something to belong to and something to believe in, can lead them to this extremist ideology. (Cameron, 2011)

This singling out of Muslim individuals and communities, counter-productively, feeds into another assumed correlation with 'extremism' by creating conditions for marginalisation and grievances according to CONTEST – 'political exclusion and group grievances are drivers of terrorism' (HM Government, 2018: 23).

The term 'extremism' is legally undefined in British law but is understood in the CONTEST policy as 'the vocal or active opposition to fundamental British Values' (HM Government, 2011: 107). First, what 'fundamental British Values' are, and crucially who defines them, is opaque. However, an incomplete list of 'fundamental British values' includes democracy, tolerance, and rule of law, among others (HM Government, 2011: 107). While the list is itself fallacious, its 'incompleteness' has legal implications. The potential to add to 'fundamental British values' retrospectively remains a possibility. In this narrative, the 'extremist' is not categorised as such by their actions (violent or otherwise) but by not adhering to 'British values'. As Faure Walker (2019) has stated, 'by failing to provide a precise definition of these values, the "extremist" is defined as the

other'. This coincides with Massey's (1994: 169) work on the identity of place as she argues that to understand the identity of place as stable 'requires them to be enclosures . . . to establish their identity through negative counter position with the Other'.

I argue that whatever 'British values' are, 'British values' have, and will continue to be, fluid, malleable, and contingent upon space and time (Stronach et al., 2020: 15). Societal norms and their associated meanings shift as they interact and compete with other existing norms (Haspeslagh, 2020: 510). Massey (1994: 153) has forcefully argued that just as individual identities are constructed so are the identities of 'place' (in this case the United Kingdom). Massey (1994: 169) argues that 'identities of places are inevitably unfixed. They are unfixed in part precisely because the social relations out of which they are constructed are themselves by their very nature dynamic and changing'. Given the constructed nature of 'British values' it is argued that Muslim charitable practices can be (and already are) part of a shared value system within the United Kingdom. However, the latter section of the article will posit that the values enshrined in Muslim charitable giving offer the potential for a more inclusive and less discriminatory conceptualisation of social integration than that currently espoused by the UK government.

According to Jarvis et al. (2020: 97), "'British values" are not only made (by people) rather than given; they also appear to be made differently by different people'. If British values are 'made . . . rather than given', they are likely to be made within the spaces of civil society as different individuals and communities navigate and respond to each other, hence Muslim charitable practice is a domain in which shared values are being constructed.

However, the assemblage of counter-terror policies is negatively impacting the civic and humanitarian efforts of Muslim charitable practitioners, thereby directly hampering the social integration potential that the United Kingdom's counter-terror policies reportedly seek to support. While various documents in the Counter-Terror assemblage claim social integration to be a tool in preventing 'extremism', scholarly research suggests that the Counter-Terror assemblage is in fact more focused on policing and surveillance than community cohesion (da Silva et al., 2022; Faure Walker, 2021; Kundnani, 2014; Whiting et al., 2021). So much so that Faure Walker (2021: xv) has argued that 'the only way to promote a more cohesive and hospitable society is to abandon counter-extremism programmes'.

Charity (broadly) is understood within *Prevent* as both a problem and a solution. On the one hand, the *Prevent* strategy states that 'legitimate charities provide mechanisms for constructive debate and social action to build a strong civil society. Charities can be an important protection against extremism and terrorism' (HM Government, 2011: 92). On the other hand, it is argued that 'charities can be formed to raise funds often under false pretences for terrorist groups' (HM Government, 2011: 93). This is despite none of the recent terror attacks across Europe having any link to any charity (Muslim or other). With tenuous evidence, charitable institutions and organisations in the United Kingdom fell into the *Prevent* Strategy and counter-terror legislation which saw the securitisation of charity broadly and Muslim charity specifically. As da Silva et al. (2022) have argued, an ongoing critique of *Prevent* 'has been the extent to which it singles out Muslims as the source of risk'.

By enclosing charities within counter-terror assemblages the integration function of charities becomes dampened. This is despite the revised *Prevent* strategy (unveiled in 2011) seeking to disentangle integration efforts from counter-terror. This separation was instigated for good reason as social integration efforts received allegations of spying and

surveillance of communities while integrated with counter-terror initiatives (Kundnani, 2009, 2014). The revised *Prevent* strategy claimed the original to be ‘flawed’ by confusing the ‘delivery of Government policy to promote integration with Government policy to prevent terrorism’ (HM Government, 2011: 1). Thus, integration and terror prevention were consciously separated in the revised strategy arguing that ‘Prevent must not assume control of or allocate funding to integration projects . . . the Government will not securitise its integration strategy. This has been a mistake in the past’ (HM Government, 2011). While acknowledging that linking counter-terror to the funding of integration projects was a ‘mistake’, it took until 2021 to close the controversial counter-extremism programme Building a Stronger Britain Together, which had provided £60 million to local ‘integration’ projects to counter ‘radicalisation’ and ‘extremism’ (Datham, 2021). I argue that despite seeking to learn from past mistakes, the revised *Prevent* strategy has, in practice, failed to disentangle integration from securitisation (see the example of Eric Pickles, Department for Communities and Local Government below). This failure is largely a result of misunderstanding or neglecting the effects of one policy upon another – specifically the detrimental effects of counter-terror practices on civil society integration efforts. This echoes De Goede’s (2012: 28) statement cited earlier that the counter-terror ‘assemblage’ can be contradictory.

Banking procedures associated with financial counter-terror strategies (following the Special Recommendations by FATF) are currently one of the most difficult and fundamental challenges facing all charities. Bank’s ‘de-risking’ and ‘know your customer’ policies have disproportionately and negatively affected Muslim charities and individuals (CFG, 2018; Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2015; May, 2021). To comply with FATF regulations, banks must verify the identity of account holders by checking names against the designation lists provided by both national and international governments and institutions (De and Goede, 2012: 178). Importantly, names appear on the designation list without further identifying features such as date of birth, resulting in banking complications for individuals who simply happen to have the same name as a designated person. The proscription of designated entities is a central aspect of global counter-terror procedures which are widely, though inconsistently applied (Jarvis and Legrand, 2018: 199). Haspeslagh (2020: 506) has stated that ‘proscription has emerged as shorthand for who should be considered a “terrorist”’ despite no universal definition of ‘terrorism’ existing. Proscription therefore allows a range of ‘direct and indirect sanctions and penalties’, including the freezing of assets in the United Kingdom as outlined in The Terrorism Act 2000 (Jarvis and Legrand, 2016: 559).

All charities interviewed by the author had experienced delays in banking payments, threats of bank account closures, or had their bank accounts closed or refused. Research conducted by the Charity Finance Group examined a range of charities (secular and faith-based) and found that 41% had faced transfer delays, 27% had transfers denied by their own bank, 8% had funds frozen, while 6% were denied accounts (CFG, 2018: 11). The report states that ‘overall, 79% of respondents had some kind of problem in accessing or using mainstream banking channels’ (CFG, 2018: 12). Most charities received no explanations or evidence to why banking de-risking policies had been applied.

Banking procedures have affected the whole spectrum of the charity sector but have excessively affected Muslim charities specifically. This is largely because the decision to apply de-risking strategies and/or reporting terrorist financing is up to the non-expert individual conducting the banking transaction and is ‘largely informed by the impressions of the individual(s) conducting the transaction’ (Iofolla, 2018: 86).

'Impressions' by non-expert individuals are likely to draw on the popular societal perception of the intertwining of Islam with 'terrorism', thus shaping dominant society understandings of what terrorism 'looks like' and disproportionately affecting Muslim individuals (Whiting et al., 2021). All this relates to conceptualisations of the 'suspect community'. Breen-Smyth (2014: 223) has argued that the 'suspect community' is an 'imagined one, created in the imagination of a suspicious public'. Breen-Smyth (2014: 231) continues by arguing that the construction of the 'suspect community' is produced and reproduced 'by mechanisms deployed by the state' which 'are directed at one specific population identified by an ethnic, religious or other identity marker'. The surveillance, profiling, and suspicion cast upon Muslims hamper the internal work of Muslim charities themselves. In addition, it can exclude Muslim charitable practitioners from everyday banking activities and economic life – creating the very conditions of exclusion, isolation, and grievance which CONTEST seeks to overcome. As Breen-Smyth (2014: 223) has commented, the creation of a 'suspect community' ultimately silences and marginalises the community, preventing or curtailing democratic participation of the 'suspected' community which in turn undermines social integration and peaceful politics.

Challenges to social integration

As Heuser (2005: 24) argues, 'the keys to social cohesion are creating stability, trust, empowerment, and reciprocity that translate into the greater good'. Currently, the elements of 'stability' and 'trust' are being undermined, not through the charities themselves or Muslim communities generally, but ill-founded political rhetoric, misleading media reports and counter-productive counter-terror initiatives.

A specific example which demonstrates the tensions between counter-terror and social integration efforts is the actions of Eric Pickles in 2014 in the position of Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. Note that Pickles' actions came *after* the supposed separation between counter-terror policies associated with *Prevent* and social integration work. In a written statement to the House of Commons in 2014, Mr Pickles emphasised the shift in policy from multiculturalism to social cohesion when he wrote 'in contrast to the last administration, we have moved away from supporting separate communities' identities – "single group funding" – as it undermines integration' (Pickles, 2014). At the same time, 'integration' is linked to 'extremism' when Pickles states that increased integration is desirable for 'confronting and challenging extremism in all its forms' (Pickles, 2014). This statement was made in relation to unsubstantiated allegations made in *The Telegraph* (Turner, 2014) that specific Muslim charities had links to 'extremist' organisations (the allegations were based on 'association' rather than explicitly linked to any 'terrorist act' or designated entity). Based on this unevidenced newspaper article, Mr Pickles publicly and unilaterally ceased government funding to the charities concerned. The link to specifically Muslim charities was made explicit by Mr Pickles in the following statement:

following a formal review of the project, which included examination of allegations made in the press, . . . I have taken the decision to terminate its funding. The Muslim Charities Forum has failed to reassure us that they have robust measures in place to investigate and challenge their members. Concerns have also been raised about events held by member organisations, at which individuals with extremist views have been invited to speak. (Pickles, 2014)

What occurred is that a published *Telegraph* report (Turner, 2014) was accepted blindly by a government department and acted upon without an initial investigation from the *Charity Commission* nor with consultation with the charities concerned. As an employee working within the Muslim charitable sector remarked, the concerned charities were ‘charged, convicted and sentenced’ without the ability to defend themselves nor being told what exactly the alleged links to ‘extremism’ were (interview with author 2017). This is but one example which demonstrates the tension between counter-terror strategies and social integration efforts. To emphasise, all concerned charities were retrospectively investigated by the *Charity Commission*, cleared of links to ‘extremism’, issued public statements denying any wrongdoing, and are successfully operating to date.

The conflation of ‘extremism’ with Muslim charities severely undermines social integration efforts and thus, counter-terror strategies by eroding trust between the state and civil society. Research from the United States has concluded that:

Aggressive prosecutions of Muslim charities and individuals across the country have embittered communities that feel besieged by their government and distrusted by their non-Muslim compatriots . . . As a consequence, the vibrancy and development of civil society within these communities is at risk of being significantly stunted. (Aziz, 2011)

The lack of transparent, accountable, and robust evidence from both media outlets and certain politicians has added to the perceived feelings of distrust between Muslims and elements within the current British government. This lack of evidence to substantiate allegations of terror financing is particularly apparent in the contemporary era that has increased surveillance, scrutiny, and bureaucracy for the Third Sector itself while seemingly taking a different approach for policy and government under the guise of ‘national security’. The dangers of this perceived duplicity for social integration efforts and counter-terror were articulated by one employee of a British Muslim charity who stated that:

A lot of people were saying that there are two different laws here. They are saying ‘look, we have tried democracy, we’ve given it a chance but there are double standards between Muslim and white non-Muslims’. It’s why you have people going to the other extreme. (Interview with author 2017)

If trust is to be meaningfully established and social integration secured, transparency, accountability, and evidence must be supplied by all sides of the ‘trinity’ – state, market, and civil society – and cannot be held to be the responsibility of only a segment of one of the three.

Understanding Muslim charitable practices in the United Kingdom

Muslim charities and Muslim individuals were among the first respondents to the Covid crisis both domestically and globally (Uddin, 2020). As the Covid crisis began, global *zakat* (obligatory alms) rose dramatically as Muslims responded to the crisis by donating their religious obligations (Charities Aid Foundation (CAF), 2021: 7). As the cost-of-living crisis continues to negatively affect individuals and households, general charitable donations among the British public have decreased (CAF, 2021) apart from Muslim and

other faith-based donors (Whitehead, 2020; YouGov, 2021). In this context, Muslim charities have provided a dazzling array of support for British communities of all faith or none. Food parcels, clothing, small grants, burial services, advice, distribution of personal protective equipment, and efforts in tackling loneliness are just some of the services British Muslim charities provided during the height of Covid restrictions (Uddin, 2020: 8). Not only did this provide vital services for some of the most vulnerable in British society (of whatever faith or none), but it also grants an opportunity to shift the narrative from concerns of funding terrorism to humanitarian assistance and social integration.

To demonstrate the civic and social integration potentials of Muslim charitable giving it is necessary to provide an overview of how, and why, British Muslims give to charitable causes within the United Kingdom. While doing so, it is pertinent to bear in mind that CONTEST stipulates that it aims to ‘build strong integrated communities where people- whatever their background – live, work, learn, and socialize together, based on shared rights, responsibilities, and opportunities’ (HM Government, 2018: 78). The below seeks to make visible the ways in which British Muslim charities ‘work, live, learn and socialise’ both together and with their non-Muslim fellow citizens.

Many of the charities I interviewed considered themselves primarily humanitarian rather than religious per se, yet this does not detract from the founders of the charities who, driven by values and ethics of faith, put that faith into action by beginning the charity in the first place. The perception of being a ‘Muslim’ charity is also largely correlated with each charity’s donor base. The wishes of the majority donor base are extremely important to any charitable organisation. As Petersen addresses, ‘organisations do not formulate and present their ideologies to an undefined or abstract other but address particular *audiences* . . . if audiences do not consider organisations to be legitimate, they will not support them’ (Petersen, 2015: 40).

Certain charities I spoke to, while they considered themselves humanitarian rather than faith-based, were acutely aware of how they were *perceived* by their majority donor base. An example of this is the Yorkshire-based charity *Penny Appeal* which does not have the words ‘Muslim’ or ‘Islamic’ in the title, does not profess any faith in its guiding statements, assists in over 30 countries globally, on the criteria of need, not religion, ethnicity, or sect and as such is easily conceived of as simply a charity aimed at poverty alleviation. Yet, many of its donors perceive it as a ‘Muslim’ charity, or certainly that is how many of my interview participants understood it.

Penny Appeal collects charitable donations under many project titles considered largely ‘secular’ such as ‘adopt a Gran’, but also has a ‘100% *zakat*’ collection fund. By including *zakat* within its donations, it is directly meeting a need required by its majority donor base and to publicly deny any association with ‘Islam’ would de-legitimise its ability to take responsibility for their donors’ religious obligations. Of note is that *Penny Appeal*’s headquarters are established consciously in the founder’s hometown of Wakefield, Yorkshire, providing over 200 jobs to the local community and invoking over 3000 volunteers. Office staff were notably of a diverse selection of British peoples many of whom were non-Muslim or of no faith whatsoever demonstrating the potential of social integration. The case of *Penny Appeal* certainly appears to be performing exactly the role of social integration that CONTEST aims for in terms of building ‘strong integrated communities where people- whatever their background – live, work, learn, and socialize together, based on shared rights, responsibilities, and opportunities’ (HM Government, 2018: 78).

Muslim charity and the potential for social cohesion: *Zakat* and *Sadaqah*

Zakat (obligatory alms) is the third of the five pillars of Islam and is considered *fard* (obligatory) for all Muslims who are sound of mind, of age, and have savings over the stated threshold (*nisab*). *Zakat* has restrictions on who can be beneficiaries as outlined in the Qur'an. *Sadaqah*, in contrast, is considered general, voluntary charity without the restrictions or obligations of *zakat*.

When asked what the purpose of *zakat* is, the potential for social cohesion becomes clear from the view of my interviewees. As a director of a busy mosque in London reported, '*Zakat* is one of the pillars because it is important to guarantee a better society around you; to show your participation to those around you and to do this for the sake of God' (interview with author 2014). Another interviewee from the Muslim Association of Britain described the consequences of *zakat* as being the 'development of sacrifice, selflessness, to help others. *Zakat* helps combat diseases, aspects of crime, greed, or taking advantage of others' (interview with author 2014). From a scholarly perspective, the purpose of *zakat* is said to encourage the development of pious, moral persons in that '*zakat* moulds the individual into responsible caring persons. It inculcates the spirit of good will, cooperation, and brotherhood in upholding social solidarity in the society' (Abdullah and Suhaib, 2011: 85).

Sadaqah is not restricted to the giving of monies alone. As a young professional Muslim woman told me '*Sadaqah* is very flexible: you can give to anything and everybody – Muslim or non-Muslim' (interview with author 2017). The practical consequences of this are that Muslims will entrust *sadaqah* to any cause they feel worthy and is most often distributed to charities that do not distinguish the Muslim donor from any other charitable actor in society.

The majority of donated funds from Muslim individuals are not constrained for use on Muslims only nor restricted to 'Muslim' charities. A Humanitarian Policy Group report indicated for instance that Muslim charities may make up around 4.74% of the charitable sector yet they receive only 3.32% of overall charitable income (Wharton and Las Casas, 2016). This should not be mistaken for Muslim individuals giving less charity than others in society. According to a joint survey between JustGiving and Independent Communications and Marketing (ICM), Muslims donate to charitable causes more than any other religious group within the United Kingdom averaging annual donations of £371 per head in contrast to the national average of £165 (Ainsworth, 2013; Khimji, 2014: 2). What this suggests is that far from being isolationists and giving only to fellow Muslims, the British Muslim population are willing to financially support causes that transcend faith boundaries. Monies are therefore donated with the knowledge and intention that they fall into the category of *sadaqah* and will be used for charitable purposes for those in need regardless of faith, nationality, or other exclusive categories.

A common authenticated *hadith* ('sayings and doings of the Prophet') proclaims, 'He is not a believer whose stomach is full while his neighbour is hungry' (Sunnah al-Kubra 19049). Of note is that the saying simply says 'neighbour' not *Muslim* neighbour and all respondents understood it this way. Thus, there is a strong ethos to ensure all in your community, regardless of faith or none, do not go wanting for the most basic of life's necessities. An employee of Islamic Relief expanded on the same *hadith* saying 'but which neighbour? Black? Muslim? Non-Muslim? *Neighbour*: full stop' (interview with author 2014). This *hadith* helps explain the extraordinary charitable efforts by British Muslims

during the height of the Covid crisis that sought to assist all ‘neighbours’ in need in British society (Uddin, 2020).

Unlike charity as generally understood in Western society, *zakat* is not a ‘gift’ to the less fortunate but is considered their right (*haqq*). Wealth ultimately belongs to God and is deemed a trust in the hands of some for the benefit of all. While the notion of ‘gift’ is somewhat an antithesis to *zakat*, it relates somewhat to Mauss’ theoretical work in which he points out that a ‘gift’ creates unity as

it serves to transcend the boundaries of the individual . . . the process of giving incorporates both giver and receiver into a larger self. Giving to the collective is not imagined as impoverishing the individual, but as creating a sum of abundance which is greater than the separate gifts and in which all will share. (Cited in Dunn, 1996: 436–437)

Zakat may be the only obligatory alms giving in Sunni Islam, but those interviewed considered it merely a trifle to how much, and how often, most practising Muslims donate and give to charitable causes. As one charity employee stated:

I think, if you have got that core practise of giving *zakat* and you accept it as one of the fundamentals of putting your religion into practise, I think from there will spring other charitable practise and charitable giving and it doesn’t have to be monetary either. I think what it does is reinforces your sense of humanity . . . so then you start acting charitably in your general life, like helping the elderly across the road or helping your neighbour all these sorts of things. I think especially for young people it builds up their character and develops them as a human being but also makes them socially aware if you like, by discovering their role in the world. (Interview with author 2017)

From the above, the potential for social integration therefore lies not only in the practical assistance to the needy but also in helping develop individuals to be ‘socially aware’ and thus able to become a positive contributor to civil society.

Muslim/Muslim integration

Identity politics has been on the rise as an explanatory tool in understanding the presumed failure of multiculturalism and the erosion of social cohesion, yet studies have argued that more traditional concepts such as class and local environment still have more explanatory power than other identifiers such as religion and ethnicity (Laurence, 2009: 70). This coincides with the findings of the *Commission on Integration and Cohesion* (CIC) which states that ‘deprivation remains a key influencer of cohesion, but the fact that some areas have high deprivation and high cohesion shows that local action can build resilience to its effects’ (CIC, 2007: 20). If this is indeed the case, attempts at poverty alleviation and reductions of wealth gaps have the potential to be a strong instrument to bridge gaps between (*and within*) communities and assist in the process of social integration. Indeed, charitable practices that cross religious, ethnic, or cultural boundaries not only contribute in practical assistance to the needy, but also potentially create solidarities and community awareness in promotional roles, activities, and general negotiations in the Third Sector irrespective of faith, ethnicity, or other identity attributes. As already stated, civil society is far from a homogeneous unit and diversity exists in all its sub-sections including within the various Muslim communities within the United Kingdom. In this sense, even seemingly ‘isolationist’ practices such as *zakat*, which almost entirely stays within Muslim

demographics, can be seen as an important tool for social integration in that it can help bridge ties between various Muslim sects, schools of thought (*madhab*), practices, and cultures. As a young Muslim charity shop manager explained to me regarding the importance of charity in Islam:

It creates brotherhood – brothers and sisters united. Automatically you have been brought up with the belief that you *have* to give to the poor; they need it . . . They have a right . . . When you give to them you become part of their life to an extent, they become like your brother and this creates a love between you as a human race . . . it creates the bonds of one human race. (Interview with author 2014)

Muslim charities are potential bridging points not only between Muslim and non-Muslim communities, but *between* Muslim communities themselves. British Muslims are often discussed as a singular, homogeneous whole without regard to ethnicity, class, generation, gender, sect, school (*madhab*), or tradition (Deobandi, Sufi, Salafi, etc.). While largely invisible to non-Muslim communities, tensions exist between the various heterogeneous Muslim communities and individuals. Even seemingly insular charities and mosque collections must find ways to negotiate the differing views and perspectives of members and contributors. Thus, the social integration *between* Muslims is often an overlooked factor of Muslim charity due to the erroneous assumption that British Muslims are a single homogeneous community. As Barylo (2018: 3–4) has stated of Muslim charities, ‘the diverse cultural and spiritual backgrounds of their members are no longer sources of division, but a wealth they use to build bridges throughout the Muslim community’.

Conclusion

At the time of writing Britain is undergoing overlapping crises which includes post-Covid recovery, cost of living, a collapsing National Health Service, and union strikes. As ‘mainstream’ society slim back their charitable donations while the needs of society increase, the sustained charitable giving from Muslim donors will rise in importance. Muslim charities and humanitarian organisations have filled the gap that ‘Big Society’ offered and in doing so, support the state in its current agenda of social integration. This article has argued that the consistent intertwining of social integration with counter-terror is at best counter-productive. As segments of British society become more reliant on charitable provisions, it will become increasingly important to support, rather than thwart, the efforts of Muslim charities. This is not only for the benefit of Muslim charities and their members but crucially to continue support to the British public (regardless of faith) at a time of increasing need.

In the summer of 2022, the Muslim Charities Forum (MCF) launched their report ‘Bridges of Hope’ (MCF, 2022), in the House of Commons, supported by the All-Party Group on British Muslims. The efforts towards social integration are conscious and tangible in the naming of the report. ‘Bridges’ between different communities (faith-based or secular) are actively being sought by Muslim charitable practitioners and thus an important tool in social integration. Saliently, the MCF report was launched on Monday evening, and by Tuesday afternoon British politics was consumed by high-profile resignations from *Prime Minister* Boris Johnson’s cabinet dominating media headlines and effectively burying the ‘Bridges of Hope’ report.

Whatever ‘British values’ are, the MCF’s decision to release the ‘Bridges of Hope’ report in the Houses of Commons is very ‘British’. The palpable excitement of the MCF

and invited guests at simply being in the deeply historic heart of British parliamentary democracy speaks to the sense of 'shared values' and belonging to the United Kingdom. In our post-Covid environment, there is an opportunity to shift the narrative of Muslim charitable giving from a factor in 'extremism' to an important tool in combating extremist narratives. This can be done by either radically revising counter-terror strategies or as Faure Walker (2021: xi) argues to abandon them altogether. Currently, counter-terror strategies counter-productively act as a barrier for social integration thwarting its own internal logic. As Massey (1994: 142) has argued, 'we can only build unity if we have the confidence to face diversity . . . and to analyse the *real* conditions for solidarity'. By exploring the social integration effects of Muslim charitable practitioners, this article has sought to explore the 'real' conditions for social integration. In so doing, it hopes to add to debates about how to conceptualise social integration in a more inclusive and transformative manner than that currently utilised in the United Kingdom. Rather than casting suspicion on non-Western conceptualisations, in increasingly plural societies, there is much to learn from the richness of diversity and the actors currently classified as the Other.


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