

Finding unity across difference? The alliances and fractures of the anti-war movement in Britain

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Abstract

The contemporary anti-war movement is diverse and heterogeneous. It is at once fractured and fragmented, and yet simultaneously full of alliances and coalitions. This paper critically explores these alliances and fractures. Drawing materials from a two year ESRC research project, it provides evidence from in-depth analysis of case studies from a full range of anti-war and peace organisations including Faslane 365, Stop the War Coalition, the Society of Friends (Quakers), Justice Not Vengeance, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and a range of Muslim organisations. It examines a variety of examples of how different groups worked together across difference, how alliances were made, fell apart and the consequences of these changes to the capacity of the movement to voice its objections to war. It also includes a consideration of the role of Information and Communication Technologies in potentially facilitating broader alliances to be built and maintained.

Key words: War, activism, alliances, diversity, and difference

Introduction

The anti-war movement is fractured and fragmented, yet simultaneously it contains multiple alliances and coalitions. The common cause is 'Stop the War', but the more detailed aims, justifications, methods and alternatives of participants are as heterogeneous as the groups involved. It joined together to oppose the 'War on Terror' and pursuit of this goal operates outside and across party politics. In what follows, we then examine some of the processes by which coalitions and alliances might achieve a degree of harmony and cooperation despite their differences.

In key respects the anti-war movement is a union of opposites. Feminists march with patriarchy, Muslim women wearing hijabs campaign alongside bejeaned students, Jews walked in protest against Israel's 2006 invasion of Lebanon alongside anti-Semites declaiming 'We are all Hezbollah', secular Trotskyists link with devout Christians, extreme left-wingers join with centrist Liberal Democrats, and those who wish for the military defeat of Anglo-American forces combine with deeply committed pacifists. As Respect candidate and regular StWC speaker Yvonne Ridley told us, 'In Britain, the anti-war movement has forced some bizarre coalitions'. Given this diversity it is hard to think of such groups forming a genuinely united social movement. Although there is commonality in resistance to the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, their framing and broader demands differ widely. Some groups, for instance, link their resistance to war to broader anti-imperialist struggles or to a pacifist ideology, while others believe in the necessity of war but that the specific war against Iraq was not justified.

This paper is based on material collated during a two year ESRC research project. It provides evidence from in-depth analysis of five case studies from a full range of anti-war and peace organisations; Faslane 365, Stop the War Coalition (StWC), the Society of Friends, Justice

Not Vengeance (JNV), Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). In addition a number of Muslim anti-war organisations and networks were examined, including The Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), The Muslim Public Affairs Committee (MPACUK), and Cage Prisoner. In total 60 interviews were conducted with a range of activists from leading figures to lay members. There was observation of demonstrations and vigils protesting war, as well as close analysis of electronic and hard copy literature from the movement.

Working Together

We suggest five ways – which are not mutually exclusive – in which groups work together, namely: with *formal coalitions*, by *shared identity*, by *common tactics and conduct*, by *acts of solidarity*, and by building *transnational networks*.

Formal Coalitions

The outstanding example of a formal coalition in the current anti-war movement is Stop the War Coalition (StWC). This is the largest organization in Britain that arose to oppose the ‘War on Terror’. It came into existence in September 2001, growing from a groundswell of concern about an impending American military response after the 9/11 attacks. The coalition grew during its campaign against the invasion of Afghanistan and expanded as preparations for the invasion of Iraq developed in 2003. As it expanded StWC brought in other significant players, including a partnership with MAB and CND. Interestingly MAB was initially approached to be affiliated to StWC, but it did not want to be subsumed into the coalition and thus pushed to be an equal partner and sponsor of StWC events. Anas Altikriti, formerly of MAB, explained the tensions this caused; ‘at the time we didn’t realize that CND were also invited to become part of Stop the War coalition; however, they had refused on the basis that we were part of it and they didn’t want to be seen as part of the coalition that was against the rights of women, free speech and the like’. Resistance to the arrangement did not just come from CND, however, Anas goes on to note that ‘people were saying to us you’ll never succeed. We’ve never ever tried building any kind of position with the left, they will never have you. You’re on opposite extremes of the spectrum in terms of belief and faith. Their moral code, their values, in terms of their family values, is totally different to yours, and you will never be able to do much. You may be able to hold an event, but nothing more, nothing in the long run’.

On the coalition’s national executive are members of the Green Party, Respect, Friends of Al Aqsa, and CND as well as various MPs (e.g. Katie Clark, Jeremy Corbyn) and trade unionists. Its President is Tony Benn, and amongst a clutch of Vice Presidents are retired MP Tam Dalyell, novelist and political essayist Tariq Ali, Green Party MEP Caroline Lucas, and Respect MP George Galloway.

StWC also has affiliates from groups such as the Palestine Liberation Campaign, the British Muslim Initiative (BMI) (individuals who were once part of MAB) and the Communist Party of Britain. In addition to the London-based central group, dozens, later hundreds, of smaller local groups are affiliated to StWC. We calculated from its 2005-6 accounts that StWC has only about 300 individual members, but its emphasis on affiliations from groups such as trade unions and branches of political campaigns increases its weight.

StWC places emphasis upon marches (chiefly regular demonstrations, usually in London) that are aimed at bringing pressure to bear on government as well as to maintain public awareness of the issues. Its organization is steered by three or four people who work full time in the central office. This enables StWC to respond quickly to events, having nimble campaigns, but it is not something that allows for much dialogue or open discussion.

StWC was driven from the outset by an established Trotskyist group, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), which – like everyone else - was unprepared for the large-scale ethnic minority involvement. The SWP's experience and political nous, combined with its organizational discipline and resources, allowed it to some extent to channel this unanticipated opposition. However, a price of the coalition has been that the SWP muted its Marxist adherence to socialism and secularism. Uncompromising leftist criticism of patriarchal family formations and of religion as an anti-scientific 'opiate of the masses' has been dampened for the sake of maintaining a united front by those wary of upsetting the Islamic devout. The website of the SWP now announces a plural and inclusive outlook:

We fight alongside anybody or any organization that wants to build the movement. The anti-war movement has gained its strength from its unity and breadth. That's why we fight to maintain the principles [of] unity of all the coalitions and campaigns with which we are involved. We respect people with ideas that are different from ours. So, while we seek to persuade people of our revolutionary ideas, we resist moves to narrow the movement to those who are already part of the radical left. (SWP 2007)

Some sense of the problems this entails comes from Mike Marqusee, former StWC press officer, who told us:

The advantage of having the SWP as a national organization with a printing press and twenty full time workers and a rapid network for the distribution of leaflets was huge in getting the Stop the War Coalition off the ground. ...And I think they were right, in the sense that they felt that this is a crossroads in global politics. It was that strong sense that brought people together, and the SWP did have that. They then though took that into meaning that nothing should be allowed to confuse anybody about what was the absolute priority, which meant that the arguments, complex arguments about secularism and religion were not heard. ... So, for example, pretty early on, those people who questioned the link with MAB [Muslim Association of Britain] were castigated as Islamophobes.

Its annual conference, held over one day, is managed to ensure that a range of StWC members speak from the platform, thereby parading the breadth of the coalition, but motions shaping policy bear the imprint of core activists, especially those from the SWP. Thus at the Annual Conference on 10 June 2006 the programme had been prearranged and motions to be decided upon pre-printed. These had come from several organizations, but SWP motions came first after the opening speeches with others postponed for consideration towards the end of the packed day. Moreover, delegates wishing to speak were compelled to inform the chair in writing if they wished to intervene. This made for well-ordered proceedings, but it was evident that core players had exercised disproportionate influence over a significantly orchestrated event.

Attempting to Share Identities

Unity can be achieved by possessing a common outlook on the world. This has been important in past anti-war activism and it remains significant, for instance with regard to pacifist and left wing socialist involvement. However, shared identity as a basis for alliance is problematic in at least two ways: one, it can be exclusionary of potential allies who do not

have this identity, and two, identity is generally a much more complicated and nuanced matter than it appears once one looks beneath labels such as socialist or Christian.

In the recent anti-war movement it has been the engagement of a particular ethno-religious group, Muslims, that has been especially noteworthy. Recent events have galvanized many Muslims and impelled them to take part in the anti-war movement. Muslims are now a visible presence on anti-war demonstrations and routinely part of protest movements. In what follows we will work initially with the simple category Muslim, but later we will consider some of the complexities of identity this can disguise.

The involvement of a religious and ethnic minority has challenged the political left to accommodate and better understand such a heterogeneous coalition. For many Muslims such involvement seems to have been empowering and contributed to the proliferation of Muslim groups that sought political change through activism outside the formal polity.

This Muslim presence from the early days of StWC, as Mike Marqusee observed, ‘caught the SWP and the white left completely by surprise’. However, StWC soon capitalized on the opportunity to include a more diverse range of activists. Consequently, the strongest Muslim connections in the anti-war movement in Britain have been with left wing socialists, exemplified by the Respect Party that sought to capitalize on the Muslim anti-war vote, and the high profile presence of Respect Councillor Salma Yaqoob. In practice this has involved the StWC hosting key Muslim leader speakers at their events, and in the naming of a Muslim organization (originally MAB, since 2006 the BMI) as co-sponsors of StWC (with CND) organized London rallies.

Non-Muslim anti-war activists have spoken of the need for ‘respect and tolerance’ for Muslim practices, and as such prayer spaces were provided at key anti-war rallies. Many groups other than StWC also made links with Muslim anti-war activists. This is exemplified at the local scale (in Leicester) by joint meetings being called, Muslim speakers invited to address local groups, and vigils attracting a variety of Muslim support (expressed through different Islamic dress, chants and banner slogans).

This incorporation of diversity has been celebrated by many in the anti-war movement as a sign of its strength (the logic of numbers), liberalism (as opposed to others’ emphasis on war and terrorism), and as an example of integration in action (proving through practise that common ground can be found through political action). It is clear why non-Muslims sought the involvement of Muslims and vice versa. Both cohorts benefit from increased numbers and their respective arguments are strengthened by the inclusion of the other (for non-Muslims being able to illustrate their diversity and solidarity with ‘those under attack’; for Muslims supporters outside their own faith networks).

However, there are tensions in these relationships. A Muslim activist expressed a cynical view of why Muslims had been embraced by existing leftist anti-war groups, arguing that because Muslim communities were already highly organized internally (usually around mosques), then left groups could simply tap into those pre-existing networks to mobilize protesters. Asad Rehman, a Muslim activist formerly of StWC, qualified this perspective, suggesting that while Muslims were under-represented at StWC nationally and this was a source of discontent, people at ‘a local level worked together in very local coalitions – (and) that’s where people were represented. If the mosques weren’t necessarily representing themselves officially, what they were doing was they were opening space where people with a link to a mosque would say “oh yeah, 27 mosques in here, no problem, we know all the mosques, we’ll go and leaflet, we’ll get people outside all of that – it’ll be brilliant”. And there were public meetings – “make sure someone big from the Muslim community’s

speaking, some Iman, someone like that”, so it was very much done on those sort of levels’. Moreover, Asad was upset that Muslims had been targeted for inclusion rather than their being a broader focus on bringing in different voices, ‘where’s the Afro-Caribbean community in the anti-war movement, where’s the Sikh community, where’s the Hindu community – where are they? Nowhere. They’ve gone for what they think is an easy ... it weakened us and not only weakened but it’s created a narrower Muslim community’.

Despite the apparent success of the joint mobilizations in attracting large numbers and diversity, these interactions were fraught with suspicion and rather temporary. Naima Bouteldja, a Muslim activist formerly in Globalise Resistance, said that MAB's involvement with StWC was perceived by many Muslim activists as 'mariage de convenance' which was not liable to last very long given the political culture and practises of the most organised group within the StWC, that was more interested in gaining short term political advantage than empowering Muslims. Although there was Muslim representation on the StWC Steering Committee (for example, Ismail Patel of Friends of Al Aqsa, and Dr Ghayasuddin Siddiqui of the Muslim Parliament), there were no Muslim office holders in the organization and, as Asad Rehman pointed out, ‘there were no big Muslim organizations represented there’. The inner workings and power of this steering committee remain contested. It was diverse in its composition and activists reported its discussions being open and inclusive. However, its resolutions were reportedly often ignored by office holders of StWC.

We spoke to several people who expressed concern that Muslims were being appropriated by secular anti-war groups so such groups could appear inclusive and draw on broader support. As Mike Marqusee insisted, ‘it’s not the rainbow coalition, it’s like someone painting the stripes and deciding who’s in and who’s out’. Beyond the temporary interactions of marches, or jointly held meetings, conversations were often not extended. Many non-Muslim anti-war activists had few direct links to Muslims and spoke of their frustration that coalitions had not been built, dialogue had not continued and mutual understanding had not been fostered.

By 2006, some non-Muslim activists in Leicester felt excluded by Muslim groups, who organized their own events and appeared to forget to invite them even though, for one event, the Muslims had billed a non-Muslim activist as a key speaker. Some could also feel uneasy marching alongside Muslims who were shouting for something they could not understand. Korin Grant recollected that, while pleased at ‘the number of Muslims who had turned up at the demo in Leicester’, she had misgivings because ‘while they were shouting things that I didn’t understand I suddenly thought I actually feel a bit uncomfortable because I really, really don’t know what they’re saying. And, you know, I hoped and assumed I would feel that way no matter what language was being spoken. But normally, if you’re on a march, you can shout along with other people. But I was being a steward and smiling and I just felt very much like they were laughing at me”.

From another position, Arif Sayeed, a Muslim student from Leicester who wore a jacket with a Palestinian flag to our meeting, described his pleasure when, on an anti-war march in London, he was walking side by side with a Orthodox Jew and realized that they could be on the same side. He argued that such demonstrations create space ‘for dialogue between people’. However, he did not feel able to talk to the Orthodox Jew, despite at other times initiating conversations with other left non-Muslim activists. Anti-war protest had helped bring Muslims out on to the streets alongside those with whom they rarely, if ever, had come into contact.

Throughout the recent period of anti-war conditions, a significant group of Muslims have felt an affiliation with a movement that was shared by others with many different backgrounds.

Thousands of people walked side by side, all opposing the same policies of the same government, but few talked to each other across the ethno-religious divide. In the following paragraphs we describe four reasons for this continuing division, these centre around the political foci of key anti-war organisations; a tendency to reify Muslims as a single community; the inherent difficulties of connecting across religious identity; and the complexities of the broader projects of Muslim politics in Britain.

1. Prioritization of Anti-War Campaigning

Some groups articulated the need to resist anti-terror legislation and try to prevent demonization of Muslims at the same time as arguing against war. For example, StWC began in 2001 with three demands: ‘Stop the War, No to a Racist Backlash, Defend Civil Liberties’. In practice, however, many groups prioritized their activities around anti-war campaigning rather than defence of civil liberties. Muslim interviewees spoke of their disappointment that more non-Muslims had not acted in their support after anti-terror raids or had not spoken out more assertively against their perceived persecution. Zina, a peace activist from Leicester, details this mis-match of priorities, ‘when we started trying to get people together for Faslane 365, I contacted loads of different Muslim organizations saying could I come and do a talk, would this be something you might support? And the response, time and again, is they’re just feeling so under pressure at the moment, so endangered at the moment that nobody who’s Muslim wants to stand up and be counted at the moment because they’re worried that the police will raid their houses and shoot them. And it’s a very understandable position for them to take’.

These mismatched priorities become more obvious over time. Dedicated activists feel overworked and when issues competed for their attention, non-Muslims prioritized anti-war campaigning. When their engagement with Muslim politics became complicated or difficult (for example, during public debates about the rights of women to wear the veil in late 2006) many chose to avoid taking sides. Moreover, such engagement was seen by some as a diversion from the more important politics of being anti-war.

2. Tendency to Reify ‘The Muslim Community’

Activists are attempting interaction between two different entities. On the one hand, there are those who have a particular repertoire of tactics and strategies aimed at a clear target. In the case of anti-war, that target is in the main the British government’s involvement in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. The target is broader than that, of course, incorporating the US government’s actions (especially with regard to Guantánamo Bay), a broader concern for peace, and horror at the loss of life. But the target in Britain is primarily national and primarily the government. Thus the fundamental aim of most of the groups involved in the anti-war movement is to mobilize public opinion against the wars, and thus force the government to change its strategy of involvement.

On the other hand, there is a diffuse, complex, fractious identity of Muslims in Britain. There is no discrete British Muslim identity. There may be some underlying unity in what it means to be Muslim, but there are a plethora of organizations attempting to represent ‘British Muslims’ politically and to the public which all represent different perspectives. In addition there are numerous small politically focused Muslim groups such as MPACUK, JustPeace, and the Muslim Network. For many Muslims there is an indivisible relation between anti-war opposition and criticism of new terrorism legislation. Because this is so, Muslim groups Cage Prisoner and Stop Political Terror may also be considered as part of the anti-war movement. However, like many of the smaller non-Muslim anti-war groups, these groups have struggled

to survive. JustPeace folded in 2005 and Stop Political Terror merged into Cage Prisoner in late 2006 due to a lack of resources. StWC Muslim Network has found it hard to get off the ground, its initiators conceding as recently as September 2007 that ‘we must be honest and recognise that there is still a great deal of work to be done within the Muslim community to build an awareness of what individuals can achieve by working together’ (StWC Muslim Network 2007). For Nahella Ashraf, a key instigator of the network, it was the prioritization of anti-war concerns above being Muslim that was proving problematic, ‘one of the reasons why I wanted to do the network was to broaden this kind of understanding as to what we’re trying to do with Stop the War. Because if you come into it from a Muslim group, then I think, you pigeon hole yourself as well as letting other people do it. That’s one of my biggest frustrations with Muslims, If I’ve said it’s a Muslim thing, they’ll turn up. It is quite difficult. ... It is frustrating that ... the fact that I am a Muslim... has more of an impact than what I have to say’. Moreover the ways in which Muslim participation was encouraged in anti-war campaigns was often structured via communities, rather than individual participation in anti-war groups. Thus, in Leicester Yaqub Dadhiwala (UoLISoc) noted that ‘three or four Imams in the city are very influential and they’ll make the final decision over what happens’.

As a result non-Muslim activists have had to engage with organizations which, although they may have expressed opinions about the war, did not articulate being anti-war as their core rationale. The majority of these organizations make representation on behalf of Muslim communities *per se*, and often on a range of broad issues that affect their constituents – such as education, crime, and security (for example, the Federation of Muslim Organizations in Leicestershire [FMO], or MAB), core principles being the defence of Muslims and advancement of their case. Unavoidably, their targets and requests are diffuse. Moreover, some of the targets for these groups are international, following through diasporic links beyond Britain.

3. The Challenge of Commonality Across Religious Identities

This complexity of Muslim identity in Britain is a core friction for those seeking commonality in the anti-war movement. For many interviewees, Muslim and non-Muslim, Islam became a barrier to co-operation. Activists found establishing commonality around religion difficult and many non-Muslims’ lack of understanding of Islam and the variety of ways in which Muslims practise their faith, further complicated matters. There were frequent misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and false assumptions made. At the same time, some Muslim activists said they had not joined anti-war groups because they felt such groups failed to respect the importance of Islam, ‘a religion or faith [which] people live with all their lives, they’re born with it, it’s integral, whereas their political view develops ... and sometimes it [anti-war activism] can just be a bit frivolous’ (Arif Sayeed).

The possibility of finding commonality has been complicated by the way in which Muslim identity has been essentialized in Britain. As Bouteldja points out, politicians and journalists have been ‘constantly entrapping and caricaturing Muslims within their religious identity’ (2007). As a result being Muslim in Britain has come to be expressed by many in the media as a singular identity, an identifier that categorizes large numbers of people under one banner in a way that few would attempt with Christianity. Fearful of alienating Muslims, or of adding to their demonization, few non-Muslim activists have questioned this homogenization. In an attempt to project a united anti-war movement, debate about the differences between Muslims and non-Muslims, let alone within Muslim communities, was often carefully avoided. Thus a former StWC activist, Stuart Hodkinson, an early member of Leeds StWC and reflecting on processes other groups had struggled with, recalled that it had ‘worked hard to cultivate and bring in ... those organizations that could bring a mass of Muslim people into the anti-war

movement and therefore you would have meetings of Stop the War Coalition, where anything ... to scare them [Muslims] off, was prevented – it was a complete and utter party line – we don't talk about capitalism, anti-capitalism - we don't talk about direct action'. A consequence was that, even amongst anti-war activists, Muslims were, as Mike Marqusee put it, 'conceptualized in almost a colonial fashion, in that the communities, and the elements, were seen as monolithic and homogeneous'. Consequently, as Asad argued, 'it's all very shallow front-type politics ... the white left thinks it's easier to get the vote from the Muslims – we've always argued 'leave us alone – you go and work with the white community – win them over because why aren't they on the demonstrations? – we can get the Muslim community – it's alright you standing outside the mosques trying to mobilize people to do that and so on – it's easy. ... they're replicating *shell type politics* which actually don't take you any further because they're actually not about plurality, engaging a lot of people, adding lots of different voices within it ... they have gone for the lowest common denominator type of politics, so actually they are doing the Muslim community a disservice, because actually they are allowing the debate to either be framed by the media or to be framed by the Islamists'.

While the mobilization potential of homogenization should be acknowledged, such simplification of identity hinders alliances in the longer run. Asad Rehman articulated his frustration as follows: 'what we didn't want was either the right or the left to see the Muslim community as one homogenous community, with one voice, one identity, and one political perspective. We thought it was very important for people to know that actually there's always been a progressive Muslim identity – we are not new on demonstrations, we've always been demonstrating – we've been demonstrating on many, many different issues – just because the white left has never seen people – but increasingly we looked to MAB as an easy way, more I would say a street product, hired to bring a lot of people out on the street.' In consequence of this homogenization, anti-war activists actually helped proliferate the singular and inadequate notion that there was a uniform Muslim identity in Britain and thus adhered to a blind respect for the rights of 'Muslims' to practise their faith as they saw fit. Having embraced it, but still ignorant of its subtleties, many non-Muslim activists were then too scared of appearing exclusionary to question Islamic beliefs or practices even though they often privately expressed unease. Interviewees often specifically asked for their reservations about some Islamic practices not to be quoted.

What could have been a moment of dialogue was in fact a period of polite silence under the auspices of non-Muslims showing 'respect and tolerance' for Muslims. Few interviewees said they had learned anything about Islam as they had focused on 'being anti-war' as the commonality. However, this superficiality of dialogue and embracement of 'Muslim' as an identifying category has led activists down a difficult path which has failed to lead to lasting interactions.

If the distinction becomes between 'Muslim' and 'non-Muslim', as it has in the anti-war movement, then religion becomes central to any discussion of commonality, and the categories oppositional; 'essentialisation thus reinforces the belief shared by many sectarians (both Muslims and non-Muslims) in the existence of two monolithic and antagonistic blocs that either coexist in separatist isolation or, if one of the groups dissolves, assimilates itself into the other' (Bouteldja 2007). But beyond a superficial understanding that Islam can teach peace and justice as much as can Christianity, religion is a rather non-negotiable entity through which to attempt a compromise. It can quickly become a highly emotive, intensely personal and polarized dialogue. If anti-war activists had been able to embrace other aspects of identity, such as diasporas, home-country links, and place-based identities there may have

been more ground with which to find commonality beyond the temporality and superficiality of 'being anti-war'.

4. The Complexities of Muslim Politics in Britain

The argument that religion is a difficult entity through which to reach commonality has led critics to suggest that the anti-war movement has perversely aided fundamentalist expressions of Islam. Nic Cohen, for instance, argues that anti-war activists' unquestioning alliances with Muslim opponents of the Iraq invasion have led them into supporting those they would otherwise abhor. Thus he reckons that 'the anti-war movement disgraced itself not because it was against the war in Iraq' – there was always a case to be made for this –, but rather 'because it could not oppose the counter-revolution once the war was over' (2007, p.289). Cohen claims that, by supporting Muslims *tout court*, rather than those Iraqis who opposed religious sectarianism, Al Qaeda, and the heritage of the Ba'ath Party, the anti-war movement failed to show solidarity with those who struggled for a genuinely alternative Iraq, thereby siding with 'theocrats and fascists' who, in the name of Islam, are central to the civil war 'insurgency' (Cohen, 2004; cf. Halliday 2007).

At the least critics such as Nic Cohen can help us to appreciate what many non-Muslim and Muslim activists already know: that the veneer of unity has prevented non-Muslim activists from engaging fully with the complexity of Muslim politics in Britain (cf. Anthony 2007). While some individuals have gone to great lengths to educate themselves, many more remain ignorant through fear of fracturing any perceived unity.

Given this, it is perhaps not surprising that anti-war groups have sought to avoid detailed debate about the principles and aims of the different Muslim organizations. Muslim identity politics are highly complex and contested, and the intersection between being British and Muslim has been problematic for many, especially politically articulate anti-war activists. For many Muslim anti-war activists their politicization afforded an opportunity to create identities beyond that of their parents and conservative Islam and to at times challenge the hierarchies established by their elders. Ismail Patel of Friends of Al Aqsa and BMI, argued that 'after the 9/11 event, 7/7 took place a few years later that allowed us to be able to discuss politics much more openly on the platform of the Stop the War coalition than we would have been able to say, in a Mosque environment ... because once you start defending Palestinians or the Iraqis and then you use language in which you have to confront the British Prime Minister and the British Government foreign policy, or even domestic policies, obviously then you're seen as a radical. And once you're seen as a radical, if you do not have a lot of people around you who are not of the same faith then you're in danger'. For Saleem (2005), the chair of JustPeace, it is the conflict of how to be British *and* Muslim which is exacerbating the alienation felt by some Muslim youth and creating a space for Islamist fundamentalism.

If such complexity could be embraced by non-Muslim activists this would not only facilitate those Muslim activists seeking to articulate new forms of who they are, but also subvert those such as Irving Horowitz (2004), who appear to cast Muslim anti-war voices as supporters of terrorism. It would also support a more informed dialogue between multiple voices as to what commonalities exist between different forms of Islam and non-Muslim activists. Activists would then be in a better position to understand why some Islamic practices are supported, contested or rejected by Muslims and consequently more clearly support those with whom they felt most aligned. By moving beyond the self-limiting 'respect' for multiculturalism (which can ironically foster separatism), anti-war activists could engage in the detailed sharing and exchanging of ideas that are necessary to practicing interculturalism (Hussain *et al*, 2006).

Common Tactics and Conduct

Some groups come together round the cause of anti-war activism which they pursue with a shared commitment in terms of tactics and conduct. There is an acute consciousness amongst such activists of the symbolic import of what they do and how they comport themselves in doing it.

Women in Black projects and subscribes to a cognate set of shared tactics and conduct. Established in the Middle East in 1988, its groups are spread round the world (but with an international email list accessible from its website) with each enjoying a high degree of autonomy. Women in Black activists characteristically hold regular peace vigils in places such as central London and New York, where their soberly dressed and dignified protests may be witnessed (Cockburn 2007). The group insists that ‘We are not an organization, but a means of mobilization and a formula for action. Women in Black actions are generally women only, and often take the form of women wearing black, standing in a public place in silent, non-violent vigils at regular times and intervals, carrying placards and handing out leaflets’. It continues to draw out the symbolic import of its tactics and conduct: ‘We use non-violent and non-aggressive forms of action. In addition to vigils Women in Black groups use many other forms of non-violent direct action such as sitting down to block a road, entering military bases and other forbidden zones, refusing to comply with orders, and “bearing witness”. Wearing black in some cultures signifies mourning, and feminist actions dressed in black convert women’s traditional passive mourning for the dead in war into a powerful refusal of the logic of war.’ (Women in Black, 2007).

Such groups are generally loosely organized, but they are not necessarily so. The pacifists in the Religious Society of Friends, for instance, also place emphasis on appropriate conduct and tactics of non-violence. Amongst Quakers there is concern to listen effectively, even – perhaps especially – to those whom one opposes, to remain calm however stressful the situation, and to ‘bear witness’ with dignity and sobriety. Steve Whiting of Turning the Tide, for instance, assured us that, to Quakers such as he ‘bearing witness is key, because the Quaker approach is very much your own experience of the divine in your own life, which you then share in your meetings with other Friends, and you live it out as guided, as guided by the divine god, the spirit, whatever you want to call it’. This accords with the common practice of holding ‘vigils’ at military and at other locations. Quakers told us that it was important to be seen at such places, but when there also to be seen to be acting appropriately. Non-violence is crucial here, as is internal self-control, even when the issues are felt passionately. For this reason one can see Quakers at vigils and on marches, holding up signs proclaiming who they are (in unostentatious ways). This, it is said, is one way in which others are drawn to Quakerism, though the Society does not seek for converts, seeing faith as coming from within the individual rather than from external stimuli. Whiting went on to insist that in a protest one might be burning with anger and frustration, but for Quakers what is crucial is ‘how you channel that anger into a positive energy’. This is not a matter of piety, but as Whiting added, more about ‘becoming or being the change you wish to bring about, which is what non-violence is about for us, and it plays itself out in terms of group process, how we are as a group. So we work with action groups, campaigning groups to say “look if we’re saying no to this, actually we can’t be behaving like that ourselves, we have to become a model for an alternative”’.

Enacting Solidarities

Solidarity activism, seeking change for the benefit of others rather than for oneself, often involves activism in one location to defend differently situated others (Passy, 2001). This is

more than just ‘care at a distance’ (Popke, 2006), but an enactment of that care. Some groups, such as Justice Not Vengeance (JNV), define their primary purpose as providing informational resources for other campaigners through effective use of ICTs. Other respondents referred to morale-boosting benefits of connecting to other anti-war groups online.

We conceive this as a desire to find and express solidarity. Following Bayat (2005), we might term this ‘imagined solidarity’. Bayat draws on Benedict Anderson’s (1991) work defining the nation as an imagined community ‘because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members ... yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion’ (p. 5). Imagined solidarity may be achieved through projecting locally grounded actions into the global arena, thereby increasing the significance of a campaign for participants. Interviewees highlighted their ability to communicate their participation in protest: Chris Goodwin, for example, a LCSTW campaigner, told us that ‘a lot of the big demonstrations have been coordinated around the world ... if nothing else – if we don’t stop the wars – at least you can hope that word about our actions gets out around the world’.

The need to show solidarity was felt especially keenly amongst activists who closely identified with those suffering in the Iraq war. In Britain this is most obviously represented by Muslim communities and reflects the Islamic concept of one *umma*, something Arif Sayeed articulated as ‘the unity, the brotherhood, the sisterhood, of all Muslims, wherever you are, whatever colour your skin is, wherever you live’. This was extended to a concern for justice for all: ‘You stand up for an injustice wherever it is – it doesn’t matter whether they’re Muslim or not’ insisted Naazish Azaim of UoLISoc.

Building Transnational Networks

Barriers to forming and sustaining coalitions in the anti-war movement are imposing. There are issues of resources, ideology and outlooks that must be addressed. Building coalitions across national borders brings additional difficulties beyond those required for a domestic coalition such as further cultural and political diversity, extra economic costs to be met because of longer distances, and variations in political contexts and power differentials between potential partner groups (Smith and Bandy 2004, 7-8). The particular context of the ‘War on Terror’ also militates against the conditions that have been previously conducive for some coalitions across national boundaries. Such coalitions have previously been encouraged by international governmental or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) seeking to facilitate network development. In addition, high profile targets in the form of international financial or political institutions have also been relatively easily identified (Bandy and Smith 2004, 230-34). Yet formal international bodies provide neither shared allies nor shared targets for domestic anti-war movements.

Necessarily then anti-war movements have targeted their own national governments. In spite of this, Kahn and Kellner (2004) contend that ‘the global internet... is creating the base and the basis for an unparalleled worldwide anti-war/ pro-peace and social justice movement during a time of terrorism, war and intense political struggle’ (p.88). If there are formidable substantive barriers to establishing transnational networks, perhaps the internet can facilitate their being overcome in the virtual domain, which in turn has potential for transnational developments on the ground.

Rather than generating international organizational frameworks some anti-war activists have created transnational linkages of solidarity between local struggles. This might be conceived as a form of *decentralized transnationalism*. It is the ability to make connections between disparate causes and campaigns. These campaigns do not need to share explicit aims but

rather agree upon an underlying commonality of perspective. For example, peace activists in Britain will likely support other peace campaigns internationally, bound perhaps by a unified pacifist ideology, even if they do not necessarily support the tactics or approach taken by the other group. In practice this solidarity is expressed through symbolic actions, the sharing of resources and skills and/or visiting and joining in different struggles (Cockburn 2007).

The importance of ICTs in building these global networks is obvious and explored elsewhere (Gillan and Pickerill, 2008). At its most basic it has involved the use of email and websites to share stories of struggle or to co-ordinate international days of action. For example, on 15 February 2003 millions of people took to the streets worldwide to voice their opposition to the impending war with Iraq, with over one million people gathering in Hyde Park, London. Such synchronization of actions is no longer viewed as particularly innovative or novel, yet this ability to organize simultaneous demonstrations in disparate locations relatively cheaply and quickly should not be undervalued.

Conclusions

At a superficial level none of the reasons behind the lack of a more sustained interaction between different fractions of anti-war activists limit the power of groups to organize against war. A more unified movement does not necessarily lead to a more powerful one and attempts to find that unity, as we have seen in our discussion of alliances, can lead to superficiality and a curtailment of debate. It is also important to note that we have focused here on the example of Muslim activists in discussing problems of forming alliances across difference. However, the perceived lack of debate about differences was not just about accommodating Muslims, rather it reflected many activists' desire to accommodate *everyone* within a diverse and heterogeneous movement. It was part of a deliberate strategy on behalf of many to create a welcoming and accommodating space of resistance to war. However, many interviewees felt that an opportunity to fully engage with Muslim activists especially had been lost, and that failure to make the most of this opportunity was consequential for Muslims' (in particular) understanding of their place within British society (Pickerill *et al.* 2007).

For stronger and deeper ties to be created more sustained interaction is needed. The transitory moments of interaction, be it on a bus to a demonstration or at a vigil have fostered some initial conversations. Many activists valued these interactions for the temporary exchanges that they were, articulating hope that they occur again sporadically without requiring them to continue in a long-term linear fashion. Thus they viewed such exchanges as useful short-term alliances that could be re-ignited and effective when they needed to be, but did not require prolonged interaction. In arguing such, several evoked memories of participation in the coal miners dispute of the 1980's and peace campaigns in Northern Ireland to support the efficacy of this approach. There were others, however, who felt that far more face to face interaction was required to have meaningful communication and that it was important for those in the anti-war movement to continue this dialogue.

Protest spaces, as illustrated by the diverse attendance at many in London were more open spaces of interaction. The identity of such spaces was claimed and remade by those attending through the act of demonstrating. This enabled diverse groups to walk side by side. However, these spaces were temporary, limiting the possibility of sustained interaction and post-demonstration were reclaimed by others.

Thus it is doubted that such spaces have survived beyond the early anti-war demonstrations. As groups (Muslim and non-Muslim) have reverted to more insular separate practices the common spaces, those liberating open spaces of early protests, have been lost. Asaf Hussain, a British Pakistani in Leicester not only feared that young Muslims in the city were not being

given opportunities to negotiate what it meant to be British, but that they were being actively encouraged by certain mosques to assert Islam as their primary identifier at the cost of any engagement with being British. Without these spaces, enjoyed by many in the early protests, then the possibilities for interaction and sustained dialogue across difference within the anti-war movement remain limited. Although Muslim and non-Muslim activists may still walk side by side in protest against war, they are likely to continue to fail to talk to each other and is perhaps the responsibility of all activists to decide whether maintaining such spaces is an important component of anti-war alliance building today.

At the national level wide-ranging political diversity came together in a relatively stable coalition, but regionally and locally the specifics and practices of such alliances become more contested. Unity through shared identity or tactics empowered activists to work well together but simultaneously made working across difference all that much harder. While many activists celebrated the different practices which enabled alliances to be formed many viewed such exchanges as temporary and by necessity superficial; only to be maintained when necessary for campaigning efficiency. The task of building longer-term, deeper alliances has not been undertaken by many, although some expressed regret at this, and even the large coalitions such as StWC have struggled to continue to encompass diverse perspectives in recent years.

Finally, while the internet may be celebrated for giving the user access to a diversity of opinions, and while anti-war website authors may link, promiscuously, to sites with a range of worldviews, such connectivity does not seem to encourage the creation of more formal coalitions. By enabling imagined solidarity, internet networks may help the 'rooted cosmopolitan' (Tarrow 2005) to *feel* global. Nevertheless, concrete action remains predominantly affixed to place and to the political context of the nation.

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